



Have-it-Your-Way Faith
2 Kings 5:1-15
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Diane Christopher

When I was in NJ, I lived in Italian country. There seemed to be an Italian restaurant on every street corner, and one of my favorites made a very interesting and different pizza that I really liked called Vodka Diabalo Pizza. Instead of a regular tomato sauce, the pizza had a vodka sauce that was very spicy and delicious.

One day, I stopped in for a meal and noticed that this pizza was no longer on the menu. I guess others did not like it as much as I did! However, they had a pasta dish with the vodka sauce. So, when the waitress arrived, I told her that I had really liked the pizza with the vodka sauce. Even though it wasn't on the menu anymore, could they still make it for me? With a smile on her face, she said, "Sure! We can make whatever you want."

Isn't that the way we like it? "Have it your way" the commercial says. "I did it my way," sang Frank Sinatra.

There is a man in our scripture passage today who liked to have things done his way. His name is Naaman.

Naaman was a man of great power and prestige, a commander of a great army, a man used to getting his own way. He had everything that he needed and wanted, except for one thing: his health. He had a skin disease called leprosy. In our scripture passage today, he seeks to be healed, but he wants it done his way. God, however, has other ideas.

Let's read Naaman's story and find out what happens. Turn with me to 2 Kings 5. Before we read, pray with me:

Eternal Spirit, you flow through the ages from the pages of Scripture, transforming hearts with your challenge, moving those who hear to new acts of faith and courage. Bless our hearts and minds in the reading of the Word, so that we might know your presence and power more fully. We pray in the name of the Living Word. Amen.

Read 2 Kings 5:1-15

Who are the heroes of this story...besides God? Did you notice the kind of people God uses to get Naaman to the river?



First, there was his wife's maidservant, an Israelite. She had been captured in a time of war and brought into the home of Naaman against her will to serve this family. She should have hated this country and this king because they had taken her away from her own country, her homeland, her family.

Yet, she noticed that her master was sick. So instead of hating this man, watching him in his sickness and gloating over his disease (which could have been easy to do in her situation), she mentioned to her mistress (Naaman's wife) that she knew of a prophet in Israel that could heal Naaman.

Perhaps this little Israelite slave girl took her job seriously of being a light to the nations. God had chosen the Jewish people to be His people, and they were chosen to be a light to other nations – to tell them about the God of Israel. Little did this slave girl know how much light she would end up being.

This little maidservant, whose name is not given, who vanishes from the story within a couple of verses becomes an initiator of hope.

Through a series of events, Naaman ends up at the doorstep of Elisha's house, the prophet that can heal. He arrives at Elisha's humble home in all this glory - with chariots and horses and money and power and wealth. It must have been a magnificent scene. We would have been impressed.

Elisha, however, is not impressed. He doesn't even come out to see Naaman, as should have been appropriate for a commander of a huge army. Instead, he sends his own servant to the door to greet Naaman and give him a message.

According to Naaman, this is not how it is supposed to go. Elisha should have come to the door to meet Naaman for he is a great man. But all he gets is a message: Go down to the Jordan River and wash yourself not once, not twice, but seven times. Then you will be healed.

Naaman is furious. This is what he says (it is worth reading again because of its humor): verse 11: "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy!"

Where did Naaman get this idea? From TV healers? Is this the way they did it with the gods in his own country? How would you like it if I came up to you and started waving my hands over you, and crying out to God in a loud voice, "Be healed!"



Naaman wants a grand event; after all, he is the “great warrior.” It is right and fitting to have it done this way for such a great man. And all he gets is a demeaning run around from a God who refuses to be tamed to Naaman’s expectations. And as a result, he almost missed out on what God had for him...because he wanted it done his way.

We aren’t much different, are we?

But that’s not all. Something else made Naaman very angry: he was told to wash in the Jordan River. The problem with the Jordan River is that it is muddy. All Naaman could think about was the beautiful, crystal clear waters of his home country. Get clean in the Jordan? It’s filthy. That muddy water is going to heal me? Are you out of your mind! Why can’t I do it in my own rivers! This is not the way it is supposed to be done!

Naaman had it all figured out: wave the hand and be healed. Go in the clean river. But God had a different way for him. Naaman doesn’t like it, throws a temper tantrum and leaves in a rage. I know so many people who have walked away from God in anger because God didn’t act the way they wanted God to or expected God to.

Now, notice what happens. Another servant enters the scene. This is the third group of servants. The first was the maidservant who told Naaman about the prophet of God who heals. The second was Elisha’s servant who had to deliver the message to Naaman that got him angry.

The third group of servants is Naaman’s servants. They approach Naaman and say, You know, if Elisha had told you to do something really difficult, you would have done it. But he told you to do something simple...dip in the water 7 times. Why don’t you just do it?

In this story, roles are reversed. It is the little people that have the power. Not the kings, not the commander of the army, but the servants. This is often God’s way. Much of God’s way is through the small, the quiet, the poor, the unnoticed, the helpless.

Give some credit to Naaman. He listens, somehow masters his anger (and perhaps pride), goes down to the river and washes 7 times. He is immediately healed: “his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.”

Isn’t it amazing even after Naaman wants it done his way, God still steps in and heals him of his leprosy? God waits as Naaman works things out, rants and raves a bit, but then relents and goes in the muddy river. We finally see what God saw all along – a man of faith. “Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel.”



And in another astonishing reversal, not only is Naaman healed, he now calls himself a servant. From a proud commander to a servant of Elisha and a servant of God.

This story is about the surprising and unexpected ways of God in the world and our openness to that way. It is about our expectations being undone as we engage with a God who does the unexpected. God's spirit and word moves to their own tune (not our tune) with surprising results.

We like to design our own faith. We want it our way. But this little story is here to tell us that our faith is not a have-it-your-way faith. It is not about our ways, it is about God's ways. My ways are not your ways, God says.

For example, think about our salvation. It is not a have-it-your-way salvation. It's not by good works or by being good enough. God says it is simply through the cross. Not our way, but God's way.

Our faith is not a have-it-your-way faith. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus meets a man like Naaman who has leprosy. This man knows Jesus can heal him, but he says this, "If you choose, you can make me well." He totally leaves it up to Jesus. He wants to do it Jesus' way, not his own way. And Jesus says, "I do choose. Be made clean."

God does answer prayer. God does heal wounded hearts, burdened souls and bodies and minds. God heals, and cares and loves. But when we come knocking on God's door, his answer may not be what we expect or in ways we think we need. Sometimes we have to let go and go under – maybe even 7 times.

Our faith is not a have-it-your-way faith. It is us coming before God, perhaps letting go of our pride, submitting to the way God has provided and saying, *Have your own way with me, Lord. I accept on Your terms.*

Amen

