

Alexandra Presbyterian Church

February 21, 2021

First Sunday of Lent

Minister: Rev. Vern Tozer

Stephanie Burgoyne, music director

Kaitlin Vandertuin, soprano

GOD'S PEOPLE GATHER

PRELUDE

"Andante religioso"

F. Mendelssohn

WE ARE CALLED TO WORSHIP

They who worship the father must worship Him in spirit and in truth for the Father seeks such people to worship Him. Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while He is near. Come, let us draw near to our Father to offer our worship and our praise.

HYMN 706

Come let us sing of His wonderful love

PRAYERS OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

Loving God, we pause on this Sunday morning to offer our praise and devotion. During these days when time weighs heavily on most of us, we set aside these minutes to offer ourselves and our praise to you. We are grateful for the daily blessings you provide for us. We thank you for supplying the needs of our bodies and of our souls. How loving and how caring you are every day. When we remember your faithfulness we are ashamed of how unfaithful and ungrateful we can be. Our lips speak more words of complaint than of gratitude. We take what you provide and ask for more. Grant us your forgiveness and plant a resolve in our hearts. May it be a resolve to show our thankfulness by what we do and say and think.

These prayers we offer in the name of our Master and Lord who encouraged his disciples to pray...

LORD'S PRAYER

*Our father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as in heaven.*

*Give us this day our daily bread
and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.*

*For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.*

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

There is sense in which we do not need to ask for forgiveness we simply have to accept it. For the Lord's forgiveness is ever available to the heart that repents. Thank God for His amazing forgiveness.

LENT LITURGY

Lent is a journey with Jesus toward Jerusalem,
toward the cross, toward resurrection and new life.
We will be transformed and blessed on this journey.

We are pilgrims on a journey.

We are travelers on the road.

We undertake the journey knowing we will not remain the same.

We are pilgrims on a journey.

We are travelers on the road.

The journey will take time.

We will feel the strain in our bodies and in our souls,
yet love will urge us onward.

We are pilgrims on a journey.

We are travelers on the road.

Let us start the journey with prayer:

**God of all times and places,
as we begin the pilgrimage
from life to death to new life,
you will surprise us and nurture us.**

**We put our trust in you,
knowing you will guide and provide for us.**

In the name of Jesus we pray.

Amen

WE HEAR GOD'S WORD

SCRIPTURES

2 Kings 5:1-14

Mark 1:40-45

SERMON

"Seven Ducks in a Muddy River"

When I attended Toronto Bible College, as it was known in those days, the Principal started each day with lectures from the Bible. Usually he would go through a Bible book verse by verse and probably a chapter each morning. He always assigned homework for you to prepare for the next morning. He instructed us to read the next day's chapter and decide on a title for the chapter. He knew that if you could provide a title then you spent some time reading and studying that chapter. We were going through the book of Second Kings in the Old Testament and the fifth chapter was the one for a certain morning. The students were asked to share their titles. I remember well what one fellow from the southern states gave for his title. It was "Seven Sucks in a Muddy River". So that is where my title comes from. You will see how that applies as we share in this wonderful story from Second Kings.

The central character from our story was named Naaman. I will say he was the main character but we might decide later that someone else was the true hero of the story. So Naaman was not a descendant of Abraham and would be a Gentile. Naaman was a member of the army for the king of the whole country. It would be helpful for you to know he was a Syrian. So he would not believe in the God of Israel and he would not care very much for God's people.

We are told that Naaman had risen to the very top of the army of the whole country. He was respected and he was given many honours. People feared him because the King always stood right behind his five-star general. There were so many stories you could tell about this man. He was praised and honoured by numerous parades. He had returned from battle after battle waving the victory banners. The newspapers stated that he was probably the best army general the people had ever known. To sum it up, Naaman had risen to the top and held the position that thousands would like to have. Now that could be where our story would end. It could but there is a huge BUT that changed everything. In just a few words the Bible says: "but he was a leper."

Oh no! When that word got out people would not just fear him, they would avoid him. If you think someone with the Covid Virus might be shunned and avoided in our day, it was nothing like what happened if someone had leprosy in those days. It would only be a matter of time until Naaman would begin to lose fingers, toes, and then his legs. Eventually his face would be disfigured and people would avert their eyes and not want to look at him. He had risen to the top and become the envy of most men in the land but a few tell-tale spots had appeared likely on his arms. The tests came back: Leprosy. No doubt he would now be willing to give up all the honours and all the praise he received—if only his body could be set free from this disease with its death sentence. And no doubt this General began to take a serious look at his life.

But even though he did not believe in God, God had a plan for his life. He had raided a part of Israel and among all the people he took captive there was a little girl. So what? If he sold her she would not bring the same profit as a strong, healthy boy who would earn his keep. She could possibly be sold as a slave but that would not bring much profit. So, it just happened, that Naaman's wife took a liking to this little one whose name we do not know. She took her into the household and taught her to do some of the chores. The little heard about Naaman's leprosy. What would she do? What should she do? Should she chuckle to herself and say: "Good enough for him. Look at how the mighty will fall. He will come down off his high horse now."

