

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. The Lord has made his salvation known and has revealed his righteousness to the nations. Amen.

2 Kings 5:1–14

¹ Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.

² Now bands from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. ³ She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

⁴ Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. ⁵ "By all means, go," the king of Aram replied. "I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing. ⁶ The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy."

⁷ As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!"

⁸ When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: "Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel." ⁹ So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. ¹⁰ Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."

¹¹ But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. ¹² Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.

¹³ Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed!'" ¹⁴ So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.

In the name of Jesus, our Savior, dear Christian friends,

“Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.” That was the recipe for Naaman’s cure. It was the cure that would save him. And, oh, how Naaman wanted to be saved. Naaman was a powerful man, the commander of an army. He was highly respected, even by his king. He had a bright future ahead of him. Or at least that was the case until his present power and his future glory came crashing to a halt when he was diagnosed with a deadly disease. Naaman didn’t want to die. He wanted to live. How good it was to hear there was a cure for his disease! He would do anything to get that cure. He would have traveled over mountains and deserts. He would have faced danger and given up his wealth. But to Naaman’s surprise nothing difficult was demanded of him. The cure was simple and it was free. **“Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.”** Amazing. Simply amazing! But it was not at all what Naaman had expected.

My friends, the Word before us today has an important lesson: **Salvation Comes in Simple Ways.** 1) At first the word of salvation wasn’t dramatic enough for Naaman. 2) But he learned that simple salvation is still salvation

I.

“Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.” Our text introduces us to Naaman, an enemy of God’s Old Testament people. Yet we hear that God gave him victory. Why? We can’t say more than it was part of God’s plan. It was also part of God’s plan that a young girl from Israel should be captured. She now served Naaman's wife. The Lord used this young girl to give Naaman the help he needed. The young girl said to her mistress, **"If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."** Desperate for help, not finding it in any other place, Naaman received a letter of introduction from his king and he went looking for that cure, **“taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing.”** When it came to a cure, price was no object. But now, after arriving at the house of Elisha the prophet, Naaman wasn’t so sure the trip had been worthwhile. The cure was not what he had expected.

You’d think Naaman would have been overjoyed with this cure for his disease. But he wasn’t. He thought this cure was silly. “Dip yourself in water? That’s ridiculous. I want the prophet Elisha to come out and wave his hands in the air over my illness. I want the prophet to speak loud, boisterous words to his God, calling

on the name of his God to do something amazing. I don't want some boring water. What kind of healing, what kind of salvation is that?" How sad! Naaman had the cure for his illness right before his eyes and he couldn't see it. He had the penicillin for his illness in hand, the chemotherapy for his cancer in his grasp, the electrical paddles for his deadly heart attack within reach. But he pushed the cure away. The cure was not fancy enough for Naaman. He wanted something dramatic.

Every Sunday, we come to church and are offered salvation, God's healing cure for the deadly disease of sin that threatens all of us. Did you realize that? Have you seen the salvation God has been offering you every week during every year of your life? Maybe you haven't. Sometimes dramatic events happen in such simple ways that we overlook what is happening. A pastor says, **"In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all of your sins."** Is that enough? Do we realize God's healing salvation is announced through those simple words? Or maybe we don't think they're dramatic enough; maybe we feel as if we should shed some tears or do something to make us feel really forgiven. Can forgiveness really happen through those simple words?

A child has a few drops of water placed on his or her head, and with the words **"I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,"** salvation comes to that child. That baby has been united to Christ in his death on the cross for the forgiveness of his sins, and that same child has been united to Christ in his resurrection for the promise of eternal life. At first glance it seems silly that salvation comes that way, doesn't it? I'll be the first to admit it does not appear very dramatic or fantastic or dazzling for the God who is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. But the question is, is that good enough for us? Or do we walk away from our Baptism, forget what Jesus has done for us through that water, and maybe look for an altar call somewhere or repeated baptisms? Do we try to create some kind of "spiritual" atmosphere of our own where, hopefully, we can "feel" more saved than we do through that simple water and Word?

And don't forget the bread and wine. God comes in the flesh. He promises to come, to be present among us, to be near us, to give us his sacrifice. Amazing that God would do this, isn't it? We celebrate the Lord's Supper, a celebration of bread and wine, body and blood. God's salvation is among us. It's so simple.

One day, a young Lutheran woman was at a college youth group meeting. After a week in the godless environment of her university, she was pleased to be around other Christians. The group began talking about their salvation and how that salvation came about. Each student had a dramatic story—one heard a voice from God while on a bus one day, another young woman spoke about a fantastic dream, still another young man talked about how he felt God take his hand and walk him up to an altar call. When it came time for the young Lutheran woman to speak about how she'd been saved, she said it happened when she was baptized. A few of the college students gave her a puzzled look, two of them even laughed at her. Finally, one of the young men in the group said, "You mean, you believe you're saved just because some pastor sprinkled some water on your head and said a few words? That's silly." The Lutheran woman sat there, found herself blushing a bit, and then she said, "You're right. It is silly. But that's exactly how God saved me."

II.

Naaman and all of us struggle in this world with receiving God's salvation. Ever since the fall into sin, the devil has been tricking us into rejecting what God has given us and instead Satan has us looking for other, more dramatic ways that we think will bring us salvation. But Christ surprised the world by coming into it as a baby and not as a great and mighty king. He comes to us in simple ways, quiet ways, sometimes ways that can be completely overlooked. But these are ways of salvation that the greatest of kings can touch or even the smallest infant.

Thankfully for Naaman, he had a servant who said to this mighty army commander, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed!'" Naaman listened to those simple words and look what happened: his life was spared! His skin was restored. He was healed!

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we don't need trumpets, fireworks, or flashing strobe lights to point out our salvation. Christ says to you, "Come, hear my words of forgiveness and be free. Come, take my body and blood. I gave it into death for you, and now I want to give it to you so you can be certain you are really free from the devil and hell. Come, here is water for you in Baptism. I gave you this miraculous water so that babies, children, teenagers, and adults can all be washed and be clean. It is simple, so all of you are able to receive it. I

don't ask anything from you. I don't ask you to be rich or smart or powerful. Let me wash you of your sins and make you clean."

The season of Epiphany continually reveals to us who our God is in the person of Jesus Christ. There is perhaps no greater realization of this than the means by which the Lord chooses to save us. Just as Jesus' entry into this world came by means of a humble birth, so he also uses humble means to enter our lives – word, water, wheat, and wine. God works through these simple means to bring us salvation. Christ's birth, his healing gospel, and his sacrifice which wins peace with the Father – these things reveal Jesus to be simple and approachable to all.

There will always be times when we're tempted to look for the dramatic or the spectacular. But our God, who died on a cross and rose from the dead, desires to give this gift to everyone, young and old alike, rich and poor alike, weak and strong alike. Complete and full forgiveness of sins. We don't deserve it. We haven't earned it. God gives it to us. What an amazing gift our God gives us and it comes in such simple ways! Amen.

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