

## Stepping outside of our Comfort Zone

If you are anything like me, then pride has probably played a beneficial role in your life. Pride has sometimes saved us from embarrassing and cringe worthy situations. Pride makes sure we hold ourselves together during trying and unhappy times. It has tempered our emotions and calmed us down when our self-confidence was being beaten to a pulp. But I hope you realize that pride has also kept us from being vulnerable and from stepping out of our comfort zone. Stepping out our comfort zone can be super uncomfortable. We feel totally out of our element and probably a little naked. In theory, the more comfortable we are, the more successful our lives should be. However, the opposite has been proven true. The more vulnerable and uncomfortable we get, the more successful we can be. It turns out that comfort often creates complacency and avoidance; it gets in the way of what we really want.

Author and speaker Brené Brown writes, “When we step back and examine our lives, we will find that nothing is as uncomfortable, dangerous, and hurtful as standing on the outside of our lives looking in and wondering what it would be like if we had the courage to step into the arena—whether it’s a new relationship, an important meeting, the creative process, or a difficult family conversation.”<sup>1</sup> Or wondering what it would have been like if we tried a new way of attaining a goal; something different, yet easier than we expected.

A few minutes ago, we heard the story of a man who almost missed what he wanted most, to be healed. This story began in Aram, which is modern day Syria. Israel and the neighboring Syria were usually at war, but at the time of this story they were momentarily at peace. Syria’s army was more powerful, and Israel knew it. They had defeated Israel more than once and Israel even knew the name of the commander of the Syrian army. This was Naaman, whose name means “pleasant”, not a fitting name for a warrior, nonetheless, even Naaman’s enemies admitted that he was a great man who was clearly favored by God in battle. He was a decorated military general, perhaps like General Petraeus. Naaman was a national hero, a man of great wealth, power and influence, but there was something nagging at him. He had leprosy, which was not such a big deal for a Syrian as it was for a Jew- a Jew would have been marginalized and would certainly not have been given a high ranking government position – but Naaman’s skin problem caused him great embarrassment, especially when he had to meet with other officials.

As the story goes, a slave girl, who had been taken captive from Israel, told Naaman of a prophet in Israel who could cure him. This prophet was Elisha, the one who had pleaded for, and received a double portion of Elijah’s prophetic spirit. Naaman had no idea of who Elisha was; he just knew that he wanted a cure for his skin condition. So Naaman obtained a letter from the King of Aram and his blessing, to go to Israel in search of a cure. And, because a prophet in Israel was outside of his preferred provider network, Naaman set out with gold, silver, clothing

and an entourage – everything he knew would win the favor of any one, even an enemy prophet. Being a man who was used to getting what he wanted and who knew how best to accomplish this, imagine his surprise and anger when Elisha the prophet did not even come out to greet Naaman, but sent his servant to dispatch orders to “Go and wash in the river Jordan seven times and you will be healed.”

When I visited Israel, a few years back, a group of us renewed our Baptismal vows at the Jordan. The water was about knee deep, muddy and polluted. Although we witnessed pilgrims submerging themselves in the river, we were strongly advised against it as we were told the water contained sewage, agricultural and fish farming runoff and pesticides.

I understand fully how Naaman must have felt knowing there were much better, cleaner rivers in Syria. Besides that, he had fully expected to be greeted as the hero he knew he was. And now the prophet not only didn't talk to him, but he was told to simply go and dip himself in the water. That wasn't heroic, challenging or difficult. He had envisioned Elisha coming out and doing some fancy magic show – perhaps waving his arms in the air and calling out to the Lord for some healing miracle. He wanted something dazzling, something impressive that would suit such a great man. He wanted spectacular, like 4th of July fireworks! Nothing about the idea felt comfortable so he flat-out refused to go. But his servants tried to reason with him saying, “Father, if the prophet had told you to do something very difficult, wouldn't you have done it? So, you should certainly obey him even when he says simply, ‘Go and wash and be cured!’”

We see a similar struggle in today's Gospel story when Jesus commissions the 70 disciples. Perhaps the disciples already had ideas of how it would be to be sent out as agents in God's kingdom. Maybe they envisioned themselves waving their hands about and calling on the name of the Lord. Yet Jesus tells them, the task ahead is to live simply and vulnerably. The task is to rely on the grace and hospitality of others. The task is to stay in one place — to encounter, to engage, and to go deep. The task is to live as guests, sharing the Gospel with those you come in contact with, and you need to depend on these people for sustenance and shelter. The task is to speak peace and cure the sick. The task is to believe always in the abundance and nearness of God's economy.<sup>ii</sup>

Both lectionary stories this week turn our expectations upside down. Naaman took the advice of a Jew, a slave, a girl to seek a cure for his leprosy in Israel – and the advice of his servants to “try something simple.” It took Naaman's stepping out of his comfort zone, humbling himself and listening to Elisha, the man of God and doing something ordinary so the extraordinary could happen. It wasn't what he was expecting, nor was it something that he wanted to do. His healing came about from simply showing up and experiencing God in the muddy waters.

Likewise, the story of the seventy is a story of abundance flowing from simplicity. Purse-less, barefooted houseguests usher in God's kingdom. And speaking peace into villagers' homes brings Satan down like lightning.<sup>iii</sup> The disciples were probably not expecting the mission they

were given yet, leaving their comfort zone allowed them to find joy in healing the sick and spreading the Gospel.

Sometimes we also need to step out of our comfort zone in order for extraordinary things to take place. I am the first to admit that this is no easy task. It goes against everything our body naturally tells us to do. But we do get used to it with practice. Coming out of our comfort zone is tough in the beginning, chaotic in the middle yet oh so awesome in the end – because in the end, it shows us a whole new world. It can bring us healing and bring peace.

We as Disciples of Christ do not have any super powers, yet we have been given authority to show up and proclaim the nearness of God that scatters the darkness. And we can show up for life, for each other and for the world because Jesus is always with us and has given us what we need for healing and nourishment - the simple, ordinary things that are right in front of us.

---

<sup>i</sup> Brené Brown

<sup>ii</sup> Debie Thomas, *Journeying with Jesus*, July 01,2019

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid