

July 3, 2016
Rev. Curran Reichert

The Mystery of Healing

2 Kings 5:1-14

This is not a sermon steeped in exegesis. My books are in boxes and my internet is down. This is not a sermon embedded in scholarship, because since the movers came and upended my life this past Wednesday, I can scarcely remember my own name.

No, this is a sermon offered by a woman who understands that her days are numbered with a community she has loved deeply, who only yesterday memorialized one of her favorite people, and frankly, it is the sermon of a woman who was lucky to enough to find a matching pair of shoes amidst the chaos of her life this morning.

This is less a sermon and more a reflection on the mystery of healing, and how regardless of what we think we might need to heal our own hearts, the answer is almost always different, simpler, better than we could have dreamed up on our own.

Life is this simple. We are living in a world that is absolutely transparent, and God is shining through it all the time.

—Thomas Merton

Naaman was a war hero. He was a hero, but still he needed to go on the hero's journey for his own healing. You know how the story goes. The hero is assigned an impossible task. He has to accomplish the impossible in order to win the maiden or inherit the throne. He makes mistakes along the way, disobeys instructions given, but at crucial moments, just when we think all is lost, he is assisted and set back on track by humble, kindly strangers (or in this case servants). *Only* when he does *what* he is told the *way* he is told, by accepting the help he is given along the way, only then can he complete his journey.

I'm not entirely certain what this story has to teach us this morning, but I do know that we are, all of us, always in need of healing, and I do know that even though we know this about ourselves, we also resist our own healing all the time.

So, three stories of mysterious healing...

The first begins with a man named George. The other day Katie told me about a man she met walking down our street in Albany. His name was George. I don't know if he knocked on the door or if Katie just saw him walking by, but Katie had made extra scrambled eggs and toast, and she noticed that George looked hungry and invited him in for breakfast. They had a long visit, and she discovered that George lived in his van around the corner. Katie told me this story after the fact, and I have to admit I only half listened to it; I had some other stuff going on.

Fast forward to last week. A man knocks on the door. It was Tuesday evening, the eleventh hour before the movers were to arrive the next morning. It was a man I had never seen before; it was a man looking for Katie; it was a man named George. “You must be her roommate,” said George “I am here to see Katie.”

Now friends, I have done a good bit of advocacy around issues of homelessness, and I would say I have a heart for most people, but on this night, this night of all nights... George was the last person in the world I wanted to see. [But,] Katie being Katie, she invited George in, told him he could use the bathroom and even take a shower if he wanted. I panicked! There were three men in the backyard digging out Ellis Jane’s play structure to move to Sonoma, and Katie was inviting George to take a shower. Had she lost her mind?

I have long held the theory that who we are at our worst is actually who we are, and if we are not OK with who we are at our worst, then we still have work to do. Well, Naaman had nothing on me on Tuesday night. Katie looked me in the eye and said, “I don’t understand why you are so upset. We believe in the same things, don’t we?”

Fortunately, George seeing the look on my face thought better of taking a shower, and while he and Katie were engaged in conversation outside, I had a moment to reflect on my behavior. I gathered some food that had been lovingly prepared by a neighbor and handed it to George. I wasn’t even conscious of the healing I still needed, but George was there to help me through it.

Life is this simple. We are living in a world that is absolutely transparent, and God is shining through it all the time.

—Thomas Merton

Story number two: Maui. Katie’s parents in their benevolence took our family and Katie’s brother’s family to Maui to celebrate their fiftieth Wedding anniversary. People told me how wonderful it would be. I have a friend who said that the air is different there: “You’ll see; you cannot help but relax.” But I am in the middle of a move, straddling two communities, two congregations. I thought: *That is all well and good for other people, [but] there is no way I am actually going to relax.* Well I’ll be damned if there isn’t a reason they call Hawaii paradise. I was taken by the kindness of the people, the breeze in the air and the ever-present in and out breathing of the waves.

It is ironic that the story this morning is about Naaman, a man struggling with Leprosy, a skin condition that would have exiled a man of lesser stature. The island on which the lepers were exiled was within my view at all times—Molokai, the island of lepers. While I was in Hawaii the Democrats sat in on the House floor and Britain left the EU, but wonder of wonders, the healing air of those islands had nothing to do with the CNN reports.

I did not know how much I needed to stare at the ocean for a week, how good it would feel to think about absolutely nothing. Not the lepers, not the Democrats, not the EU. I thought I was beyond the touch of these healing waters, but on the last day as I ran headlong into their waves, I realized I had been wrong. Healing waters are not just for Naaman.

Life is this simple. We are living in a world that is absolutely transparent, and God is shining through it all the time.

—Thomas Merton

The last story is not my own to share, but one that belongs to Patricia. I think she would be OK with my telling it.

When Patricia made the decision to stop taking medical therapies to control her cancer, she understood the trajectory her life would take. We sat down to talk one afternoon, and she shared that Jim, her late-in-life love, had lost his wife to cancer, and she did not think it fair to ask Jim to go through her death with her. She said she planned to talk with him about it and offer him an easy out. Weeks passed, and on each visit I asked Patricia if she had spoken with Jim about opting out. She had not.

As Patricia was nearing the end of her journey I mentioned this to Jim. He smiled and said that they had never discussed it, and that of course not being present for one precious moment of time with Patricia was never an option to him. Jim was there for everything with Patricia. He took her for strolls along the water, and to Macy's so often that the lingerie sales women knew his name. Up until the end Patricia wanted comfortable yet tasteful bedroom attire. He was there for her when they could no longer share the same bedroom, and ultimately when she could not eat or speak. The last thing this earthly body knew was a sweet kiss on the lips from Jim. Patricia had given and given her entire life, and here in the final chapter she was given the gift of receiving. A hero's journey of a sort.

It is humbling to remember that we are all in need of healing at all times. It is also helpful to remember that healing is a mystery, a gift of God for the people of God.

Life is this simple. We are living in a world that is absolutely transparent, and God is shining through it all the time.

—Thomas Merton

Amen