

Streetsville United Church

Sunday, October 27, 2019

Rev. John Tapscott

## “IMMERSED IN THE JORDAN”

2 Kings 5:14

In 2 Kings 5, verse 14, we read, “So he (Naaman) went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.” The Jordan River is very significant in Israel’s history. After wandering forty years in the wilderness, the Hebrew people crossed the Jordan into the promised land. John the Baptist baptized many people in the Jordan River, including Jesus himself. And nine centuries before the time of Jesus, Naaman, the foreigner, was healed in the Jordan. And then I began to think – where is our healing Jordan? What is our Jordan? Then I realized that our Jordan is not a place but a person. Jesus Christ is our healing Jordan.

Naaman was the commander of the army of Aram. He was a five-star general, a great man, much in favour with his king. Naaman had won victories over Israel, though at this time there was peace between the two nations. The Scripture tells us, “The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy.” Leprosy affects the skin and inflicts nerve damage and even causes limbs to fall off. Leprosy at its worse, is a deadly disease, and highly contagious. It sometimes meant quarantine, lepers living only with other lepers. Clearly a man of Naaman’s stature didn’t want that. He wanted to be healed of his potentially deadly disease.

We are all afflicted by the deadly disease called sin. It causes us suffering in body, mind and spirit. It is not a physical disease, though all human misery has its source in the fall. Sin is that human tendency to ignore or disobey the Creator’s rules for life, seeking to do things on our own and in our own way. Sin fractures our relationship with God and with others and makes us feel divided within ourselves. Paul says, “I don’t do the things I want to do, but the things I don’t want to do, these I do; what a wretched man I am.” We are all like that. We don’t understand ourselves and our own actions. Sin comes out in many ways – bursts of wrongful anger, greed, unfaithfulness, hatred, envy, stealing, lying, and so on. And there is a social aspect to sin as we have been reminded in recent years. War, aggression, inequality, abuse of God’s creation, oppression, prejudice - all these result from the power called sin. Sin makes us unclean before our Maker, even unclean to ourselves.

Two men were riding on a train. One man treated his fellow passengers kindly and thoughtfully on the journey. The other treated his fellow passengers rudely and with contempt. But when both looked out the window, they saw that the train was heading in the wrong direction. Sin affects us all, no matter how accomplished or morally correct we may be. “We have all sinned,” says the Scripture, and further, “the wages of sin is death.” Sin sends us in the wrong direction. It puts us on the track towards hell instead of heaven. Sin is a deadly disease which afflicts us all.

Naaman had a physical illness, but he also suffered from this deadly disease called sin, which almost prevented him from receiving a cure for his leprosy.

Now the hero of this story is a young Israelite girl who served Naaman's wife. She said to her, "If only my Lord could go to the prophet who is in Israel. He could cure him of his leprosy." Naaman told this to the King of Aram who said, "Go, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." When the King of Israel read the letter he thought it was a scheme to invade his country. But Elisha said to the king, "No, let Naaman come to me, that he may learn there is a prophet in Israel." Elisha's main concern was not to draw attention to himself, but to the Lord God of Israel, who reigns over all the earth.

Elisha sent a messenger to Naaman. "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be made clean." But Naaman became angry and said, "I expected the prophet himself to come out and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over me and I would be healed." And he turned away. You see, here was how sin came out in Naaman. He was a great man, but he was full of pride. He wanted personal attention from the prophet; a mere messenger wouldn't do. He also said, "What's so special about the Jordan? We have bigger, better and clearer rivers in Damascus. Why should I wash myself in these greenish, insignificant waters? I won't lower myself to do it." It reminds me of the Grade 1 classroom in which the teacher said, "When you need to go to the bathroom, raise your hand." A boy asked, "How will that help?" Well, that was Naaman's attitude. "How will washing in this Jordan help me?"

Those of us who have travelled in the Middle East know that the Jordan is not a great river, at least by North American standards. I stood in the Jordan with others on my tour group as we did a rebaptism ceremony. Its waters are not clear, but full of silt. It's not terribly wide and maybe 10-12 feet deep in the springtime. Reeds grow high along the banks. But it's very important. For the Jordan does flow throughout the year, bringing needed water to a dry land. It is fed from springs up north on snow-capped Mount Hermon, and its waters eventually flow south into the Dead Sea.

