

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

People loved by God,

Our text is the continuation of the account of Naaman's healing of leprosy that we heard last week.

If you were not able to hear that sermon, I would encourage you to look it up on our Vimeo page

to refresh your memory on how the Lord, by the power of His word attached to water,

cleansed and healed Naaman, a Syrian (and an enemy of Israel), from his corrupting leprosy.

That life-altering healing brought Naaman back to Elisha to respond to God's grace

as he gave his good confession and changed his life in appropriate ways,

much like we pray(ed) at the beginning of our service:

that the Lord "*would teach us what we should believe and do.*"

So let's hear about and meditate on God's continued grace to His servant Naaman:

...as follows in Jesus' name:

And [Naaman] said, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant." But [Elisha] said, "As the Lord lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none." And he urged him to take it, but he refused. Then Naaman said, "If not, please let there be given to your servant two mule loads of earth, for from now on your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the Lord. In this matter may the Lord pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon your servant in this matter." He said to him, "Go in peace."

But when Naaman had gone from him a short distance, Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, "See, my master has spared this Naaman the Syrian, in not accepting from his hand what he brought. As the Lord lives, I will run after him and get something from him." So Gehazi followed Naaman. And when Naaman saw someone running after him, he got down from the chariot to meet him and said, "Is all well?" And he said, "All is well. My master has sent me to say, 'There have just now come to me from the hill country of Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of clothing.'" And Naaman said, "Be pleased to accept two talents." And he urged him and tied up two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of clothing, and laid them on two of his servants. And they carried them before Gehazi. And when he came to the hill, he took them from their hand and put them in the house, and he sent the men away, and they departed. He went in and stood before his master, and Elisha said to him, "Where have you been, Gehazi?" And he said, "Your servant went nowhere." But he said to him, "Did not my heart go when the man turned from his chariot to meet you? Was it a time to accept money and garments, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male servants and female servants? Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants forever." So he went out from his presence a leper, like snow. (ESV)

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; **sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth.** Amen.* (John 17:17)

That is an astonishing ending to this account, isn't it?

How the Lord healed one man, even a Gentile and an enemy of the people of Israel, of leprosy but then gave the next guy, an Israelite and the servant of His prophet, that same leprosy.

It seems like a such an extreme, doesn't it?

And maybe that astonishes us... and even scares us a little.

It's easy to look at this story and think: Gehazi made one mistake... he messed up ONE time,

and now he and his children are consigned to a life-time of dealing with this horrible disease.
So why might this scare us?

Probably because it seems like it could just as easily have been me.

Don't I have times when I am more greedy than generous?

When you look with an envious eye at something the Lord has given to someone else and covet it.

Or even make plans to enrich yourself off of them deceptively, by cheating them,
or even by cloaking it, as Gehazi did, in some sanctified sounding story?

Or manipulating their emotions or their generosity for your own gain?

Sure, they may or may not ever know — just as Naaman probably never knew the truth — but God knows.

He knows not only the actions that you have taken, whether they were out in the open or concealed,
but he also knows the impulses of your heart and mind — He knows the “why” of your sin.

He sees the naked truth no matter how cloaked in sanctified rationale it appears to others to be.

And by this account, the Lord would teach us the danger of allowing ourselves to give in to those impulses,
and to hold on to them instead of repenting of them.

You see, the nature of our sin is that we sin so often and in so many ways, (it's so natural to us...) that except for possibly the flagrant, obvious sins, it is easy NOT to think much of them, especially those sins that reside mostly in our minds and hearts.

Except that they don't reside mostly in our minds and hearts, do they?

As Jesus said, **For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.** Matthew 15:19

And the frustration, the irritation, the animosity that we feel and even harbor towards a person, comes out in your interactions with them or with other people about them, often even unconsciously.

If we just consider Gehazi as greedy, then we miss the more deep-seeded sin lurking in his heart.

Listen to what he said to himself, “**See, my master has spared this Naaman the Syrian;**”

Gehazi viewed Naaman, not as a soul to be redeemed, a sheep to be saved, but as a sheep to be sheered.

His words and actions betray a contempt for this very rich Gentile, even though a new convert.

But in addition, instead of rejoicing at God's grace to Naaman, in healing as well as in believing,

Gehazi saw it as an opportunity for self-enrichment, and was willing to lie to God's prophet to get it, much like Ananias and Sapphira hypocritically lied to St. Peter in Acts 5 to appear more sanctified.

See how one sin, seeded in the recesses of the heart, bore a vile harvest of all kinds of sinful fruit?

Then God's judgment was immediately carried out, as Gehazi left Elisha's presence as a leper.

And so when something bad happens to us, we can wonder if it's a punishment like Gehazi received, as if God is carrying out justice on you, and this is what you deserve for your sin.

But kind of this thinking is the product of a guilty conscience, one that is still afraid —

living in fear of God's wrath rather than living in the truth of His gracious love for you.

