

Twenty-Eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time
Oct. 8 & 9, 2016

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Namaan's Cure

If I asked the children of the parish what today's readings are about, I would bet on responses that have the words "always say thank you, and be nice to the person who does something good for you." But all of you adults, who have the ability to comprehend the nuances in today's readings based on the history and practices in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament ought to have a much different take. You and I are challenged to read between the lines, to grasp the real meaning of today's lessons.

The Jewish People, for centuries were accustomed to their special role as God's chosen people. They were the ones to be uniquely instrumental in God's plan of salvation.

They took their responsibility for God's love and promises and contrived entitlement out of them. They forgot it is a matter of God's choice, not what is merited, earned, or deserved. God's choice was rooted in God's loving prerogative and was to be gratefully welcomed as gift.

Namaan was a pagan commander of a Syrian army. He had led troops into Israel and in fact. Had an Israelite slave girl in his household. So wouldn't he have been the absolute last person who the people would think to receive a gift of healing from God. He had a disease which would ostracize him from his own society. He would have been feared and disdained. He was a leper. Secondly, he was despised and disdained because he was a foreigner. He was outside the possibly of redemption.

It was the Israelite slave that told Namaan's wife that Namaan should seek healing from this Israelite prophet named Elisha. Namaan goes because he is desperate for a cure. Elisha hears of his coming and goes to seek him out. When Elisha sees Namaan, he is told to go bathe in the river seven times. Elisha says no thanks to a reward. Instead, the prophet wants Namaan to take back earth from this holy land, take it home and build a shrine to the one true God.

Namaan becomes a believer. God's mercy though preceded Namaan's cure. God's mercy is available to all people. God did not find Namaan despicable. God did not turn away because Namaan was a pagan, a foreigner, nor had the dreaded disease of leprosy.

In the Gospel, ten lepers shout to Jesus, "Jesus, teacher, have pity on us!" Jesus keeps to the traditional process and sends them to the priest who was to verify the cure. One of ten lepers that Jesus cures comes back to thank him. And who is that one? Someone despised by the Jewish people. Someone who is considered a foreigner. Someone who in their minds should not have received God's favor. But the Samaritan, he could not go to the priest, he would be

kicked out of the temple Someone who should never had had the opportunity to be a follower of Jesus. But Jesus says to him, stand up, be on your way, your faith has saved you!

The message is clear, God's mercy is inclusive and unconditional. No one should be ostracized, not one should be left hanging, excluded, made to feel that they don't belong to the rest of us.

A scripture commentary suggested that when we read about something happening in the Gospel, we use the words, "One of us." One of us was cured. One of us returned to say thank you. One of us who others would have kept away from Jesus.

So how about this from an article I read in our Sunday newspaper two weeks ago: one of us is 17 and kept in solitary confinement in Jamesville prison for several weeks along with many other teens, not seeing anyone else for 23 hours. Therefore, one of us is now emotionally and psychologically harmed.

One of us is homeless and no one calls that person by name. It's just how it goes. Once you start picking from trash, no one cares to look you in the eye or call you by your name.

One of us is a baby who is mentally ill because she was neglected and abused, and no one bothered to do something.

One of us is elderly and alone in a nursing home. People don't come to visit.

We profess that we believe in God. God loves unconditionally, without measure. So, if God doesn't play favorites, how can we? Now, here is the challenge. Logic majors, step up! If God's mercy is without condition, and we have the spirit of God within us, then what? Yes, we must reflect the same unconditional mercy. It's possible, and we get glimpse of God's reflection often. It took a group of protestors from Grace Episcopal to raise the issue of teens in solitary confinement. Homeless people on our streets are being addressed by those who care like the Emmaus Ministries. Babies have more advocates with our Community Health Organizations. And thank God for pastoral visitors like our own Barb Hadley to visit the isolated elderly brothers and sisters. Let us walk with these good disciples where "One of us" is outside the world of the loved and accepted, and bring them in.