Naaman considered the Jordan less than impressive. And in his pride he turned away from the waters that could heal him. But his servants said, "Master, if the prophet had given you something hard to do you would have done it. But all he said to you was 'wash and be clean.' You're right here; so you might as well try it." The servants' wise words overcame Naaman's pride. "He went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean." Naaman acknowledged the Lord God of Israel as the only true God. He took some mud from the Jordan back to Aram as a constant reminder of where his healing had come from.

We live a long way from the actual Jordan River. But Jesus Christ is our healing Jordan. Perhaps to some he may seem insignificant or unattractive. Some may desire a Saviour who did not have to shed blood for our sins. Some may prefer One who boosts our self-esteem rather than One who breaks our hard hearts by suffering love. Some may prefer a Lord who doesn't demand that that we take up a cross and follow. But please don't turn from him. Instead, turn towards him in trusting faith. For Jesus Christ is the source of God's healing love and mercy. He

is the fountainhead of grace and forgiveness. He is the only begotten Son whom God gave to save us from the curse of sin and death. Though he was in the form of God Jesus humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. But he was raised by God from the dead to be the ever-living Saviour. What makes the waters of the Jordan special today is that Jesus himself was baptized in them, as a foreshadowing of his own death and resurrection. Jesus Christ is the One who makes us clean before Holy God now and forever. He is the one who takes us off the train heading for perdition and puts us on the train heading for the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ is our healing Jordan.

Even today it is only pride that prevents people from embracing God's gift for our healing and deliverance. It is only pride that prevents us from trusting God's cure for our deadly disease. It is only pride that prevents us from looking into the face of the crucified and crying, "Lord, have mercy on me." But God's word moves you to put away your pride and self-sufficiency. The Holy Spirit turns you toward Christ in faith. And by faith in the Saviour you immerse yourself in God's healing grace. We can immerse ourselves in Christ seven times or seventy-times seven, every day, for his love and mercy never run dry. In him you and I have become a new creation, ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven. His saving, healing power is sufficient for you and for me and for the whole world. One day Christ will return as judge and make all things new. All disease and brokenness will be put away at last. And Christ will take home all of us who have received him by faith. "He went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean." Jesus Christ is our healing Jordan.

Now Christ's healing power comes to us in various ways, unpredictable for sure. But whoever immerses themselves in him by faith receives divine healing in some way.

I told this story in the summer, but some of you may not have heard it. An email came to me from a Christian man who attended here for a while, though he now worships at another church. But he enjoyed his time with us and thanked us for the worship and hospitality. He wrote:

"I had an incredible experience during Easter. I have artificial limbs on both legs below my knees. I took communion on Palm Sunday and started to feel different, like the Holy Spirit was doing something. I normally walk 2 kilometres a day with the artificial limbs, but suddenly started walking further. During that week, I walked 15 kilometres per day. On Easter Sunday I walked 29 kilometres. I thought that no one might believe me, but the app on my phone tracked all my steps! So I've joined the "Walk So Kids Can Talk" marathon on the weekend, and my whole team at work joined as well. We've raised a lot so far, and I'm thrilled, as kids are so precious. So it was quite the Passion Week, and amazing things happened, all because of Jesus."

Here's a story told by Tony Campolo, the teacher, evangelist and author. Tony was preaching at a particular church. As he ended the service he said that if anyone wanted to remain behind for healing, he would be glad to pray for them in Jesus' name, even though he is not a TV miracle worker. Thirty people stayed for prayer. Most did not have a physical problem. One man needed healing for an addiction to pornography. One woman wanted healing for her marriage. Another asked for healing for anger.

A month later a woman phoned him and said, “Tony, on that Sunday you prayed for my husband. He had cancer.” Tony asked, “Do you mean that he is cancer-free now?” She said, “No, he died.” Tony thought—a lot of good I did! But then she said, “When my husband and I walked into church on that Sunday, he was angry with God. He knew he was going to die soon, and he hated God for letting it happen. At night he would lie in bed and curse God. And the angrier he got toward God, the meaner he was to everyone around him. It was unbearable. But you laid hands on him and prayed for him. When he left the church I knew something was different. The last few weeks of his life were the best days we’ve ever had together. We talked and laughed. We even sang hymns with each other. It was wonderful.” She paused, “Tony, he wasn’t cured, but he was healed.”

Jesus Christ is our healing Jordan. And the church’s role is to be like that servant girl or the servants of Naaman. We tell people where God’s healing waters are found. We invite people to immerse themselves in Christ by faith. “Come on in, don’t delay; the water is wonderful.”