

*Look At Who Has Something To Give*  
by Rev. Durrell Watkins  
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#### THE PROCLAIMED WORD

I went to Barnes & Noble the other day and asked the clerk where the Self-Help section was. She said, "If I told you, it would defeat the purpose."<sup>1</sup> Our readings today tell about people who needed some help, and who found people to be a bit more helpful than my bookstore clerk.

The story we heard this morning from the book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings is one of those signature tales of our faith tradition. It is a key story not just because it mentions one of the great prophets, Elisha and not simply because it affirms the possibility of divine healing, but because it demonstrates the sacred possibilities that exist in unlikely places. It is important to us because it shows that systems that are built on excluding or demonizing others is absolutely contrary to how things ought to be.

If God has a preferential option, it is for those who have been excluded, marginalized, left out, demonized, or unfairly vilified. The Universal Love that we call God includes everyone, leaves no one out, and our sacred stories repeatedly use the people society has left out to make that point. The unlikely heroes are the people of God, pointing to the all-inclusive, life-giving love of God. And the story of Naaman and Elisha is one more such story.

In the story, we see a Syrian general, Naaman. A general...the highest military rank. This is a person of influence. This is a person of power. This is a person of privilege. This is a person highly regarded in his society. He has a title, he has a position, he has authority, he probably has some financial resources. He is a powerful person, and we know how he has used his power...over others for his own personal gain and for the advancement of his nation. How do we know this? Because we read in verse 2 that Naaman's army had raided the northern territory of Israel and in that raid it had taken captives. One of those captives was a young girl who is now serving Naaman's wife as a slave. Naaman has power, and he has used his power to keep others disempowered.

We aren't picking on Naaman; he's a product of his culture and his time. Wars and conquests and domination were part of political reality in antiquity...thank goodness we've evolved past that today (!). Equality wasn't even on Naaman's radar...he was in the position of power, so he enjoyed it. Had he been on the opposite side of the equation, he would have resented it and maybe plotted to gain power for himself and his people...not power with all others, but power over others, perhaps the ones who had lorded power over him. Such tit for tat, king of the mountain thinking was the way of the world. But the scriptures consistently hint that there may be a better way than the way of the world...there is the world that is, but there is also the world that could be...and we are constantly challenged to transform the former into the latter...into a world of justice and peace and equality and goodwill.

So Naaman is part of the power structure that wages wars and takes prisoners and enslaves the losers. In the world of conflict and struggles for which few people get to have all the power and resources, Naaman is powerful. But in God's world, look who has power: <sup>2</sup>*Naaman's wife had a servant who had been captured from Israel*. <sup>3</sup>*She said to her mistress, "If my master would visit the prophet in Samaria he would be healed."*

The one society has judged to be least, lowly, insignificant...the one the power structure has tried to rob of her humanity, THAT IS THE ONE who knows who she is. Dis-ease can't keep her from knowing her truth. Discord can't keep her from knowing her truth. War, famine, injustice, crime, pain, loss...these conditions are not her truth. They may be her experience, but they are not her TRUTH. And she knows her truth, and she has an inner strength, an inner power that war or slavery or social stratification cannot take away. She has spirit. She has hope. She has dignity. She has the knowledge of her own sacred value, and though others might say she is poor or

powerless, she is actually the one in this story who has something to give...and P.S., she's WILLING to give it!

Will she be repaid for her kindness? Probably not! Will she be given freedom? Will she be reunited with her family? Will she be offered money or prestige or a high ranking position? There is no guarantee of that, in fact, it is unlikely and apparently that isn't why she does it anyway. She gives because she knows she has something to give. And just as the Syrian army can't take away her pride or her dignity or her hope, the Syrian army also can't give her a sense of empowerment, accomplishment, or self-worth. They can't give it, and they can't take it away; so since the Source of her power, the Source of her supply, the Source of her fulfillment is unlimited and she is part of It and It is part of her, she has something that no one else can give and no one in the world can take away. And when you have that kind of power, that kind of wealth, that kind of insight...you gladly share it.

She participates in the circulation of divine blessings because she knows she has it to share and the more she shares the more she'll have. No one can take it from her, and she can't even give it all away. She is giving from the deep well of her own spirit, and she knows that will never run dry. This servant, this captive says, "If you would visit a prophet in Samaria, in Israel, the land you have already defeated, you might get some help." She doesn't have the power to conquer nations, but she has the power to help a person in need, whoever he or she might be, and she gives it. She doesn't have political power but she has divine power. She is the one with that kind of power to share: the unnamed girl, the servant, the captive, the child of God.

Of course, Naaman gives it a try, and from his sense of entitlement and privilege is outraged that Elisha doesn't pay him enough attention. Who does this crazy prophet think he is? And what the prophet tells him to do is crazy too! There are beautiful, clear streams in Damascus in which to bathe, why would one splash around in some muddy river? But again, to the world's view... Damascus has cleaner water. But in God's view, that which is judged to be unclean is often the thing that is blessed. And Naaman takes a swim in a nasty river, a river he found repulsive, and in his willingness to enter into that which he had previously judged to be dirty, he himself was cleansed, and healed, and made whole.

When Naaman confronts his prejudice, when he confronts his arrogance, when he confronts his judgments and lays them aside (if only for a moment), then he is renewed and then he experiences a miracle. There is a lesson in that for us, I believe. We become our best selves when we get over ourselves. When we see the other as our neighbor, as our sister, as our brother, then we see ourselves more clearly and we become more of what we are meant to be...reflections of the divine image and likeness.

Naaman could have ignored the loving and wise council of a slave-girl. Naaman could have ignored the healing instruction of a crazy prophet in the land of his enemies. And Naaman could have remained unchanged. But the ones he would have thought to be beneath him actually were children of God, filled with gifts of God, and they were willing to share those gifts. And Naaman, in a miraculous moment, was willing to recognize and receive those gifts. That was Naaman's miracle...an effect of that miracle is that his physical condition improved as well.

In Jesus' day, lepers were untouchable, but we see him loving lepers into wholeness today. In Jesus' day, Samaritans were the Other...vilified, the victims of unfair prejudice. And Jesus sees them as children of God, and he affirms their sacred value. He rises above the finger pointing, wrist slapping, name calling prejudices of his day, and Samaritan lepers are healed. Jesus gave, and people who probably thought of him as their enemy, received his gift of healing. One was even grateful and in expressing his gratitude achieved wholeness...more than physical improvement, the one that received the gift and then gave his own gift of gratitude, that is the one who got more than physically better...he became whole...body, mind, and spirit...brought into right relationship with the god of his understanding and with his neighbor, including the neighbor he would have earlier thought of as an enemy.

Thank God that Israelite slave-girl gave what she had.  
Thank God the prophet Elisha gave what he had.  
Thank God Jesus gave what he had.  
Thank God the one grateful leper returned to give what he had.  
When we know we have something to give, and when we gladly give it, we can change the world.  
We may change it only one life at a time, but that's the fun way...because that's how we can see  
that our efforts are paying off. We are children of God and we have something to give to this  
world. And as we give, we become miracle workers. This is the good news. Amen.

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#### THE AFFIRMING WORD

I have gifts to share!  
I have sacred value.  
I have hope.  
I have love.  
I have spirit.  
I am blessed...  
And I am a blessing to my world.  
And so it is.

#### THE FINAL WORD

We receive the "noisy" offering.