

Ordinary People Help The Needy! 2 Kings 5:1-14

Today, I want to begin a short series of sermons on ordinary people – people like you and me – people who are often overlooked in our society due to our society’s fascination with those that it considers extraordinary. Whether it’s athletes, actors, generals, or politicians, our culture is captivated by the lives of the rich and famous. And the story before us shows a similar sort of captivation. After all, it’s the story of a rich, powerful, and successful general named Naaman, and it includes other actors that are equally extraordinary such as the king of Israel, the king of Judah, and a prophet named Elisha who was famous for performing a whole host of marvelous miracles. But tucked away in the story are a handful of very ordinary people like you and me, and it was their work that made this story worthy of our remembrance; for without them, there would have been no healing miracle and no story worthy of our recollection!

The story begins with these words: “Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram (Syria), was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy.” (2 Ki. 5:1) From these words we see just how extraordinary Naaman really was. He was commander of the Syrian Army, something like the Chairman of our own Joint Chiefs of Staff. He was a great man and in high favor with his king because he had led Syria’s armies to many a great victory. Indeed, he was, in every respect, a mighty warrior worthy of admiration and praise! And quite likely, he was rich as well as powerful because of his extraordinary service, his remarkable record, and his position of friendship with his king.

But despite all this, Naaman had a problem. He suffered with leprosy, a serious skin condition that caused him great pain and much misery. And so this great and powerful man wanted to be well and probably sought healing from the very best and the very brightest of the physicians of his day – all to no effect. His condition continued and probably grew worse with time.

Enter the first of our ordinary people – a little girl in Naaman’s household. Second Kings 5:2-3 says, “Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman’s wife. She said to her mistress, ‘If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.’” Now this little girl was utterly insignificant. She was as small as Naaman was great. She was from a foreign country – foreign at least to Syria. She was young and inexperienced. She was female in a patriarchal society. She was a slave in Naaman’s household. She was just part of his property. She was so insignificant that we’re not even given her name. She was utterly and absolutely ordinary.

And yet, this little girl knew all about the prophet Elisha, about his many miracles, and about his healing power. And so, she said, “If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.” (2 Ki. 5:3) Do you see what she did? She shared what she had, just a little bit of knowledge, and that knowledge was the key that opened wide the door to Naaman’s miraculous healing. Her action raises this question:

What knowledge do you have, that if shared, might make a difference in the lives of the needy? Now that's something to think about, don't you think?

Enter the next ordinary person in our story. That person is Naaman's wife. You might think at first that she's one of the extraordinary people in this tale, but really, she's not. Like the little servant girl, she's a woman in a patriarchal society and, though married to a great man, her role in that society was really rather limited. She, too, was part of Naaman's property, and though he may have loved her, she certainly didn't have the rights and privileges that he had as a man and a military leader. As a sign of her insignificance, like the little servant girl we just met, her name is not mentioned and is nowhere now known. And yet, she did what she could to bring healing to her husband.

Doubtless she had tried her best to comfort and console him in his sickness and his suffering, and when that failed, she carried the little maiden's message to him so he could act upon it. It was such a simple task – passing a message – that it isn't even explicitly mentioned in our text – it's only implied. But the miracle would never have happened had she not passed the maiden's message to her sick and suffering husband. And her action raises this question: What simple task could you perform that would make a difference in the lives of the needy? Now that's something to think about, don't you think?

Well our story continues with Naaman acting on his servant's advice and his wife's message. Second Kings 5:4 says, "Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said (and, by implication, the message his wife had passed to him). And the king of Aram said, 'Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel.'" And so Naaman went to Israel, armed with a letter from his king and vast riches in gold, garments, and silver with which to purchase his healing. Once in Israel, word of his presence and his purpose traveled by grapevine to the prophet Elisha who sent for him saying, "Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel." (2 Ki. 5:8) Once again, we see the work of an ordinary messenger carrying this message from Elisha to Naaman and thereby ushering Naaman forward on his pathway to a cure.

Well Naaman acted on the messenger's message and when he reached Elisha's house, Elisha sent another messenger to Naaman saying, "'Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean.' But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, 'I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?' (So) He turned and went away in a rage." (2 Ki. 5:10-12)

And the story would have ended there, and Naaman would have lived out his days in leprous misery and been forgotten, had not his servants intervened. Once more we see several unnamed and ordinary individuals making all the difference in the world, this time by giving wise counsel and sage advice. Second Kings 5:13-14 says, "(Naaman's) servants approached and said to him, 'Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you

was, 'Wash, and be clean'?' So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean." Their actions, the actions of these ordinary people, raise this question for our consideration: What counsel or advice could we give to help the needy? Once again, that's something to think about, don't you think?

You see, all through this story, it's the actions of unnamed and ordinary people that drive the story forward to its successful end. And as I think about my own life, I realize that it was often the actions of unnamed, unknown, ordinary people operating behind the scenes that made all the difference in my world and put me on the road to where I am today. Let me give you just one small illustration of this truth.

As most of you know, I wasn't raised in the faith. I came to Christ in the summer between my freshman and sophomore years of college. At that time, I was unemployed and didn't have enough money to return to school. Nevertheless, I wanted to attend a small Christian college near my home so I called and spoke with someone at that college, someone whose name I never knew and cannot now recall, and asked for his advice. He told me to write a letter to the trustees of that college asking for their assistance. I followed his advice and sent a letter to the college board of trustees asking for their help. I did not know their names. I do not know them now. But they met in session and voted to award me a full tuition scholarship that paid my way through their college and set me on the course that led me to this pulpit in this place, today! You see, ordinary people – unknown and unnamed – changed my life forever!

I suspect if you searched your own memory you would discover a host of ordinary people – many unnamed and unknown – who helped you in your times of need. Wouldn't you like to be one of them, too? Wouldn't you like to be an ordinary person doing ordinary things that help the needy – sharing knowledge, giving counsel, performing simple tasks that make a world of difference – spiritually and otherwise – in the lives of those so served? Well, wouldn't you? Singer and songwriter Ray Boltz sings a song that just about says it all. He says,

I dreamed I went to heaven
And you were there with me
We walked upon the streets of gold
Beside the crystal sea
We heard the angels singing
Then someone called your name
You turned and saw this young man
And he was smiling as he came
And he said friend you may not know me now
And then he said but wait
You used to teach my Sunday School
When I was only eight
And every week you would say a prayer

Before the class would start
And one day when you said that prayer
I asked Jesus in my heart

Thank you for giving to the Lord
I am a life that was changed
Thank you for giving to the Lord
I am so glad you gave

One by one they came
Far as the eyes could see
Each life somehow touched
By your generosity
Little things that you had done
Sacrifices made
Unnoticed on the earth
In heaven now proclaimed.¹

Yes, ordinary people doing ordinary things to heal the hurting and help the needy – spiritually and otherwise – may be overlooked on earth but they’re never overlooked in heaven. In fact, in the New Testament book of Hebrews, a book written by an anonymous, unnamed author, we read these words: “God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do.” (Heb. 6:10) Isn’t that good to know? God notices and doesn’t forget!

My friend, God calls all of us, as ordinary as we are, to do what we can to heal the hurting and help the needy, and he promises to take note of our actions whenever we do. Will you share your knowledge, give some counsel, or perform some simple task to heal the hurting and help the needy in your world? Well will you? The opportunity is yours to grasp! You think about that. Amen!

¹ *Thank You* by Ray Boltz.