PENTECOST 4

Proper 9 - Year C

*This Bible study was written by **Patrick Keyser** for Proper 9 (C) in 2019.*

2 Kings 5:1-14

5 Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram,
was a great man and in high favor with his master because
by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man,
though a mighty warrior, suffered from a skin
disease. **2** Now the Arameans on one of their raids had
taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she
served Naaman's wife. **3** She said to her mistress, "If only
my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He
would cure him of his skin disease." **4** So Naaman went in
and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel
had said. **5** And the king of Aram said, "Go, then, and I
will send along a letter to the king of Israel."
He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand
shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. **6** He brought the
letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter
reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant
Naaman, that you may cure him of his skin
disease." **7** When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore
his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that
this man sends word to me to cure a man of his skin
disease? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel
with me."

8 But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of
Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king,
"Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me,
that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel." **9** So
Naaman came with his horses and chariots and halted at
the entrance of Elisha's house. **10** Elisha sent a messenger
to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and
your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean." **11** But
Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought
that for me he would surely come out and stand and call
on the name of the Lord his God and would wave his
hand over the spot and cure the skin disease! **12** Are not
Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all
the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be
clean?" He turned and went away in a rage. **13** But his
servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the
prophet had commanded you to do something difficult,
would you not have done it? How much more, when all he
said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?" **14** So he went down
and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according
to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like
the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

Commentary from Patrick Keyser

Naaman was a wealthy commander of the army of the king of Aram. Though he was a person of great power and prestige, he suffered from leprosy, a condition that visibly marked him as different from those around him. Eager to be cleansed of his leprosy, Naaman traveled with massive amounts of treasure to the King of Israel in hopes that his leprosy could be cleansed. Though the King of Israel admitted his inability to help Naaman, the prophet Elisha gave the army commander very simple instructions: "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean" (2 Kings 5:10). Naaman was infuriated by the simplicity of the instructions, and he initially refused to comply. When he did eventually follow Elisha's instructions, his leprosy was miraculously cleansed.

Though our attention quite naturally is focused on Naaman's miraculous cleansing, we should not miss the fact that he is helped by many different people in his quest to be cleansed of his leprosy. Though the most obvious of these may at first be the prophet Elisha, several other unnamed characters play essential roles in this story. A young Israelite girl taken captive by the Arameans first recommended that Naaman travel to Israel. When Naaman was infuriated by Elisha's simple instructions, his servants convinced him to actually go to the waters of the Jordan River and wash. Those who seemed to be of least importance played pivotal roles in helping Naaman be cleansed of his leprosy. God uses people whom the world regards as insignificant to accomplish amazing things.

Discussion Questions

What persons of apparent insignificance might be bringing us good news?

Psalm 30

[1] I will exalt you, O Lord, because you have lifted me up *
and have not let my enemies triumph over me.
[2] O Lord my God, I cried out to you, *
and you restored me to health.
[3] You brought me up, O Lord, from the dead; *
you restored my life as I was going down to the grave.
[4] Sing to the Lord, you servants of his; *
give thanks for the remembrance of his holiness.
[5] For his wrath endures but the twinkling of an eye, *
his favor for a lifetime.
[6] Weeping may spend the night, *
but joy comes in the morning.
[7] While I felt secure, I said, "I shall never be disturbed. *
You, Lord, with your favor, made me as strong as the mountains."
[8] Then you hid your face, *
and I was filled with fear.
[9] I cried to you, O Lord; *
I pleaded with the Lord, saying,
[10] "What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the Pit? *
will the dust praise you or declare your faithfulness?
[11] Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me; *
O Lord, be my helper."
[12] You have turned my wailing into dancing; *
you have put off my sack-cloth and clothed me with joy.
[13] Therefore my heart sings to you without ceasing; *
O Lord my God, I will give you thanks for ever.

Commentary from Patrick Keyser

The psalmist often speaks with a candor and sincerity that can disarm us. Here in Psalm 30, the psalmist speaks from a place of deep dependence on God, recalling how God heard his cry and lifted him from the depths of despair. This psalm contains one of my favorite lines from the whole psalter: "Weeping may spend the night, but joy comes in the morning." These words capture both an essential element of what it is to be human and the hope that infuses our life of faith. We will all know hardship, struggle, and loss. We will all have experiences of sustained lament and weeping. As Christians, however, we believe and proclaim that God will be with us in and through it all, and we know that despair will not last forever. Joy will indeed come again in the morning after the long night of lament.

