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KEEP IT SIMPLE

There is something in our nature that regularly seems to want to make life more complicated than it is.

- My brother would say that becoming more civilized means finding more difficult ways to do things:
  - when our children are very young, they eat with their fingers;
  - then we teach them to hold a fork or a spoon;
  - and then we insist that they hold it “the right way.”
    - It gets increasingly complicated.

In the Old Testament, GOD said to the children of Israel, “I will be your GOD and you will be MY people.”

- Pretty simple, right?
- But then GOD’S people started making rules about how that has to happen,
  - and who will and won’t be included, and on what basis.
- Often the things that GOD make simple, we want to complicate.
  - An example of that can be seen in today’s first reading.

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Naaman was the commander of the army of the nation of Aram.

- He fought and won many battles and was greatly feared and honored.
  - But he was also a leper.

Now, a girl from Israel had been captured by the Aramean army and placed in service to Naaman’s wife.

- This girl told her to have her husband go talk to the prophet Elisha and his leprosy would be taken care of.

When Naaman did, Elisha doesn’t even come out to meet him.

- That’s a terrible way to treat someone of this importance.
  - But he did send a message for Naaman to go wash in the Jordan River seven times and he would be healed.
- “That’s it?” Naaman said. “Washing? No great miracle? No incantations and prayers? And the Jordan? That’s such a piddly little river compared to others. Forget it!”

Fortunately, Naaman had surrounded himself with good advisors who helped him see the big picture.

- “Is how this is going to be accomplished more important than the healing itself?” they asked. When Naaman did finally swallow his pride and expectations and followed the prophet’s instructions, the healing GOD promised happened.
  - And it went much deeper than just his skin.
  - GOD healed Naaman, not only of leprosy, but also of his pride and sense of self-importance.
    - And GOD gave Naaman the gift of faith.
      - “Now, I know that there is no GOD in all the world except in Israel,” Naaman declared.
    - Naaman learned that, when it comes to GOD and healing, keep it simple.

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Often, it is through the door of humility that we find GOD’S greatest gifts waiting for us

- The gospel story today reflects what can happen when we approach GOD in humility.

Most of us are familiar with the healing of the ten lepers.

- Ten men, lepers, must keep a distance because in that day, leprosy was somewhat contagious if you made physical contact with it.
  - So, lepers would have to stay at a distance from people, including family and friends,
    - and when someone came near, they were required by law to shout, "Danger! Unclean! Leper! Keep away!"
      - How would you like having to call out what's wrong with you anytime anyone comes near?
  - But when JESUS comes by, in their humility they cry out, "JESUS, MASTER, have mercy on us!"

Humility.

How they had been humbled.

- Even to the point that this was a mixed group: Jews and Samaritans.
- Their common malady had broken down the racial and religious barriers that normally kept Jews from having anything to do with those half-breed Samaritans.
  - Lepers had to live outside the city.
  - They had to avoid the regular community.
    - So, they formed one of their own, not based on race or religion, but on their common medical condition, that allowed them to have physical contact with each other, though no one else.
      - "MASTER, have mercy on us!"

JESUS sends them to the priest to be examined.

- Again, religious law that determined who was clean and who was not, required that the priest certify them as healed before they could rejoin the community.
  - But JESUS is assuring them that there is nothing they have to do to be cleansed.
    - GOD will take care of it.
    - It's that simple.
  - Just go to the priest, and on their way, they are healed.

One returns: a Samaritan, a foreigner.

- Only he humbles himself and returns to JESUS to give thanks to GOD.
- Ten were cleansed, but only one returned.
  - But because he did, because he believed that GOD through JESUS CHRIST had healed him, he received what the other nine did not.
  - His humility before GOD opens the door to spiritual healing, as well.
    - "Your faith has made you well."
      - The Greek word that we translate as "healed" can also be translated "saved."
      - "Your faith has saved you."
    - Not only was the Samaritan leper cleansed, healed, but he was also saved by the power of faith.

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It really is that simple, but many today want to make it more complicated.

- "You have to do this..." or "You have to do that..."
- "What must I do to be healed, LORD?"
- "What must I do to be saved?"
- The answer is nothing.
- It has already been done for you.
  - Simply believe that GOD has already healed you, saved you.

In baptism, like Naaman in the river, GOD washes us clean.

- But the cleansing is more than skin-deep.

The lepers, because of their disease, were outcasts and isolated.

- Sin, too, is a disease.

Yet, to those who humble themselves before GOD and call out, “MASTER, have mercy on me,” there is healing,

- healing for everyone who believes.
  - Nothing more.

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Some churches will tell you that you GOD will bless you only if you do the right thing:

- say the right prayers;
- give the right amount of money;
- hang out with the right people;
- live the right kind of life.

Today’s gospel, as well as many other parts of scripture tell us something different

- Certainly, if it had just been Samaritans and Arameans that got leprosy, that would make sense and be easy to explain.
  - They’re not GOD’S chosen people.
  - GOD can’t/won’t love them as much as the Jews.
    - But GOD healed Naaman and the Samaritan simply because of faith,
      - even though others did not approve of them.

Some will say that GOD loves and blesses only certain people—those who earn GOD’S favor and love by the things they do.

- JESUS says, “Your faith has made you well, has saved you.”
  - Faith alone.

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How wonderful it is to know this healing.

How wonderful it is to be assured of salvation.

How wonderful it is to be able to give thanks.

How wonderful it is to have relationships restored and to be sent on one’s way cleansed, forgiven, saved,

- and with good news to share.
  - All because of faith.

Don’t make it complicated.

- Keep it simple.
  - It should be simple, because that’s what GOD intended.
- All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of GOD,
  - but we are justified (found not guilty of sin),
  - we are healed, saved by grace (a free gift from GOD),
  - received in one simple way, by faith alone.
    - Christians, know that, live in that, and keep it simple.