

JOINT ELCA OUTDOOR WORSHIP

July 3, 2016

II Kings 5:1-14

"Everyday Miracles"

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In our Old Testament text today we hear the story of the miraculous healing of the general, Naaman. Naaman is a powerful leader in the Syrian army. He's no doubt tall and muscular – used to giving orders and getting his way.

But now he has a slight problem. You see, lately he's noticed some dry, flaky areas of skin. At first he hopes it's just **armor rash**, but after several weeks it becomes clear that this problem isn't just going away. He has leprosy!

And in that time and place, leprosy was almost the same as a death sentence.

But Naaman's wife has a young servant girl who tells her mistress that **there's a Man of God in Israel who could cure Naaman.**

And so Naaman goes to his king and receives a letter to take to the king of Israel requesting a cure.

The prophet Elisha hears about it and tells the king to send Naaman to him.

Now picture the next scene. Let's describe it in modern terms.

The powerful and rich celebrity, Naaman, shows up at Elisha's clinic with **a string of stretch limos** and his **entourage of bodyguards**. He's sure that his status and the expensive gifts he brings will insure preferential treatment from the miracle-worker, Elisha.

Naaman is looking for some act of stunning magic, or perhaps a sign from heaven. Imagine his surprise, and yes, his outrage, when this prophet doesn't even bother to come out to see him.

Instead, he sends a message: *"Wash in the Jordan river seven times"*, which sounds like the equivalent of: *"Take two aspirin, drink lots of fluids, and you'll be cured."*

"What kind of baloney is this", Naaman roars. "You call this a man of God – a miracle worker? Who ever heard of such nonsense; 'wash in the Jordan river.' Why, it's nothing but a muddy, filthy brook. The rivers back home are a hundred times cleaner, and probably more effective."

I guess it'd be like **someone from Excelsior, on beautiful Lake Minnetonka, being told to wash in Lake Alice!**

You see, Naaman CAN'T IMAGINE A MIRACLE TAKING PLACE THROUGH SUCH COMMON, ORDINARY METHODS. It must be a joke.

Well, we know how the story turns out. Fortunately for Naaman, his servants manage to calm him down and convince him to follow the prophet's directions. As a result, Naaman is cured.

The miracle of Naaman's healing comes through **plain water**, and **simple actions**. And that's how so many of God's miracles take place.

Simple everyday miracles are happening all around us. Do you see them? Do you truly see God's gracious, miraculous gifts to you?

Or have you become so **jaded and complacent** about everyday miracles that, unless the heavens open and trumpets sound, you **just take everything for granted?**

I remember an experience our **daughter Emma had while serving in the Peace Corps in Mozambique.**

She had traveled 2 1/2 hours to a bigger city in order to withdraw some money for her living expenses.

After waiting in line for 30 minutes at one bank, everyone was told that the ATM was out of money, so she walked several miles to another bank in sweltering heat, waited in line again for about 45 minutes, and this time, the **ATM ate her card** when the **power went out!**

She returned home very discouraged and frustrated, but **when she shared her tale of woe with her Mozambican neighbors**, they all just sort of **shrugged their shoulders.**

And **then it dawned on her:** in much of the world, the **out-of-the-ordinary event** is not **when the ATM eats your bank card**, it's **when the transaction goes smoothly.**

That's cause for amazement! ...A little miracle!

We who live in America are so spoiled by our modern society that we fail to see just how amazing many things are that we take for granted.

Emma once said to me,

*"Dad. Don't ever complain again when the tap water in Fergus smells from algae. You have **no idea** how lucky you are to have clean, safe drinking water just by turning on a faucet."*

And, of course, she's right. People in most of the world have to **walk to fetch water every day, sometimes several miles.**

By the way, one time Emma decided to try to carry one of the full water containers on her head, African-style. **"Bad idea,"** was all she would tell us later about that experiment!

But my point is: we are **surrounded by miracles every day.**

Yet you and I have become so spoiled by luxury and convenience that **we don't see the miracles in the mundane.** And we don't see other miracles our God does for us, either.

Naaman expected a flashy miracle. But God chose to use a simple, everyday event to bring about healing and new life. And that's what he does for us, too.

