

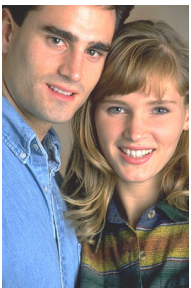
Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

2 Kings 5:1-14

Naaman was intelligent, capable, powerful, and respected by everyone around him. He was also a leper which prevented him from functioning in his position. The leprosy was incurable and life-threatening. Then a miracle happened for Naaman. Elisha the prophet sent word to him that God would heal him and restore him to health. Just bathe in the Jordan, and he would be cured. Naaman reacted in anger! This was insulting, the Jordan was nothing compared to the waters of his own country—besides, it was just too simple! His servants said, “Had the prophet told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?”

Have you known people like Naaman? They may not have leprosy, but they have the eternally fatal disease of sin. They search the world for a cure to fill the void in their hearts that can only be filled by God. Eastern meditation, spiritualists, palm readers, neo-paganism, nature worship, alien overseers, and the march to Utopia by mankind may have all influenced them at one time or another. The only thing that they seem determined not to try is Jesus. There is one thing about Christianity that the world just cannot understand—God does the work; God does the healing. Even Christians have been known to ask, “Don’t you ever feel like you haven’t done enough to please God?”

People like Naaman believe that they have to control their own lives. They think that if they can’t control their destiny, something is wrong. They believe that in order to know God, they have to do something to figure God out, even to create the path to Him. Like Naaman, they would do any task if it guaranteed that they could be healed and united with God, anything except nothing.



We have the most treasured gift ever offered, and it was and is free. In Ephesians 2:8 Paul said, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” The words of Naaman’s servants helped him understand that not doing a big thing could be acceptable. Is there a friend that you can help understand God’s free gift?

Studying God’s Word is easier with friends. Join a Bible study group!

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

2 Kings 5:1-14

1. Who was Naaman? Why would leprosy be a concern for Naaman?
2. Through whom did Naaman first seek relief? (vs. 5-7) Was there a human solution for his predicament?
3. What was Naaman’s response to Elisha’s “cure”? What happens when Naaman follows the prophet’s directives?
4. God sometimes works through unlikely people. Who was the unlikely voice of God in this story? (vs. 2-3)
5. How does the situation of the little girl parallel the experience of Joseph in Genesis 50:20?
6. Naaman was washed from his leprosy. Where and how has God washed us from the leprosy of sin?



Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

Jeremiah 17:5-8

Have you ever stopped to consider that what we often think about the least is what makes or breaks our entire existence? How often do we just not find time for God? How often do we forget to pray? How often does soccer practice or a hockey game or a day-trip to see the family make it “impossible” for us to attend worship? It’s a priority quagmire that we all fall into!

It isn’t that we don’t have confidence or trust in God. We do! We know that Jesus died for our sin and has saved us from eternal separation from God, but by the priority level that we give to our time spent in communication with our God it would seem that we sometimes forget that He has saved us for more than that. The people in Jeremiah’s time believed in God, but they always wanted to “hedge their bets” by figuring out how to protect themselves and assure their position and affluence through their own wisdom and political savvy.

In verse 4 God said to His people through Jeremiah, “Through your own fault you will lose....” By depending on themselves and forgetting about God they lost track of who He was in their lives. He allowed them to go their own way because that was their choice. God did not send a curse upon them; the curse was the natural result of living life on their own without considering their God.



In our own lives the most valuable choice we can make is to sit with our God every day. He is our strength and our protector and our guide. Verse 8 describes the life of faith as a tree by a river. It need not fear drought because its roots touch the water of life—the life that feeds it daily. It’s a wonderful description. Why would we not seek God daily? Of course even as believers we cannot choose to seek God on our own. The Holy Spirit urges us to trust God more than we trust ourselves. He is the stability and strength in our lives. It is His influence that enables us to choose to seek out time with our God every day. In this we find blessing and peace surpassing understanding in any situation.

Please join a study of God’s Word this week!

