

*Wash me through and through from my wickedness, O Lord, and cleanse me from my sins.*

The story of Naaman's healing is one of the best stories in scripture. There are wonderful characters: Naaman, the leprous hero; the Israeli servant-girl; the kings of Aram (modern day Syria) and Israel; and Elisha, the put-upon prophet. The redactors who put this story together wanted the readers to know that healing processes might surprise you.

Naaman was in a pickle. He was a military hero but lived with a horrendous condition. Leprosy was feared because there was no cure. It disfigured people. It destroys your nerves, so you could injure yourself badly and not know it. The disease could make you an outcast. How could a hero like Naaman become a zero before the eyes of all Syria? Something needed to be done and without delay.

Enter the girl from Israel. She too was in a pickle.

She knew about Elisha, who had set up shop in Samaria, because she'd been trafficked from that area by Aramaic soldiers. Her suggestion to consult the prophet may not have been altruistic. Perhaps it was a way she could get back to her people?

Just when we think that the road to health is paved with gold, in comes the red tape. Naaman can't go anywhere without traveling papers. He needs the kings of Aram and Israel to stop feuding long enough to allow him to travel.

Then, there's Elisha: a prophet and healing caught in the middle of meddlesome government vinegar. When he's not healing or prophesying, you can catch him rolling his eyes at everyone involved. And rightly so. Why should a famous prophet of Samaria in Israel spend his precious time on a hero-to-zero general from Aram? He does what any busy executive would do. He delegates.

This is where the story gets really comical.

Naaman, who has traversed at least three rivers and 150 miles, gets angry because he's greeted by Elisha's intern. Someone as important as he should get the real thing, right? Aren't there incantations and rituals that go along with healing? It would make for such an awesome display, wouldn't it?

Naaman's completely ungrateful that someone from Israel would deign to heal an Aramean in the first place! And, if that wasn't bad enough, the intern tells him to go wash in the River Jordan. Wait a minute. That's it? Go wash? In the Jordan? Didn't we just cross that river 75 miles ago! What's wrong with the rivers in Aram? Where's the ostentatious healing rite?

To paraphrase former Texas Governor Ann Richards, "Poor Naaman. He was born with a silver foot in his mouth." Naaman is so caught up in how important he is that he can't see that the path to his healing comes from 'beneath him.'

Once his temper tantrum is over, one of his servants pulls him to the side. The servant, probably from experience, understands that you praise in public and criticize in private. "You know," he says. "It's not like he just asked you to run a marathon. You just have to take a bath."

Does this resonate with you?

The doctor didn't tell you that you had to run seven miles every day. You should try to walk for 20 minutes a day, though. The nurse practitioner said to eat more green vegetables, not go vegan. The priest didn't suggest you become a monk, but it might be helpful for your soul to spend 5 minutes a day acknowledging the gifts God has given you.

Unfortunately, we often believe for healing to happen, there needs to be something extraordinary happening. Or, we believe that we need not do anything and just let the medical and spiritual personnel take care of everything.

Sometimes, we just need to take a bath.

Seriously.

Sometimes the road to health is allowing yourself to take a bubble bath. Feel the warm water surround you and play in the bubbles. Let your body relax so that your muscles can rest and your mind ease.

You may need to take a pill or two or three, and that's okay. Yet, adding that 20-minute walk alone or with your furry companion may be what you need to help the medications do their work.

When is the last time you walked barefoot in the grass or laid flat on the sand at the beach? Getting 'grounded' has healing aspects as we connect with the earth and look up at the sky.

Healing includes curing. Yet healing happens despite a cure. Ask anyone who has adopted the 12-steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. Ask the person who learns to accept her diagnosis as an opportunity to live to the fullest. Listen to the stories people tell about how their attitude toward life changed, even if the circumstances have not, once they connected with a faith community.

Healing can begin with a hug, taking time to listen, delivering a pot of chicken soup, prayers delivered with a gentle touch, or taking the kids for a couple of hours. We don't need big showy miracles. The small every-day ones do nicely.

Naaman finally dipped himself in the waters of the Jordan to cure himself of leprosy, just as he'd been told. His skin became like a young boy's. Now, with feeling in his limbs and a new sense of life, perhaps Naaman's attitude became one of wonder like a young boy's as well.

What happens next – and what our lectionary leaves out – is that while Naaman's curing happened at the river, his healing was completed when he met with the prophet Elisha face-to-face. Elisha refused payment from Naaman. Naaman had to acknowledge that he needed to be ministered to, that he wasn't in control of everything the way he'd understood life to be. It was then that Naaman surrendered himself to the God of Israel.

(As an aside, after this healing event, Elisha's servant then managed to mess up royally, but that's another story. You can read it in 2 Kings 5:19b – 27.)

Work on becoming more aware of where healing happens every day.

Don't expect anything big and ostentatious. Look for the random acts of kindness happening between people. Where that happens, there you will find God healing presence.

Amen.