

Don't Worry – It's Easy
18th Sunday after Pentecost
October 13, 2019
Trinity Bixby
Rev. Lucus Levy Keppel

[Luke 17:11-19](#) (GNT)
[II Kings 5: 1-16a](#) (CEB)

A few years ago – right after we first visited with the Pastoral Nominating Committee here at Trinity Bixby, as it happens – I had a medical experience I'm glad hasn't happened since. That particular day, I started to feel very dizzy. I'd take a step, and the whole room would seem to spin around me – even just moving my head slightly caused me to lurch in that direction. Fortunately, Elana was home – since I certainly wasn't going to try to drive while being that out of it – and she drove me to the doctor. At the time, we were living in a small village in New Mexico, and our nearest medical provider was a clinic about 45 minutes away by car – while the nearest hospital was another 45 minutes beyond that. Unless it was Wednesday – on Wednesday, a Nurse Practitioner came to town to handle any medical things that could be scheduled. (Sadly, any time I got sick, it never was on a Wednesday. Sometimes, things work out like that.)

In any case, the nearer clinic was closed, so we ended up having to drive 90 minutes to Albuquerque. There, we were able to see a doctor relatively quickly, and I found out that I was experiencing vertigo, as a symptom of labyrinthitis. We got a prescription for something that was supposed to help with the vertigo and headed were headed back to the car, when Elana noticed what the prescription was for. Meclizine – a drug name that I'd never heard before – but which is the main active ingredient in Dramamine, a motion-sickness drug, which Elana had had in her purse the whole time. If we had but known, we could have saved a long trip and waited for Wednesday. "Don't worry, next time will be easy," Elana said to me. There hasn't been a "next time," fortunately, but that phrase stuck with me – "Don't worry – It'll be easy."

And in our story from II Kings today, it's the phrase that lies beneath some of the humor of the story. Naaman, a general of Aram, is worried about his skin condition. A Hebrew slave tells him, essentially, "Don't worry – it's easy! There's a prophet in Samaria that can help." So, does he go to Samaria? Nope. He makes it harder on himself, going to Damascus and asking his king for help. The King of Aram decides that it's worth it to help Naaman, and sends a letter along with an incredible amount of wealth – about 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and of course – ten changes of clothes. The metals alone were worth about \$15 million,¹ in terms of average daily wage. The king of Israel receives the Aramean' king's note, and panics. Here's \$15 million – now, cure my general of his skin disease. Don't worry – it's easy money!

But the king of Israel? He worries himself into a panic, and tears his clothing in two – an ancient sign of anguish. "Who does the King of Aram think I am? God?! I can't cure skin conditions!" But, Elisha the Prophet hears that the King is worried, and sends a message – "Don't worry – it's easy! Just send him to me."

So, General Naaman packs up the silver and gold (and, hopefully, leaves a set of clothing to the King, who ripped his), and heads over to Elisha's place. Naaman's travelling with an entourage, who probably are hoping to see some amazing miraculous cure – with lots of smoke and chanting, maybe even flashes of lightning. After all, this Elisha is said to have taken the mantle of the prophet Elijah, who called down fire from the heavens! But when Naaman arrives, Elisha sends him a tweet – well, at least the ancient equivalent – saying, "Yo, Naaman – go wash in the Jordan 7 times. Don't worry, it's easy!"

But, Naaman, expecting a major deal to be made – after all, for 15 million bucks, he should get a show! – gets angry that Elisha won't meet with him directly. "What in the world? I have rivers back in Aram. Beautiful rivers, much nicer than this Jordan river. Does Elisha think I've never taken a bath! How dare he! Come meet me face to face!" But of course, Elisha doesn't come out. Perhaps Elisha's

¹ 6000 shekels of gold = 36,000 shekels of silver, plus 30,000 shekels of silver = 66,000 shekels
66,000 x 4 (a quarter shekel/day was minimum wage) x 8 hours x \$7.25/hour gives \$15.312 million!

making a point about humility – “You came to me asking for a favor – so listen when I tell you to do something! Also, there’s maybe something special about this land of Israel and the Jordan river.” Naaman is about to give everything up and walk off in a huff, when his servants say, “Don’t worry, Naaman – you’d’ve done whatever Elisha said if it were hard, right? So, it’s easy – that’s nothing to get upset over! At least try it!”

And this is the crux of this story – Naaman listens. This bigshot general from Aram heads off to the Jordan, probably grumbling the whole way, where he dunks himself in the river seven times, and is cured. He tries to give the money to Elisha, who refuses to take it, and so Naaman decides to worship God, the God of Israel – but the rest of the story is for another time.

The goal that Naaman has been chasing – being restored to health – was easily solved. All it took was listening – to slaves, to kings, and to prophets. I suspect that this is part of why Naaman was a successful general – he knew how to listen, enough to cool his ego when it was needed. And don’t worry – it’s easy to follow in Naaman’s footsteps. Just listen, really listen, to what God is telling you, whether it’s through the encouragement of friends or family, through prayer and meditation, or through hearing the scriptures come alive with the Word of God.

But what about *after* you listen to God, and follow in God’s Way? What’s next? That’s where the story of Jesus and the ten lepers is quite helpful. We’ve moved about 800 years into the future with this story, and things have changed in the world in lots of ways, what with the various empires (from Assyria to Babylon to Macedon to Rome) occupying the land that had been Aram and Israel – but there are still people with skin conditions. Luke tells us that when Jesus was travelling the border between Samaria and Galilee, he found not one man with a skin condition – and also \$15 million in gold and silver – but ten poor outcasts, who approached the travelling prophet.

Now, an aside – often, these men (and Naaman, for that matter) are described as having leprosy – but that’s something of a misnomer today. The disease we know as leprosy, technically called Hansen’s Disease, is caused by

bacteria in the skin. Because of that, we can track its spread in the historical record, and surprisingly, can find no sign of it in the middle east until six centuries after Christ! But, when the first English translations of the Bible were being made, leprosy had become a major European disease, and so the translators seem to have used a skin disease that people were familiar with as a catch-all term for skin conditions in general. In Leviticus, the Bible describes various skin conditions that would cause you to shout “unclean, unclean!” as the men do in our story from Luke – and most of them are diseases that cause spots or scales, rather than necrotic flesh.

Still, these men were separated from their communities – and Jesus healed them, restoring them to clean skin and to fellowship. Jesus almost always acts in ways that heal more than the body – restoring people to wholeness of spirit, of community, as much as body. Jesus sends the men to their priests because it was the priests that could declare them “clean” and have them re-enter society. Don’t worry, it’s easy! By the time you get to the priest, you’ll be healed.

One man turns back to Jesus, after being healed, and says thank you. To be fair, Jesus told them to go to the priests, and they’re listening, doing what they were told. The one man, though – he’s got to be thinking, “This is easy! And you know what else would be easy? Saying thank you.” His thanks are genuine, and are directly delaying his connection to his family and friends – but still so important to him to offer thanks and praise, first to God, and then to Jesus. He’s listened to Jesus, been restored to health through following Jesus’ instructions, and he offers thanks to God and Jesus for all that’s been done.

That’s the pattern we ought to follow – and don’t worry, it’s easy! Listen for God’s word. Follow God’s call to change, even if it seems too easy. Offer thanks and praise to God for all that God has done.

Now, in the name of God who calls you a beloved child, may you be blessed with healing. In the name of Jesus, who restores us to health and right relationship, may you be blessed with fellowship. In the name of the Spirit, who fills us with peace, love, and understanding, may you be blessed with an abundance to share.