**Something Simple**

*Rev. John Allen*

Some of the most important characters in the Bible do not have names.

There is the woman who pours a costly perfume on Christ’s feet in his final days, one of the few people during his life who truly understood what is purpose was in the world.

There is the poor widow who gives her last two coins away to the poor.

There is a Syro-Phonecian woman who advocates for her right to be healed by Christ.

There is Pharaoh’s daughter who adopted the baby Moses saving him from death.

There is Job’s wife, who is mentioned only briefly, despite the fact that all of Job’s suffering is her’s as well. The loss of home, land, and her very children.

This is a convention in ancient writing that I will make no excuses for.

More often than not, female characters are not named. They are treated as supporting characters in some man’s story.

Now there are some female characters in scripture who we know by name. Mary and Elizabeth, Eve, Sarah, and Mary Magdalene.

But they are are more the exception than the rule. And, more often than not, their stories are about how they gave birth to important men.

So in this week’s story, we encounter another story with an unnamed woman, who is mentioned only briefly. Yet, at the heart of it, this whole story is about her.

The young girl who serves Naaman’s wife.

The story goes, that Naaman, who was a great warrior from Syria, who suffered from a terrible skin disease, had captured a young girl from Israel during one of their raids into the land of Israel.

And she served his wife.

And one day, this young Israelite girl said to Naaman’s wife, “you know, there is a prophet in Israel who could heal your husband.”

Now I just want to pause here for a moment and take stock of just what a brave thing that is to say. Because she is not just suggesting that her captors journey to a foreign. She is suggesting that their enemies could do something for him, that could not happen in his homeland.

She is suggesting that inside this land that Naaman has been attacking. The land from which she was taken as a slave. In that place, there is a prophet who would heal the commander of their arch enemy.

From the mouth a servant. Into the ear of a Queen.

And so they send a letter to the King of Israel, requesting that the leading General of the army that has been attacking them, and taking their daughters away as slaves, asking if that man could come to Israel to be healed of his disease.

And the King of Israel is incensed.

He tears his clothes in rage and will not hear it. No way. No. Way.

But the prophet Elisha hears about it, he says let him come. And so Naaman comes to be healed. With impossible fanfare. With horses. And chariots. And coffers of silver.

Just imagine it. The General who had led so many raids. Parading into town to be healed by “*our* God.”

And so Naaman is told to wash in the Jordan.

And it makes him mad.

He protests that the rivers in his own country are better. Why couldn't he have just washed in them? He cannot seem to see the gift that is being given to him through the blinders of his own bigotry, until someone pulls him aside, and calms him down, and reminds him that the fact that his healing only requires something simple is actually a good thing. And he should be pleased.

So he washes in the Jordan. Seven times. And he is healed.

And it all began with the imagination of a young woman. Whose name we don’t get to know. But whose bravery I would like us to remember. And celebrate.

Because in a story full of powerful men posturing, and parades of chariots, and tantrums of torn clothes, and enemies who could not imagine that they would be in the same room. Let alone help one another. Or heal one another.

She had enough vision to see that God’s love was not constrained by any of those barriers. She was able to imagine that God’s healing would overflow the careful constraints that had been placed on it. That God’s healing was not just for one people, but for the whole world.

And she had the courage to say so.

It’s actually something quite simple. The idea that we ought to love and care for one another. That God’s love is big enough for everyone. That we should pray for even our enemies. The ideas are pretty simple. Pretty straightforward.

What seems impossible is bringing that kind of faith to life when it seems like every wind in the world is blowing in the opposite direction.

The idea of loving everyone is simple enough, until someone attacks your homeland.

The idea that God’s love is big enough for everyone is simple enough, until we see God pouring out love on people who we have come to hate.

The idea of helping anyone in need is simple enough, until we find ourselves needing help from someone who we were taught not to trust.

So the people who wrote this story down for us no doubt intended it, at least in part, to impress us with God’s power to heal.

They no doubt wrote it down so that we would remember how great Elisha was.

They wrote it down as a witness to that time that even a foreign king could not deny that Israel’s God was great.

But I am glad that they remembered to tell us that it was a servant-girl whose imagination and vision started it all. Even if, in their minds, she was just a minor character. The truth is that what she did has the deepest lesson for us today.

And that is this:

In a world where the politics are loud. And combative.

Where prejudice and bigotry seem to divide humanity into smaller and smaller segments. And where the battle lines are drawn, and seem indelible.

There is something simple to be done. That requires extraordinary bravery.

And that is to say simply that God’s love is bigger than it all. That God’s peace, and healing, is for even those who we might think don’t deserve it.

It is to insist that what unites humanity is greater than anything that might divide us.

That differences in race, religion, background, belief, outlook, and income, are not enough to separate us from our shared humanity.

The truth is that every human face shines with the image of God.

And our story today is about a young woman. Who had an extraordinary capacity to see that truth, even in a circumstance when she had every reason not to.

And her simple statement of that fact, was the spark that started this extraordinary story of healing that turned battlements into bridges.

I wish that we knew her name.

But either way, I am glad we know her story.