

Sermon on 2 Kings 5:14-27 for 21st Sunday after Pentecost
St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church – Pastor Nate Scharf – 10.14.18

The greatest toys are often not what we think. Parents and grandparents pay great amounts and even overextend themselves to get that perfect, new, expensive gift for their beloved little one, even paying shipping costs. But we feel a bit foolish when the child has more fun playing with the box the present came in. Maybe they overlooked the gift or maybe we overlooked the simplicity and the greater gift? The light-up light saber you bought them nestles up against the knight's sword and the toy guns in the closet while they play outside with dead branches fallen from a tree. The sticks littering the ground after the windstorm are so versatile they can turn from swords into machine guns into magic wands in an instant. Amazing. Were we wrong about what brings someone true value and joy? Maybe we are missing something?

God didn't want Naaman or Gehazi to miss it. So God made a fool of Naaman and Gehazi, and he makes fools of us. He does it because **he loves us and wants us to see his greater gift and have true value and joy** that

Jesus is our Treasure.

Naaman, the revered commander of the forces of Aram reluctantly went down and dipped into the waters of the Jordan. Naaman was from the contentious country to the North. Yet he was willing to approach the king of Israel, accompanied by great riches and a humble request from Aram's king because a little captive Israelite girl who served his wife told him there was a prophet in Israel who could heal him. It was humbly foolish already. But this disease would end Naaman's career and lead to a very painful death. Naaman begrudgingly dipped in the water 7 times as a servant of Elisha told him to do. God cleansed him of this death sentence disease. Naaman saw that his skin was restored like that of a young boy. God made more than just skin whole that day. Naaman's stone cold heart of unbelief that thought you bought, earned and cajoled from God was replaced with a heart of faith that looked to the LORD the only God, full of grace and mercy.

"Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant." Naaman had brought hundreds of pounds of silver and gold and sets of beautiful clothing. He wanted to give it to Elisha for this gift of healing. Elisha refused. While Scripture is clear on our need to support those who serve us with the Gospel and Elisha often accepted gifts from God's people, Elisha refused in this case. He made it clear that God's gift is by Grace – his love for undeserving sinners. You can't earn, buy or repay it. It is a gift.

So Naaman asked for dirt. Why? It is because he picked up on what the greater gift is. He had a gracious God. He got to worship God for his grace. To be connected to the promises of God. To show his faith that he was a member of this community spiritually,

even though from Aram. The LORD is God. He would not worship another, a hard thing in a country that worshipped many different gods. Naaman even asks God's pardon for entering a pagan temple to help his master, the king, because it might give the impression he might be worshipping another god, though he would only be helping his aged king. Elisha said, "Go in peace." Naaman had true peace, peace with God, peace from God, a far greater gift than the riches he brought or any pleasure or wealth the world offers.

What do we do with our offerings? Do you ever put your offering in the plate with second thoughts? "I could really use that. Maybe I should just give a smaller amount." Do you ever not give simply because you figure, "Others are richer and better off than me, what difference does it make? I am really struggling right now." Or do you give boldly as almost a pay-it-forward dare to God, "God you tell me you love the cheerful giver, so I expect some of that lovin' to reach my bank account." Or is that just me that struggles with these things. You, me and Naaman are sinners who often get God wrong. And so God has to make fools of us to show us true treasure.

He takes us to a cross and a man who is suffering, penniless, friend and follower-less in all his weakness and humility. You want to look away, but you can hear him forgive his tormentors, speak to God like he's family, and suffer in silence as many mock and deride him. Here God says, you will find riches, as his blood drips and covers you to make you clean before our righteous and holy creator. He raises this dead man from the grave and shows him to be what he has always been – true God as well as true man. God helps you understand his love and grace better, and that **Jesus is your treasure**.