Every morning when I wake up, the **gift of life itself is a miracle.**

The fact that I can **smell and taste the coffee** shows **how wonderfully we humans are made**.

Whenever we recover from a cold – after **one week if we take medication**, or **seven days if we don't** – it's because of the **body's miraculous ability to heal itself**.

- The **beauty of a sunrise or a sunset**.
- The **millions of stars in the night sky**.
- The **birth of a baby**.
- A **marriage that survives through stormy times**.

These are all **miracles of God's grace**, aren't they? You've all experienced these miracles, and yet you probably just take them for granted.

As the **poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning** puts it,

"Earth is crammed with heaven, And every common bush afire with God; But only he who sees, takes off his shoes - The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries."

Earth is, indeed, crammed with heaven - with the **presence and activity of our loving God**. If we can perceive it, we may look around us with awe, gratitude, and wonder.

Otherwise, we're simply **sitting around plucking blackberries**; going through the motions of life – **missing out on the glories of God's creation** and his **ongoing creative and sustaining power**.

It's a beautiful thing when a person **does** appreciate one of God's miracles.

I'll never forget the experience 6 or 7 years ago when Zane Kollman was born! As soon as I got off the elevator at the Hospital, his big sisters, Miranda, Brooke, and Brittany ran to greet me and **tell me all about their new baby brother**. They were so excited!

I wish you could have seen the beautiful smiles on their faces. They **knew their family had just received a marvelous blessing** – a **miracle from their loving God**.

Naaman was healed through washing in plain, ordinary water. And that's exactly how we first experience one of God's greatest miracles.

You see, God in Christ has **chosen to heal you and me**. God has chosen to heal us from the disease of sin and he does it through **washing us with plain, ordinary tap water**.

We'd probably prefer something flashier.

We'd like a mountaintop conversion experience that we could retell again and again whenever such stories are being shared.

But God, like his servant Elisha, knows that most of the time it's not about show. It's not about fireworks.

IT'S JUST ABOUT THE POWER OF GOD, which is so very often HIDDEN WITHIN THE ORDINARY:
hidden in a stable ... hidden on a cross.

In the ordinary water of the font, God *"forgives sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives everlasting salvation to all who believe what he has promised"*, as Martin Luther teaches in the small catechism.

Naaman sniffs at the very thought of being cured by filthy Jordan river water: *"Are not the rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel?"*

His complaint sounds a lot like the way our doubting, sinful hearts view baptism: *"How can ordinary water do such great things?"* we ask.

Friends, **I can't make you see the miracle. I can't make you believe it.**

But I can tell you that God's word proclaims – and the church down through the centuries has taught – that plain, ordinary water; combined with God's word, does bring about the miracle of forgiveness and salvation.

It RESCUES US FROM DEATH, and

It GIVES US NEW LIFE.

And that's a miracle each of us shares.

And now, this morning, GOD IS ABOUT TO DO ANOTHER MIRACLE, RIGHT IN FRONT OF OUR EYES!

In the wafer and the wine, God the Son will come to us once again, **bringing healing, and bringing renewal of the gifts of baptism:**

- FORGIVENESS,
- SALVATION, and
- ETERNAL LIFE.

It makes no difference if we came here today on foot, in a stretch Limo, or in a horse-drawn chariot.

It doesn't matter if we're **wearing a suit and tie, blue jeans, shorts, or a suit of armor.** God offers the miracle to all of us, **without distinction.**

But unless we **surrender our cynical, skeptical vision,** and unless **God gives us eyes to see;** we won't notice that *"Earth's crammed with heaven, And every common bush is afire with God."* Instead, we'll **simply be sitting around plucking blackberries.**

What a shame!

What a waste of God's miracle!

But if God does open our eyes, then we'll see the miracle hidden in the ordinary. We'll see Christ himself in the bread and wine. And in our brothers and sisters gathered here.

May God grant us eyes to see the miracles that are going on in our world **every day of our lives.**

May God open our eyes to see THE HEALING MIRACLE IN THE WATER OF BAPTISM, and IN THE BREAD AND WINE OF COMMUNION.

Here at Christ's table we receive A NEW LEASE ON LIFE!

May God empower us to use it. AMEN.