

Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship  
Anita Rediger  
July 4, 2010

### “Drawn Up”

North of us, about a mile and a half up the road, the Wabash River angles across the fields. On my usual evening bike ride, I coast to the intersection and turn right, riding south toward State Road 116. Wednesday evening, however, as I came to the stop sign I decided to head north; I wanted to see the river.

Melissa’s choice of pictures for our bulletin cover had taken me by surprise. This particular view of the Jordan, which she sent ahead with our bulletin preview, made me think of the Wabash! As I sat on the bridge, I imagined the Wabash being the Jordan and envisioned Naaman and his servants standing on its banks. (with Elisha peeking out the window!

This morning’s account from 2 Kings provides for us a colorful cast of characters and a delightful script. The persons involved couldn’t be more diverse yet – just as we are with persons of our time– they are linked by their common place in the events of history. **More importantly, they are drawn together by God’s never ending desire to heal.**

First off, we’re introduced to Naaman: Naaman, not just any regular guy, but the commander of the Syrian army. As if we didn’t infer that he was a powerful man from this title, the scripture elaborates a bit more. Naaman – “was a great man and in high favor with his master” (of course, this was the King of Syria!). He was in high favor because God had His hand on him... “by him the Lord had given victory to Syria.” (hmm...I wonder what sense Naaman had of God in his life?) But, even more curious, what is the God of Israel doing coming alongside the commander of the *Syrian* army? Wouldn’t conventional wisdom tell us that Naaman was an enemy of God’s people?!

Naaman is described for us as a “mighty warrior.” What kind of picture comes to mind when you hear such a description? Perhaps, a strong, handsome, rugged type of a guy...tanned from the desert sun and his life in the camp. Well, he was a “mighty warrior” but he also bore a great burden. He was a “mighty warrior” alright, but the reality was this; he suffered from leprosy – a scaly, scabby, disfiguring disease! Naaman could conquer nations, but he couldn’t get close to the people around him!

Barbara Brown Taylor writes,

Naaman did not photograph well. He had leprosy. Even though he was a national hero and hobnobbed with heads of state, there was always that awkward moment when he met people for the first time. Some handled their surprise well, but others stared at him or looked quickly away. Naaman was tired of seeing the questions register on their faces when they saw his scabby hand.

Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship

Anita Rediger

July 4, 2010

*Good grief, is that stuff contagious?!*

Naaman could command armies but he was helpless to battle the relentless advance of this enemy, his own very personal enemy. How he must have lamented. How he must have suffered. Everyone in his household was aware of his anguish, even the youngest of servants.

Suddenly, the spotlight shifts in dramatic fashion from the national hero, Naaman, to a lowly servant girl. We're told that she was a young girl, a captive from one of the raids of the Syrian army on the land of Israel. As I think about the reports that I hear of the plight of women caught up in war, I find myself wondering what this young girl had experienced.

The most recent issue of *Timbrel*, the Mennonite Women USA publication, focuses on the issue of "Human Trafficking – Modern Slavery." The brief words about this girl of long ago became more real to me as I read an article about girls ages 11-17 who had recently been rescued from enslavement.

This particular young slave girl...I find myself wondering what trauma she might have endured and witnessed. I wonder...what inner resources of faith were sustaining her and helping her to continue to cling to the God of Abraham in this foreign land? What spirit of hope was at work within her to be able to extend a word of care to her captor? For it was from this young servant girl...the most unlikely of sources... that hope for healing comes to Naaman. I have to ask myself, would I respond with this kind of compassion toward one who and turned my world upside down? Might I not be more likely to gloat over what would seem like well-deserved suffering? Would I seek healing for my enemy?! (Dirk Wilhelms story comes to mind.)

Even though the invitation came in an unlikely fashion – from a lowly servant, it didn't take long for Naaman to get back on track with "the way things are usually done." Naaman took word of a possible cure immediately to the King of Syria. The King of Syria – in a right, kingly fashion, dispatched Naaman with a letter to the King of Israel. And don't forget Naaman's gift of 750 pounds of silver and 150 pounds of gold, plus 10 sets of fine clothes! In Naaman's world, that's how you make friends and influence people...by throwing your weight and wealth around!

"When this letter reaches you," it said, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy."

---

<sup>1</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *Home By Another Way* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1999) 156-157.

Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship

Anita Rediger

July 4, 2010

It was a nice gesture, however misguided. The problem was that the King of Syria did not understand about real power. He thought the king of Israel was the man to see – that if there were a cure available in Israel then the king would surely know about it. Only the king did not know about it, because the only kinds of power he had were political and military power. He did not know one thing about healing power – the power of God...<sup>2</sup>

As Mia read for us, now the poor King of Israel was beside himself. He tore his clothes as he read this letter... “when this letter reaches you...cure him of his leprosy.” What an impossibility! Even kings know that there are some things that even *they* can’t make happen! The King smelled a trap...surely this was a political maneuver so that Syria could again declare war on Israel. In the economy of political and military power – the King of Israel realized he was bankrupt!

But now from the wings, enter Elisha – the very prophet that the young girl had spoken of. Oh yeah...this important detail had been quickly forgotten when Naaman assumed the usual posture of power-brokering – traveling from head-of-state to head-of-state with precious metals and fine clothing. The detail about “the man of God” was left out of the equation! But, when the “order” for healing came to the King of Israel, it didn’t take long for the “God question” to come to mind! Very quickly, the King turned Naaman over to Elisha..(whew). Wasn’t there usually great tension between the prophet and king? This time that the king was glad to hear from Elisha! So, the next thing we know Naaman is standing at Elisha’s door – still with fabulous gifts and the same great expectations!

A different doorway, but the same assumptions...Naaman’s perception of his importance quickly endangered his opportunity for healing. What! To be greeted by the servant instead of the “man of God”! Naaman was insulted that he was demeaned in this way. And, then the instruction to bathe in the nasty Jordan. (picture our muddy Wabash!) Why, he would have stayed home if he had known that this is how he would be treated. “Who does he think he is!!” “Who does he think I am!, Naaman raged.

But once again, from unlikely sources, an invitation for healing. Naaman’s servants tenderly challenge him – once again - to consider a different source of power...**instead of might and prestige employed to *manipulate* outcomes, the servants invite Naaman to *entrust* his greatest vulnerability to the truest and deepest healing powers of God.**

This time, Naaman *listens* and in naked, scab-filled faith steps down into the muddy Jordan. He is drawn up a healed man, skin now as ruddy as that of a young boy, his heart brimming with the awareness “that God had done for him what military victories and

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 158.

Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship

Anita Rediger

July 4, 2010

kings and bags of money could never do... He was made new.”<sup>3</sup> He exclaims, “Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel...”

**I don't believe that it was the particular waters of the Jordan that offered healing to Naaman; rather the awareness of his common humanity and need for God which had cleansed him.**

Questions for me, for us...

- **How do we *expect* God to work? Could it be that invitation to healing is all around us if we would challenge ourselves to step beyond our usual paradigm?**
  - We're easily attracted by the trappings of power, by charismatic personalities and suave-looking bodies. Do we consider the possibility that the nudging of the Spirit may come to us through the unlikely stranger, the ordinary neighbor, the high school student, the nursing assistant or the elderly person with Alzheimer's Disease. What about the greeter at the local Wal-Mart?

On this July 4 Sunday may we consider the source of true power and deepest healing. Instead of from the top down, the power of God's **never ending desire to heal...** draws us together...*drawing us up* into a community of healing and hope! May it be so among us! AMEN

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 161.