

**"The Washing of Water with the Word"**  
**2 Kings 5:1-14**

16 February Anno Domini 2003  
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of Emmett, Idaho  
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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Baptized,

That the LORD God desires to bestow His blessings upon all people that they might have a clean heart and be able to be in His gracious presence, is well-attested in both the Old and New Testaments. In the beginning His creation was good and pure and right. Even after the Fall of Adam into sin, God sought only that which is perfect and clean for His creation. In a world of disease, demon and death, Jehovah spoke and acted, not only according to His holiness and justice, but also in accord with His mercy and grace. Therefore God's blessings of forgiveness, salvation and eternal life come to us, not by a direct face-to-face confrontation with the Almighty, but through His Word conveyed by means appointed by Him.

The Old Testament Reading assigned to the Church for this day provides a beautiful opportunity for the faithful to understand that God bestows His grace via His Word administered according to His Word. The LORD has ordained His undershepherds to announce His Word of forgiveness in the Absolution. That is one of the means of God's grace. The Holy Communion is another wherein the Word is with bread and wine. And Baptism is yet another and the historical account of Naaman's cure of his leprosy, which you heard read earlier, helps us to understand God's desire and provision for our salvation. Please listen to one verse from that text and understand gracious is ...

... The Washing of Water with the Word.

"Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

Naaman was a the commander of the Syrian army, a man who was victorious in battle. He was in a position of authority and was a mighty man. He was also a man with a terrible problem. He was a leper. Leprosy eats away at the body, consuming it slowly but surely. It is a loathsome disease, both to the one who has it and to those around that person. Unclean is the word that comes to mind and is often spoken to describe the individual with this hideous disease. Naaman was in need of being cleansed from this horrible affliction of the body.

There is something like that disease that eat human being has, one permeating the soul. It is called sin - a condition that is ours by nature even prior to birth into this world. King David declared the truth for each one of Adam's descendants: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5). Sometimes people think that sin is only something we do or fail to do. But our condition goes much deeper than that. As a result, we are in need of spiritual cleansing. Therefore, man petitions the LORD God, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and

cleans me from my sin! ... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:2&8).

Naaman was in need of physical cleansing since he was a leper. His condition, if left unchecked and untreated, would result in condemnation from the community, rejection by others and a putrid death.

Our spiritual condition, if left unchecked and uncleansed, would also result in condemnation from the Almighty, rejection by God Himself and eternal death. That is what would happen to everyone ... from infant to aged if God had not been the Way to salvation and had not made that Good News available for all. The Bible declares "therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned" (Romans 5:12) and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a). This is what all have deserved and grace is God giving us what we don't deserve. Consequently the entire verse, which begins with Law ends with the Promise: "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Through Elisha, using the voice of the prophet as the means of telling the good news, God made a promise to Naaman: "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean." What wonderful, great, fantastic, undeserved news for the leper!

But there was a problem and it was not God's problem, but Naaman's. The leper was quite unhappy with God's promise. For God had restricted His promise of cleansing the leper named Naaman to the water of the Jordan River, a river that was not near to him. The army commander said concerning God's promise that had been given and Elisha's message that had been sent: "'Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me, and stand and call on the Name of the LORD His God, and wave his hand over the place, and cure the leper. 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?'" So he turned and went away in a rage."

Here's Naaman's point: The water of the Jordan River is not better than the water of any other river. The rivers here in Damascus are closer. It's more convenient for me here and this is the way I want it to be. If tested for ecoli and bacteriological agents the rivers here might even be cleaner! Look, it's all H2O and it's my way or I'm on the highway out of here. In fact, water is just water and in itself, it possesses no medicinal strength or reactive power to cleanse Naaman or anyone else from leprosy. The water used when we have someone baptized here is not special water at all and certainly not the water from the Jordan River.

However, for the individual case of Naaman, the promise of God was tied to and conveyed by means of this particular water of the Jordan River. While the leper most certainly was invited to wash in the Jordan to receive the promised blessing, it was the Word of God that was connected with this water that really cleansed him. The promise of physical healing and cleansing made it necessary for Naaman to wash in this water seven times and not in any other river and not any fewer times.

This is strikingly similar to the power of Baptism. When asked, How can water do such great things?, the reply is: "It is not the water indeed that does them, but the Word of God which is in and with the water, and faith (the faith that God grants as a gift) which trusts such Word of God in the water. Without the Word of God, the water is simple water and no Baptism. But with the Word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost" (Luther's Small Catechism).

That right there is often the problem, the objection and the offense. How the Naaman's of this world howl at this. Surely there should be something more to salvation than that; certainly one must make some decision or make a personal pledge or do something in which one is recognized and may have his pride fed and ego stroked.

Of course, that was the Syrian Army Commander's problem with this who Jordan River business. He thought that the prophet should have come out to him and wave his arms in the air and call on God's Name and all sorts of other entertaining words and deeds. Angry that God was not using the leper's methods for cleansing him, the army leader when away in a rage. But one's of Naaman's additional undeserved blessings was that he had several wise servants.

"My father, if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much rather, then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean?'"

What a wonderful, inviting way of saying, "Look, Naaman, you fool. That prophet sent his messenger with the Word of God's promise to you. If you would have been commanded to give 10,000 pieces of silver - if you were ordered to conquer one nation or another - you would have done it and been glad. But now, since God's Word of hope and cleansing has been given to you and that you need only wash seven times in the Jordan River, you are offended, angry and having a temper tantrum. Are you really willing to pass up your only opportunity to be cleansed from such an awful disease? Repent of this great sin against God and His Word.

Oh how the unbelievers in the world and the doubters in the church regard the invitation to repent and be baptized, to come and hear the Word of the forgiveness of all your sins - to take and eat and drink the Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar. Though it is an invitation and not a command, the foolish reply, "Don't tell me what to do. I thought the pastor would come out and wave his hands and entertain me. Instead, he sends me an invitation to eat some unleavened bread and drink a sip of wine. What isn't the bread here better than a host there? Take and eat, indeed. Bosh, I do not like it when he tells me what to do. I won't have it."

And what happens to such people as this? We don't know. What we do know is what happened to Naaman. Had he not been given the gift of repentance through the mouth of others, he would have remained a leper. But he did see his sin and acknowledged it.

"So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the Word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."

When you were baptized, you were cleansed in and by the Presence of the LORD God Almighty. You were restored to God; your soul was healed; your life was regenerated by this gracious washing of water with the Word. This is God's work connected with the water that bestows the many blessings and benefits ...

- + sin no longer has dominion over you
- + you are no longer enslaved to sin
- + death no longer has dominion over you
- + you live in Christ
- + you are united with Christ in a Resurrection like His

+ you are alive to God in Christ Jesus  
+ you walk in newness of life.

As a result, your Baptism is not just an event that happened once many years ago that is worth nothing today. It is of immense importance today for you. Because you are both saint and sinner the blessings of your Baptism continue with you each day.

When Naaman was cured of leprosy, it was a cure that lasted not just for that day - it continued with him. If not, then he would have had to wash in the Jordan seven times every day. But he didn't. It continued with him and surely he must have been glad and joyful every morning when he arose from sleep and thanked the LORD for the Word and the water.

So also the cleansing you have received from your Baptism remains and works for you. Each morning when you awake recall that truth by declaring the truth, "I am baptized." Daily live in our Baptism ... drowning the old adam and arising new and clean and refreshed.

In Romans 6, we are told that those who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death. His death was necessary for our life. His death on the cross paid the price to pay for the life of the world. The sins that we have committed and the ones that we will commit today and in the days that we have left on this earth have all been atoned or paid for in the death of Christ ... in Whose death we have been baptized.

Death and Baptism ... they are connected in Christ. Centuries after Naaman went to the Jordan River to wash away his leprosy in the waters of the Jordan River, "Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented Him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness.' Then he consented" (Matthew 3:13-15).

No leprosy was washed from Jesus for He was perfectly clean. No transgressions were carried away from Jesus by the washing of water with the Word for He was without sin, blemish, spot, stain or wrinkle. No, just the opposite. Jesus stepped into the filthy waters of the Jordan River and all the diseases of body and soul ... all sins of humanity were washed up and onto Him. He stepped from the Jordan River and continued His journey to the cross, bearing this awful, terrible and horrible burden of man with Him. Jesus did all this in order that you might be baptized and continually hear that you are forgiven in the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.