He brings you to a font and bids you have water sprinkled upon you and upon your children – why? To cleanse a spot of your head or on your clothes? No. The Holy Spirit is given to you and connects you to Christ, gives you rebirth, washes away the stain of your sin and gives you a cleansed conscience before God. Foolish in the eyes of the world and even among some Christian denominations, but God makes fools of us so that we can see his greater gifts of his love, forgiveness and mercy – nothing to be earned or paid for, but pure foolish gift. You too have peace with God, from God just like Naaman.

Do you remember the first car you bought with your own hard-earned money? Some of you may still be looking forward to that day. You worked and slaved for hours to make enough money. You searched for the best car you could afford (not a lot of options). When you brought it home, even though it was old, leaked a little oil, had a few dents, maybe some rust, it was the most beautiful thing you had ever seen. You appreciated it. You even bragged about it. You couldn't wait to take your friends around in it. But what if someone had just given it to you. Would you appreciate it as much or would it have been "*too easy on you?*"

Gehazi thought, this is "*too easy.*" It was also a cover for his greed. Elisha, the man of God, refused Naaman's gift, but Gehazi thought Naaman needed to give it and Gehazi deserved it. Gehazi tore out after Naaman's chariot. Naaman saw him and condescended to speak with this servant of Elisha as though he were talking to a good friend, or even Elisha himself. Naaman didn't need any explanation, but Gehazi delivered his lies perfectly.

Naaman gave Gehazi all he asked, would have given him all. Naaman even sent servants to carry the money and the clothes. Gehazi got to the front door and took the goods inside. Now maybe Naaman would appreciate what he had been given. Now maybe Gehazi would finally get a little something he deserved for all his work. Gehazi confused the beautiful statement of God's grace. Gehazi showed his own confusion of the true value and joy over God's grace to us.

God made a fool of Gehazi as he left Elisha's house covered in leprosy. Gehazi had thought that Elisha, (really it was God) was too easy on Naaman. He should have to do something or pay something. It is a dangerous thing to want to add to what Jesus has done or to think it depends on your share. Most heresies of our heart and that you find in Christian churches spring from these two ideas. But every time Gehazi looked at his leprous skin and the leprosy on his children and grandchildren, he would be reminded – you will only find comfort in God's grace – his favor for you, a person who does not deserve it.

God gives us all a little leprosy, doesn't he? At first we balk at it or cry out under the pressure of it. We wonder why God has allowed this cross in our lives whether internal/external/mental/physical/ emotional/spiritual or all that wrapped into one. Part of us asks, "Haven't we done enough?" "When will you stop this and give me the comfort and ease I deserve for all this struggle?" "Maybe if I just get better, or live better, or achieve, or fix or do..." The bargaining, the achieving, the doing, the escaping all fall flat as they turn us in on ourselves or turn us out to the endless empty offers this fallen world puts before our eyes. But you will only find comfort in God's grace to you, a sinner.

Maybe the leprosy we bear will never go away in this life, or they'll come and go. Maybe we need the reminders. God teaches us where to find comfort, where to find life, where our true treasure is. It's him. We look to a cross and an empty grave, to a man who rose from the grave and still bears the nail marks in his hands. We trust the power of his Word whether it is spoken by a pastor or a preschooler. We come to God's house to gather together and hear this life-giving and life-saving message of his grace. We watch in wonder as water is poured over an 8-day old baby or an 80 year old and know that God's promises and gifts of life, forgiveness and eternity are there with the water and the Word because God has promised. We approach the altar of his goodness welcomed though unworthy sinners to receive and taste of bread and wine and his true body and blood and go away comforted because God welcomes sinners and not only eats with us, but feeds us and forgives us with his own body and blood.

Now we know what God's grace is and that we have peace with God. We are forgiven in Christ Jesus. Jesus has set free to serve. Our whole life is about Him, about our Savior Jesus and his love for us whether we head back to Aram with a couple carry-ons of dirt or we sit leprous in Israel carrying our crosses, we have true treasure. **We have Jesus.** Amen.