It is as St. Paul wrote to Titus: **To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled.** Titus 1:15

Now then, consider what you are to do if you have such a concerned conscience:

Do not try to minimize any sin in your mind, and don't try to justify yourself.

Instead, recognize (as you are taught to do in our public confession) that you have sinned against God and your neighbor in thought, word, and deed, and confess your sins before God.

Don't leave out your contempt for anyone, or your covetousness of other people's stuff.
Don't ignore your deceptions (cloaked in piety or not) or your selfish manipulations or hypocrisy.

But do not stop there in the confession of sin... as Naaman did, seek out the peace you need and desire.
As sin burdens and weighs on your conscience, cherish your baptism by returning to it,
not by getting "rebaptized" —for we confess *I believe in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins* — Nicene Creed
but by meditating on the blessings of your baptism, how God the Father called you His child,
and Jesus bathed and cleansed you in the river of *forgiveness* with His atoning blood,
and the Holy Spirit gave you a new *life* of faith and *salvation*. Small Catechism: Blessings of Baptism
And if still your sin haunts you, seek out God's minister to hear your confession and absolve you,
so that you can hear, in your ear, the perfection and forgiveness that Jesus won for & gives to you.
You will hear, not only of how Jesus has already suffered and died to atone
for your contempt and covetousness and deceptions and hypocrisy, as your own.
but also how His perfect life of love and generosity and honesty and faithfulness are given to you

And know that as Elisha showed with Naaman, this washing and absolution is free of charge.

Note that Elisha did not negotiate a price before Naaman rode away to wash.

There was to be no charge. ... No expectation of payment
— such as Balaam wanted to exact for cursing Israel in the days of Moses.

It was as if Elisha heard Jesus say: **"You received without paying; give without pay."** Matthew 10:8

And note that Naaman caught this too, because when he returned — which he didn't have to do —
he begged Elisha to **"accept now a present from your servant,"** and even **urged him...** to take it.
To which Elisha steadfastly refused... Elisha's financial support was to come from God's people...
not from this newly converted foreigner. Naaman, now too, **was to receive without paying.**

So too, God does not exact a sacrifice from you, in order to appease His anger or earn His favor.

He received the full payment from His own Son when Jesus died on the cross for you.

And note, too, the genuineness of Naaman's generosity and desire to bless didn't stop at Elisha's door.

When Gehazi came after him to request 2 changes of clothing and 1 talent of silver,

Naaman voluntarily doubled the silver and sent his servants to carry the load.

Though Gehazi's request was a blatant and selfish lie, Naaman's selfless generosity was true & good.

He was pleased to support the prophet and the supposed need of the sons of the prophets....

While Gehazi saw an opportunity to take advantage of the foreigner,
the foreigner saw an opportunity to bless God's people... for him to love and care for them,
just as we heard in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

...

But lest we end by focusing on Naaman's generosity as if the fruit of faith were more important,
let us also consider the other reason Naaman returned - the public confession of his newly received faith.

Listen to the excitement that Naaman had as he confessed,

"Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel."

And now knowing the one true God, he immediately realized that his life needed to change, saying,

"from now on your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the Lord."

He didn't want to return to the bondage of idolatry of his former life,

nor did he desire to offend the Lord who had just washed both his skin and his conscience clean.

So even when, in his duty as a general in the Syrian army, he was to bow before an idol with his king
in the house of Rimmon, he did not want to appear to be unfaithful to his new Lord.

He desired to keep that clean conscience before the Lord and to live in the Lord's pardon.

And the Lord, who knew his heart, said through His prophet, "**Go in peace,**" to this new convert. Perhaps it was that over time, Naaman became bold enough in his confession to speak up about his faith in the gracious God of Israel, who had healed him in body and soul. We will have the opportunity to ask him when we see him in paradise.

...

In our last moments here, let us return now to tie an evangelical bow on this text.

What are we to make of Gehazi's situation, as he left Elisha's presence with leprosy?

As with Naaman's story, we do not hear about what happened to Gehazi.

We should be careful not to judge and say that he, of course, died an unbeliever; we do not know how the Lord worked on his heart through this affliction.

As with the afflictions that the Lord brings upon us in this life,

especially those that have no promise of leaving us until our earthly death,

it may be that the Lord used Gehazi's leprosy to humble him and to lead him to repentance,

and that this now life-long affliction would keep him humble, repentant,

and trusting the Lord's grace and mercy until his earthly death.

What better gift of grace could the Lord give, than to keep us trusting in His grace until this life's end, so that we may live with Him in paradise eternally?

And doesn't it often happen that when we have or are suffering from afflictions ourselves,

that our hearts and minds and ears are all the more opened to help and relieve the suffering of others?

As you see your fellow Christians and other neighbors in need or suffering,

do not judge them as if God were punishing them, as we will hear next week in the account of Job,

but see those afflictions as opportunities to bless your neighbor in need with God's love & compassion, just as Christ, your Good Samaritan, has blessed you.

Go in peace... In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria