We turn now to a reading from the Old Testament book of II Kings. We are turning now to a story which is all about entitlement, pride, power but ultimately submission.

I Kings and II Kings were originally one book but were split into two books in the Middle Ages. The books of I and II Kings cover the period of Israel’s history from the death of King David through the time of Babylonian captivity. We are talking about the years between 970 BC through about 560 BC.

Included in these books are stories of the prophets Elijah and Elisha. Elijah was the first of these two prophets and the scriptures tell us that he was whisked away into heaven in a chariot. Prior to his departure from earth he bestowed a double portion of his spirit to the prophet Elisha.

Elijah and Elisha are prominent in our Judeo-Christian faith but also in the Muslim faith as the Quran includes stories of them. In this story that we will be reading from II Kings, Elisha is going to be approached by a man named Naaman.

Naaman, as we will discover, is an army commander in the army of the king of Aram. Aram is modern day Syria and was a constant enemy of Israel. In fact, tradition says that Naaman killed a former king of Israel.

Naaman we will discover has a skin disease called leprosy. Leprosy here could have been any number of skin diseases. But even though he was an army commander, Naaman would have been considered unclean because of this skin disease.

As we read this story this morning, I invite you to pay attention to some other details. Pay attention to these questions: Does Naaman initiate his desire for healing?

Who does Naaman pay attention to? How does Naaman think he can achieve healing? Where does God choose to be revealed in this story? And finally, how do you think this story speaks to us today?

**Read II Kings 5:1-14 (Letarshia)**

Naaman is described as a mighty warrior. Let’s think about that description. Naaman is strong and able to do anything that he sets his mind to. He is a man in control of his own destiny. Warriors are successful people. Warriors are admired. Warriors intimidate others.

But this warrior has a problem that he can’t figure out a solution for. He has a skin disease. And by having a skin disease he is considered unclean.

We discover that in one of the raids into Israel by the Aramean army that they had taken in a young girl as a slave. This enslaved girl is never named. Powerless women seldom are named.

This enslaved girl served Naaman’s wife so this slave girl must have listened as Naaman’s wife complained to her about Naaman’s skin disease. Even though she is powerless, she feels as though she knows something that the powerful Naaman does not know.

“If only Naaman would go to Samaria then he could find a cure for his leprosy,” the slave girl says to Naaman’s wife. This message is then passed along to Naaman via his wife.

Very intriguing part of this story is the role of these two women. In a culture where women were treated as property, it is this slave girl and then Naaman’s wife who advocate on his behalf. And then, very surprisingly, Naaman listens to them both.

So Naaman sets out for the foreign country of Israel which has been a hostile enemy to his country. A fragile peace exists between the two countries so Naaman’s travels to the Samaritan region of Israel brings political peril.

Before departing, Naaman makes sure to gather up the items that give him value and prestige. He gathers up lots and lots of silver, gold, and expensive clothing. Naaman then sets out and goes first to the king of Israel, the one that is most powerful.

But the king does not react well to Naaman’s request for healing. In fact, the King of Israel thinks that Naaman is trying to bait him into a war between the two countries.

Elisha the prophet then hears about Naaman’s request and communicates to Naaman that Naaman can come to him for healing. So Naaman gathers up his stuff of power and prestige and sets out for Elisha’s home.

When Naaman arrives at Elisha’s home, he is shocked that Elisha does not come out to greet him. Elisha sends out his own servant to tell Naaman to go down to the Jordan river and wash there 7 times and he will be healed.

Naaman is furious. “We have much better rivers in Syria,” Naaman objects. Naaman walks away from the potential deal. But once again it is the lowly servants who intervene. “Naaman,” they petition, “All that this man said to you was to go wash in a local river and you will be clean.”

And, amazingly, once again Naaman listens to the voices of the powerless. Naaman goes to the river Jordan. Washes 7 times. And he is made clean. His flesh is restored, and his skin is like the skin of a young boy.

A story of entitlement. A story of pride. A story of power. Naaman thought that all of these protections would give him what he would need. But his sense of entitlement, his yearning for power, and his pride kept him from experiencing healing from God.

Only when he gave up his power, pride, and sense of entitlement did Naaman experience the healing that God yearned for him. God does not seem to choose to be known in the powerful. God chooses to be revealed through servants and a prophet.

So, during this weekend when we celebrate our country’s freedom, where do we look for the presence of God? Do we look to the powerful? Do we look to those who show great pride in themselves? Do we look to those who feel most entitled?

Or do we look for the presence of God is the places where God is revealed like in this story we just read from II Kings in the Bible? Do we search for God among the servants in our midst? Do we look for God in the words of those who speak prophetic words? Those prophets who speak wisdom among the arrogant and prideful.

Are we too arrogant like Naaman to experience the emotional, physical, and spiritual healing that we need because we feel that we are too good for something? Where does our pride get in the way of experiencing the emotional, physical, and spiritual healing that God is yearning for us?

All of us are tainted by pride at times. All of us are tainted at times by a sense that we deserve something. All of us are tainted at times by a feeling that we are too good for something.

But this story teaches us that if we want to experience the healing in our lives that God desires, we may need to get over ourselves. We may need to get over our pride. We may need to get over our arrogance. We may need to get over our sense of entitlement.

God may be bringing the healing that we need in our lives through the people and places that we never would have imagined.

Our responsibility is to get over it and to seek and listen to what God may be saying to us and doing for us. AMEN.

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-Given: July 7, 2019 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)