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

Jeremiah 17:5-8

1. A contrast is developed in our text. According to verse 5, who is cursed?
2. What example of nature (vs. 6) illustrated the conditions of the cursed? What is it like to be separated from God?
3. According to vs. 7, who will be blessed? How has God blessed us?
4. What example from nature is used to illustrate the blessed? What is it like to be connected to the Lord?
5. Verses 5 and 6 speak God’s law to us. In what ways do we trust in man?
6. Even though we are in the season of winter, the Epiphany season invites us to plant and to tend to what we have planted. Are we planting our children by the waters of the Word? Is our own faith being nourished so that we can withstand times of drought?



Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

In the verses just prior to today's lesson, Paul says that everything he does, he does for the sake of the Gospel—that it may change as many hearts as possible. So, when he begins comparing life to a race that is run, he isn't speaking to us about doing our best at work, or spending as much time as we can with the family, or even about making sure that our kids have enough money for college or that we are prepared for retirement. As important as these things are, there is something more precious for which we strive.

That is not to say that God does not care whether we are successful in the areas of our lives that are so very important to us. He does care that our family is well taken care of, that our children know that their parents always have time for them. He cares that we do our best at every task we attempt. When Paul says that he runs the race as a man devoted to the one goal of serving Christ, he knows from the teachings of his Master that keeping Christ as the first focus, we will also be victorious in any other God-pleasing areas of our lives.

Jesus said, *"Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? ... And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it... your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well."* (Luke 12:25-31) Paul understood that to determinedly follow Christ and devote his heart to the Gospel meant that every day he would become more like Christ. That is what a disciple does—he or she emulates the attitudes and actions of the Mentor.

When we connect in faith with our Victor, we begin to truly share Christ in our world, love our families, establish God-pleasing priorities, and at the same time get excited about running the race of keeping on keeping on. We enjoy the challenge and the hard work. There is no time to become angry or frustrated. We more easily focus on the truly important things of life—Christ, family, caring, serving, and following the Master to the victory tape at the end of the course.

Learn more about Jesus' faithfulness in a Bible study this week.
A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

1. What athletic analogies does Paul use in this text? Why were those examples meaningful for Paul and for his readers?
2. According to vs. 25 what is special about the reward at the end of a Christian's race? What is the "crown" that we will receive? (Rev. 2:10; 2 Timothy 4:8)?
3. Is Paul suggesting a personal victory or a self-righteousness attitude in vs. 27? Who has already won the victory for us? What is Paul encouraging?

For Family Reflection

4. How is your life like a race or a boxing match? Do you feel like you are winning or losing?
5. In a race there is only one winner (vs. 24). How many "winners" will there be in the race for heaven? What assurance do you have that you will win?
6. In the last weeks we have had a series of lessons from 1 Corinthians. Skim through this letter of the Apostle Paul again. Are there any favorite verses or favorite sections? Are there any sections that are especially challenging for your faith walk (or run)?

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

1 Corinthians 15:1-20

Ever since the event, there have been those who claim that Jesus' resurrection did not take place, or that it was a spiritual resurrection, or even that Jesus lived beyond the cross to father a dynasty. Why is Jesus' bodily resurrection so necessary to our faith?

Paul says that if Jesus was not raised from the dead then we are still dead in our sin. It is His resurrection that confirms everything that He said and everything that He did. If He was not raised, then He was either a charlatan or a madman. If He was not raised, then His birth, His teaching, His crucifixion, His resurrection, and His epiphany accomplished nothing.

Many seem afraid to dig into the history of the resurrection. They may think, "What if it didn't happen?" Some Christians have been conned into thinking that it really doesn't matter, and some find it easier to keep quiet rather than risk embarrassment by stating the truth to the world.