Would we expect someone who is insignificant and in such a precarious state to say anything? Who would listen to her anyhow? The little one spoke to Naaman's wife and said: "There is a prophet in Samaria who could cure your husband." Would anyone listen? Would there be any response to this girl's faith? Well as you know desperate people will sometimes listen where others will not. And I think that Naaman and the King of Syria said: "You have nothing to lose. Go and see if this man can help you." Laden with expensive gifts, Naaman makes the journey to find the prophet Elisha. I will skip to the end of the story. Naaman was side tracked for a while because of political egos. One king claimed to be insulted by another king. Can you believe that politics got involved? Things were political even back then. The King of Israel was insulted by some foreigner coming and asking to be healed. You see even the king of Israel did not have the faith the little girl possessed.

Well when Naaman came face to face with Elisha he was surprised and insulted. Elisha did not bow down to him. Elisha did not tremble that such an important general was there. Elisha said here is what you must do. Go and wash yourself in the Jordan River seven times and you will be healed. What? This is not what I expected, Naaman yelled. I came all the way here to bathe in that muddy excuse for a river? We have better rivers back home. How come I couldn't wash there? And he stomped away in a rage.

Only after his servants reasoned with him did Naaman consent to go and dip in the river. He held his breath; closed his eyes tightly and counted seven times. And he was healed. His skin was like a teenagers'. Those were the seven ducks in a muddy river. I want to point a few quick lessons we learn from this story of long ago. First – God is a God of the unexpected and unusual. Who could have known that a little slave girl far from home would be such a brave witness to the Lord? Little is much when God is in it. Little deeds of kindness will not go unrewarded. Second, Naaman's life was changed when he decided to take a chance on the promises of God. He could have laughed at the young girl. He could have scoffed at what she believed. But he did not and he took what could be called a step of faith. And most amazing of all—God responded to the faith of a foreigner. When this outsider showed his faith and did what God asked, God healed him.

The thing I want us all to take from this story which you have probably heard ever since childhood is this: God can do amazing things when we share a word of love and caring for another. None of us knows when a simple word we speak because we belong to God will stir a response in another's heart. You don't have to be an amazing speaker. You do not have to have a degree in theology. All you would need to say is: I care about you and God cares about you. If you ask for his help, he will respond. You see our God does not draw lines and put up barriers like we are prone to do. That little girl could very well have said—I wouldn't dare to give advice to the Major General of the Syrian army. He will laugh at me. He may even get upset with me. I am going to keep my thoughts and my faith to myself. After all he is keeping me as a slave!

I would love to know more about Naaman and the littler girl after this happened. Did Naaman show pity for others that he never felt before? Did he begin to show mercy where once he would never do that because he had to show how tough he was? Did he even become more popular and show his gratitude because the god of Elisha had spared him for more years? Did the little Israeli girl get promoted and be the head mistress of the General's palace? Did she become just like a member of the family? We are not told. But of this we can be confident. She would never be doubted again and she would in some way be rewarded. She would be rewarded and yes, respected by humans and honoured by God.

Do you believe that God has something in store for us? Whether we are in places of influence and power or simply humble servants, there are simple words of care you can speak. There are little acts of kindness you can do which will bless others. Do you remember what Jesus said one day? He said whoever gives you as much as a glass of cold water in my name will be noticed! We do know that if we are faithful God will see the deeds of love and he is not slow to reward. Excuse me for saying this but the seven ducks in the muddy river were certainly all they were quacked up to be!

HYMN 204

Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

DOXOLOGY

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.
Praise Him all creatures here below.
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host.
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

BIDDING PRAYER

Most loving and caring God, our Father, thank you for being there for us. In our moments of doubt or even despair you do not leave us on our own. You desire to be welcomed into our hearts at all times. Help us to lean upon you and to long for your presence with us always. We know that there are certainly times when our hearts are not in tune with your will for us. We think we can handle whatever comes in life. We are like a child who refuses a parent's hand and thinks he can walk on his own. We know we stumble and fall whenever we forget about you. This day we ask you to come into our hearts anew for we need you in every hour.

Our caring Saviour, we pray for those who are staggering under heavy burdens today. We especially ask for your help for those who have recently said farewell to a loved one. Grant them the comfort that comes from you alone. Give them strength for today and a steadfast faith that knows that the best is yet to come. May the empty tomb provide them with the sure and certain hope of a resurrection to life eternal.

Pour out your blessing on those who are living in fear. They may be living in a country where there is cruelty and oppression. They may be afraid of what another day, another test, another phone call may bring. Comfort their troubled hearts. Assure them that you will work all things together for good to those who love you.

We pray, our loving Master, for those who have heavy responsibilities to bear. Give your guidance and wisdom to those who are leaders in our country, our province and our city. May they seek your help and determine to rule in ways that would honour you and bless all people.

Bless your church in the world and in our city. Grant encouragement to those who struggle to maintain the work of the church in these troubled times. Provide a blessing to those who miss their Sunday morning worship services very deeply. Bind your people together in prayer through the Holy Spirit.

And, O Lord, we leave our silent prayers with you, whispered in faith and in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

HYMN 490

God of Grace and God of Glory

BENEDICTION

The amazing grace of God the Father, the limitless love of Christ the Son and the eternal blessing of the Holy Spirit, be with you and upon you, this day and tomorrow and forever more. Amen

CHORAL AMEN

POSTLUDE

"Jesus, Name of Wondrous Love"

F. Peeters



In Our Prayers:

Edith Cowper
Bruce Wheatley