

# St. Paul: On The Same page

Lessons 02.15.15

Transfiguration Sunday

## Day One: 2 Kings 5:1-14

*Elijah sent a messenger to say to [Naaman], "Go wash yourself seven times..." Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy."*

A placebo is a fake medicine, like a sugar pill, that seems to make people feel better. No one quite knows how the Placebo Effect functions, but a recent study found that the more expensive it is, the better it works! Patients who were told that the pill they took had cost \$1,000 did better than patients who thought they had taken a \$100 pill, even though both pills were just sugar.

We place a lot of faith in what we see. We trust procedures, scans, and discoveries. If the doctor doesn't run a lot of tests, we worry that she might not be giving us all we need.

Naaman felt the same way. He had traveled all the way from Damascus to find a cure

for leprosy, and the man of God doesn't even meet with him? He just sends out his servant to say, go wash yourself in the Jordan River.

We see right away how silly Naaman was, refusing God's healing just because it came through an ordinary washing. But what about us?

God offers us a miracle in ordinary things. We can talk directly to the God who made the entire universe! And we can read his own words! We can be united to him through bread and wine. Our sins can be forgiven just by faith, and washed away with a little water! Prayer, Bible, Communion and Baptism are so simple.

We complain that God is not giving us anything special because he did not "wave his hand" or do anything remarkable. But he did the most miraculous thing of all. He loved us!

**Prayer:** *O Almighty God, you have offered to me the answer to all my questions and problems. Don't let me, in foolishness, turn away. Give me your Spirit that I may search your word and pour out my heart and find your direction. Amen.*

## **Day Two: 1 Cor 10:31-11:1**

*Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head...*

In our culture we invest a lot of concern in our position. We like to be in a place of authority or respect. But even if we're not above others, we at least insist that we are always equal with others. We insist on our right, our significance, our identity.

Paul would not understand our way of thinking. Knowing Jesus, he saw authority and power very differently than we do. Rather than a position that implies that one person is better than another, it was only a way for us to receive the gifts of God, like the order in which food is passed around the table.

The relationship between men and women was ordered, not for superiority and inferiority, but in the same way that there is order in the relationship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All are equal, and yet each plays a different part.

Paul points out that it is the "head" which serves all the other parts of the body. It was our "head," Jesus, who made himself nothing, who washed his disciples' feet, and who gave up his life. In the same way, the purpose of every role in our lives is to serve others.

What does this have to do with the wearing of a head covering during prayer? Paul is concerned about our attitude toward others. In particular, we must come to God in humility, not trying to raise ourselves above others. The hat, or lack of it, represented that in his time. What symbolizes our pride now?

Hats don't send such a clear message today, but our cell phone might. What would it mean if you were to kneel down for prayer and turn off your cell phone? What if, instead, you turned it on? Do you set aside earthly status and your concern for how others see you when you come to worship?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, I am easily distracted by the many things I desire. By your Spirit, grant that my mind may be held captive and filled with your thoughts – my heart with your desires. Amen.*

### Day Three: Mark 1:40-45

*A man with leprosy came to [Jesus] and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!"*

A few weeks ago, I enjoyed a conversation with a young woman from China. As we introduced ourselves, she gave me a small bow, and I in turn did the same. It felt funny – but nice. It was a way to show that you valued the other person, perhaps more than our usual perfunctory handshake would have done.

When was the last time you bowed to someone? When have you ever gone down on your knees to ask for something? A man might possibly do that one time in his life to propose to a woman, but even that is uncommon now and feels more like a joke. And yet, when a man proposes marriage, he is asking to be given an incredible gift – the life of another person! Shouldn't he kneel?

But we don't kneel to others. We don't bow to others. Even to the President

of the United States we would simply thrust out our hand, because we believe that we are everyone's equal.

Yet this man got down on his knees before Jesus and begged, because he recognized his uncleanness and unworthiness. He was admitting that he was the one who needed Jesus' help. They were not equals.

You expect the doctor to heal you because you (or your insurance) will pay him. But no doctor can give you what you really need. And you cannot pay the enormous price it would cost to be given eternal life.

Only Jesus can cure your deadly sin sickness, and he says, "I am willing. Be clean!"

Jesus describes himself as the bridegroom and us as the bride. And so Jesus is the one who humbles himself. He is the one who kneels, and takes the whiplash on his back in our place. Jesus offers us his life – and he asks, "will you be mine?"

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, I have seen your love for me. More than reaching out and touching me, you reached out and died for me. Lord, lead my heart to rest in you. Amen.*

## Day Four: 1 Kings 5:1-3

*Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper.*

*<sup>2</sup>Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife. <sup>3</sup>She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."*

This is how the story in our Old Testament lesson begins. The Bible describes Naaman as "a great man." He was probably wealthy. He held a prominent place, close to the king of a powerful nation. He was a "mighty man of valor" like the famous athletes in our day whose uniform you would pay money to hang in your house, or whose autograph you would be proud to display.

Naaman was a great man, but he was a leper. He had power, and yet he was weak. He had authority, and yet he was helpless to force his own body to do his will.

Naaman was a great man. The king of Syria and the king

of Israel were great men.

There are several powerful characters in this story, but none of them have the power to cure leprosy. Yet a servant girl, a child, a slave who had been captured from Israel, a young woman who has no special strength or education or position is the one who is able to tell Naaman what to do.

Most of us would like to be more important, more significant to others. We may long for our "15 minutes of fame." And yet over and over again in the Bible it is the weak and the small whom God uses. It is those who do not matter in the eyes of the world who are chosen by God to work out his will.

A nameless slave girl, the servant of Elijah, a muddy river, all these are God's tools. What are God's humblest tools in your life? What are the gifts from God that you may be overlooking?

**Prayer:** *Father, teach me to be content to be your instrument, to serve where you have put me, to do what you have given me to do. Let me play my part in the healing of others by your grace. Amen.*