

2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15b

The Healing of Naaman

Luke 17:11-19

Jesus Cleanses Ten Lepers

We have heard two stories about healing today; they have both been achieved through calling on God through a prophet. In the Old Testament it is Elisha who secures the cure of the soldier Naaman from leprosy and he first complained about the conditions imposed by Elisha; he had assessed the proposals in his mind, but he was soon persuaded otherwise. Finally, he declares that: *“there is no God in all the earth except in Israel.”* Naaman has been healed not just in body, but in mind and spirit too; he has become whole.

In our gospel reading, we hear about the conventional antagonism between Samaritans and Jews being overcome in the healing story. We're not told where the others have come from, but we may assume that there is only one Samaritan; he suppresses any division in his mind between himself and the Jew Jesus and turns back once he had recognised his physical healing to praise God and doing what any normal person would do – giving thanks for being allowed back into society. So, both readings speak clearly about wholeness.

When we speak about healing, do we consider all aspects of ourselves and what we might consider needs putting right? More often than not, we think only about physical healing, healing of the body; it is relatively recently that healing of the mind has been thought about and developed – I can remember from my childhood that the boy next door had been put away in a mental asylum and rarely visited by his parents. Today, we would expect them to be assessed in a psychiatric unit in the local hospital and there may well be new treatments that improve their well-being. Ideally, they remain, very much, a part of the family. The final piece in the jigsaw is the healing of the soul and ensuring that we have a good connection with the Holy Spirit who dwells deep within all of us.

The disciples felt strongly about this and knew they were inadequate, so they asked Jesus how to pray; they felt a need to make sure that their connection with the Spirit was both fluent and effective. The response that Jesus gave of the Lord's Prayer is found in both Matthew's and Luke's gospel, though they do differ a little in the detail; it is also the opening surah in the Koran. I imagine that most of us would feel that same desire to have a central focus in our lives that is firmly rooted in God. The importance of the Lord's Prayer in our worship is evident by its inclusion in almost all of the forms of liturgy that we use. It comes right at the beginning of the Book of Common Prayer service that we use at 8 o'clock and immediately before the communion in this service. Since we know it so well, it is a prayer that we can use at any time as a form of meditation, of reconnection with our source, and of a reminder of the essence in all aspects of our life.

Let's have a look at it in the context of our desire for wholeness. The first two words are vital for us to orient ourselves properly. "*Our Father*" tells us that we all have a common and respectful way to God; not only are we privileged to regard God as someone we can approach as we would a parent, someone with whom we can share any concern, someone we can respect as having wisdom and experience well beyond ours, but crucially we can all share in this approach together. We don't pray "*My Father*" but "*Our Father*" and therefore we can say the words together. I have to say at this point that we may all have a different idea about who God is and how we relate to Him (or Her) – I can remember studying our approach to God with Quaker Friends years ago and wondering whether starting with "*Our Mother*" would have the same effect; it demonstrates the limitation of our perception of the Almighty, who has to be beyond gender and human relationships, but who we believe is still approachable intimately by each one of us.

We go on to pray to our Father "*in heaven*" which immediately brings us to a separation between life here in earth where we pursue our physical lives (in body and mind) and a spiritual realm where God lives overseeing all that we do. My feeling is that it is more constructive to think of the two realms being intermingled with the spiritual being able to inform our physical existence; that is perhaps where our soul comes in as it has the potential of being a conduit for all that the Spirit has to guide us. To become whole, we need to have our body, mind and soul cooperating in unison and the emphasis has to be on being not doing; we are human beings, after all, not human doings. And to be truly whole, our soul has such an important role to play, bringing the spiritual side of our lives into balance with the physical side.

Having addressed the Almighty, we acknowledge the holy, the sacred, the mysterious, the inexpressible nature of his name: on the one hand, we hardly dare to say it, it carries for us so much awe and wonder; on the other hand, we rely on it so much and we commit ourselves to bring his Will into our lives so that we might say "*your kingdom come, your will be done in earth as it is in heaven.*" Some would say that God is impotent; he relies on us to do his Will – what do we do when we want something done? We do it ourselves to ensure that it is done properly. Not so with God; he trusts us (heaven help him!) to do his Will for him here on earth. That, I submit, is true leadership: he recognises our worth and he expects us to follow his. ... what a challenge! ... what a privilege!

In return, God "*gives us our daily bread*" – I'm sure that you remember the Israelites wandering through the desert searching for their promised land. And, they were in danger of starvation; they were so hungry and thirsty. God satisfied both of those things: he provided manna from heaven [*Exodus 16*] and water from the dry rock [*Exodus 17.6*]. We are in danger of abusing that in these days when we use far more than the earth can provide. We have a corporate responsibility to

ensure that everyone's hunger and thirst is satisfied. When we do not do that, there we find sin and succumbing to temptation.

The Lord's Prayer therefore gives us a very good model for how to become whole. First, we need to bow down to our Lord in heaven and allow his Holy Spirit to flow through us. Second, we need to recognise all those things that our bodies and minds require to remain healthy. Thirdly, we need to do these things together, caring for one another, which is in part why we come to worship here Sunday by Sunday.

Then, we may with honesty and integrity proclaim: "*for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever.*"

*... in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, AMEN*