Dr. Paul Maier, author of excellent works on the reality of the events in Jesus' life, claims some interesting things about His resurrection. Maier notes, for instance, that if Jesus' body had been present, the Jewish leaders would have found a way to find it (or Him, if He had survived) and drag it (or Him) through the streets. There is also the fact that we have the accounts of those who saw Jesus after His resurrection. Copies of their words go almost back to their original writing. Paul who, as a persecutor of Christians, denied the resurrection, went on to preach its reality until executed. Also, did eleven men, who ran like rabbits, fearing for their lives, suddenly decide to promote by lies a man that they had deserted? Hardly! What of the strong witness by Luke, a man of investigation and science? And, is it likely that Paul and most of the other apostles would have allowed themselves to be executed for a lie? Maybe one or two, but not most!

The resurrection denies science and that is why the world will not believe. It is by the gift of faith that Christians take the final leap to belief in the resurrection. Christians can also confidently proclaim its physical reality to the world by the truth of the Word and by way of diligent thought and reason. We can openly proclaim, as Paul so fervently did, that our faith is NOT in vain.

Learn more about Jesus' resurrection in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

1 Corinthians 15:1-20

1. Make a list of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus recorded by the Apostle Paul (vs. 5-8). What other appearances are noted in the Gospel accounts? What was the purpose of these appearances?
2. According to vs. 9 how does Paul describe himself? (see also 1 Timothy 1:15) How does Paul see himself according to vs. 10? How do we account for the change?
3. How important is the resurrection of Jesus to our Christian faith? (vs. 14-17)

For Family Reflection

4. Why are we focusing on an Easter message during the Epiphany season of the church year?
5. Can you think of a family member or friend who has died in Christ? Talk about the Christian faith of that individual? What hope do these passages give you?
6. As a family read the rest of 1 Corinthians 15 (especially focus on vs. 55-56). Together offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the message of Jesus' resurrection.

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

Mark 1:40-45

As they walked through the countryside, lepers were required by religious law to shout to everyone that they were “unclean.” One such man, though he knew that everyone would shun him, perhaps even run from him, persisted in trying to see Jesus. He was sure that Jesus could heal what no one else could. Jesus reached out and touched the disease-ridden man.

In those days Jews believed that leprosy was a curse from God. Not only was the afflicted person a victim of the disease, he also found himself cast out of his society and religion. Yet this man, who had not known compassion, sought it from Jesus. God, in His mercy, gave the leper the courage to hope and the strength to approach the Savior.

The Pharisees only wanted to believe in God’s judgment. They believed that this sinner must have been guilty of a great offence to deserve such a punishment from the Almighty. They refused to believe in God’s loving mercy. The Pharisees offered no hope to the leper or to any sinner. “Be perfect” was the only advice they would offer. Not recognizing God’s grace, it was the only advice they could offer. They let the leper face death believing that he was cursed by God.

Through this leper, Jesus proclaimed God’s mercy toward us all. He does not turn His back on the sinner. He pursues the sinner with His love. Jesus brought the leper healing (astounding the Pharisees who believed that only God could heal leprosy).

As Christians, we follow a Lord who has personally paid the price for the sins of us all through His death. Just as He cleansed the leper, he cleanses us through His mercy, saving us from God’s anger. We offer nothing toward our salvation. It isn’t a “pay-as-you-go” deal. Jesus has done it all. We are now owned by Him, called to His service, and blessed by His kindness.

We learn how to witness to our foes through the study of God’s Word!
(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

Mark 1:40-45

1. Find out about leprosy. Why was it such a concern for people in Jesus’ day? Review the Old Testament “rules” about the disease in Leviticus 13-14.
2. What do we learn about Jesus’ compassion from this miracle? What do we learn about Jesus’ power?
3. What directive did Jesus give to the healed man? (44) Did the man following Jesus’ direction? How did this complicate Jesus’ ministry?

For Family Reflection

4. If you could have Jesus’ healing touch (vs. 41) reach out to someone, whom would you want Him to heal?
5. The man went and talked freely (vs. 45) about Jesus. Why don’t we talk more freely about Jesus and His power in our lives?
6. The first chapter of the Gospel of Mark has lots of action. Review the variety of interactions that Jesus had with people. What did you learn about Jesus in this chapter?