Discussion Questions

When have you experienced the presence, comfort, and joy of God after a period of struggle or despair?

Galatians 6:1-16

6 My brothers and sisters, if anyone is detected in a
transgression, you who have received the Spirit
should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.
Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. [2] Bear
one another's burdens, and in this way you will
fulfill the law of Christ. [3] For if those who are nothing
think they are something, they deceive
themselves. [4] All must test their own work; then that
work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become
a cause for pride. [5] For all must carry their own loads.

[6] Those who are taught the word must share in all
good things with their teacher.

[7] Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you
reap whatever you sow. [8] If you sow to your own
flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh, but if
you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from
the Spirit. [9] So let us not grow weary in doing what is
right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not
give up. [10] So then, whenever we have an opportunity,
let us work for the good of all and especially for those
of the family of faith.

[11] See what large letters I make when I am writing in
my own hand! [12] It is those who want to make a good
showing in the flesh who try to compel you to be
circumcised—only that they may not be persecuted
for the cross of Christ. [13] Even the circumcised do not
themselves obey the law, but they want you to be
circumcised so that they may boast about your
flesh. [14] May I never boast of anything except the
cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world
has been crucified to me and I to the
world. [15] For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision
is anything, but a new creation is everything! [16] As for
those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them,
and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

Commentary from Patrick Keyser

Though Paul has a loving and friendly relationship with many of the communities he addresses in his letters, he is highly critical of the church at Galatia throughout his letter to them. This passage marks the end of his letter to the church at Galatia, which had been plagued by division over the question of circumcision and whether it was necessary for Gentile believers. In his closing words to the Galatians, Paul concludes with words of encouragement. He exhorts them to always continue in doing what is right and to work for the good of everyone. To a community divided over the question of Gentile circumcision, Paul emphasizes the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ as the core of the Christian faith: "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!" (Galatians 6:14-15). Paul exhorts the Galatians to focus on what unites them with all Christians — Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen one.

Discussion Questions

Have you experienced a time when you have become so focused on a minor issue that you lost track of what is most important?

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

10 After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others
and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town
and place where he himself intended to go. **2** He said
to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are
few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out
laborers into his harvest. **3** Go on your way; I am
sending you out like lambs into the midst of
wolves. **4** Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, and greet
no one on the road. **5** Whatever house you enter, first
say, 'Peace to this house!' **6** And if a person of peace is
there, your peace will rest on that person, but if not, it
will return to you. **7** Remain in the same house, eating
and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer
deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house
to house. **8** Whenever you enter a town and its people
welcome you, eat what is set before you; **9** cure the
sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of
God has come near to you.' **10** But whenever you enter
a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its
streets and say, **11** 'Even the dust of your town that
clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you.
Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'

16 "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever
rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects
the one who sent me."

17 The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in
your name even the demons submit to us!" **18** He said
to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a
flash of lightning. **19** Indeed, I have given you authority
to tread on snakes and scorpions and over all the
power of the enemy, and nothing will hurt
you. **20** Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the
spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are
written in heaven."

Commentary from Patrick Keyser

Though we speak frequently of the twelve named apostles appointed by Jesus, this passage reminds us that Jesus also appointed many others as messengers of the good news. Here we are told that He appointed seventy others to go out into the towns and cities. His advice to them may seem surprising: "Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals." Jesus makes it clear that they are being sent out into potentially hostile territory, yet he demands that they take nothing with them, not even the most basic of supplies.

Instead, those appointed by Jesus are to depend on the hospitality of strangers. In their movements from house to house, they are to accept lodging, food, and drink wherever they can find it. If they are not welcomed in one place, they are simply to move on to the next one. Jesus' instructions to these seventy apostles reminds us that the Christian life is not always one of comfort and stability. As Christians, we are sent out to face circumstances we cannot fully imagine, yet we know that God goes with us and will provide all that we could need.

Discussion Questions

Have you experienced a time when you have been forced to depend on the hospitality and kindness of strangers? How did you respond to it?

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