

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
Proper 23  
Year C

2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15  
Psalm 111  
2 Timothy 2:8-15  
Luke 17:11-19

In our readings from the Hebrew Scriptures and from the Gospel, we have parallel stories. In both, we have people healed of leprosy. While this disease is not that big a deal these days, in biblical times it was considered highly contagious. Therefore, anyone having a skin disorder was required to live outside of town, isolated from everyone else. If someone came near, they were required to call out, “Unclean, unclean”, so as to help others avoid them. This was a terrible situation of loneliness. If one was so fortunate as to be healed of this disease, they were required to show themselves to a priest and offer an appropriate sacrifice of thanksgiving.

In both stories, people are depicted presenting themselves to the “man of God” for healing. In 2 Kings, Naaman a great general of the army of the king of Aram, was told to go see Elisha who could help him. In the Gospel, ten men approached Jesus. In both cases, the sufferer was told to do something very simple. In Naaman’s case, he was to wash himself in the River Jordan seven times. In the case of the ten lepers in the Gospel, they are just told to go and show themselves to the priest. In neither case were the victims told to do anything extraordinary. Yet, in both situations, they were cleansed of the leprosy.

How do we react when God asks us to do something? Are we like Naaman, who objected to being told to wash in the River Jordan, as if that was a stupid suggestion? He questioned why the Jordan and not one of the rivers closer to his home. What was so special about the Jordan? Or are we like the nine lepers who went off, probably to show themselves to the priest, never to be heard of again? They were probably amazed at their healing, but just ran off rejoicing.

There are times when we question God. We may think that God is not taking our requests seriously. Or, we may think that what God is asking us to do is just ridiculous. Or, most likely, we think that this request could not possibly be from God - for whatever reason.

I have always enjoyed the response of Naaman’s servants. What if Naaman had been asked to do something difficult, would he not have been happy to do that? Why do we always assume that God only asks us to do the impossible? Sometimes, the most obvious request really is from God.

But, more than understanding that God does not always expect us to do the outrageous, how we respond to God is the most important piece. Both Naaman and the Samaritan leper returned to give thanks. The Samaritan did not praise Jesus - he praised God in a loud voice. He understood that it was God, working through Jesus, who had made him whole. Thus, he received something even greater. Jesus told him that his faith had made him well, or as it can also be translated, he has received his salvation.

Our response to God should always be one of gratitude. The Greek word used by the Samaritan in verse 16 in giving thanks is *eucaristo*, word that should sound very familiar. Every week, we gather to give thanks to God in the service of Holy Eucharist. The Samaritan man and Naaman, a general from Aram, both understood this concept, even though they were both foreigners. How much more should we understand that we are Eucharistic people - people of gratitude. No matter how crazy an idea may seem to us, no matter what we may think of the request God is making of us, let us always join these two men in giving thanks to God for the simple things we are asked to do.