

Your heart's desire

2 Kings 5:1-15

July 3, 2016

What is your heart's desire?

To win the lottery? To move into a bigger and better house? To move to Maine? No, I don't think so. You are not that shallow. The desires of your heart run deeper than that.

Is it your heart's desire to finally get the recognition and respect that you deserve? To finally get the kind of financial reward you deserve? Or is it your heart's desire to be the best, at whatever it is you want to be best at? I don't think so. You may want any of those things or all of those things, but these are not your heart's desire.

Think harder. Go deeper. What is your heart's desire?

To be free? Free of guilt? Free of regret? Free of resentment? Free of self-pity? Free of the burden of others' expectations? Free to live the life you have for as long as you have it eagerly and fully and joyfully?

It is your heart's desire to matter? To matter to somebody? Is it your heart's desire to be loved?

Or maybe your heart's desire isn't about you at all. Maybe your heart's desire is to heal the wounds of a child, or to heal the wounds of a friend, or to heal the wounds of this planet.

What is your heart's desire?

Rest in the Lord, wait patiently for him, and he will give you your heart's desire.

Rest. Wait. Be patient.

Naaman was not accustomed to being patient. He was a powerful man, a great soldier, the commander of all the armies of Syria. He had earned the respect and admiration of his king, because of his prowess, because of his success, because he got it done.

And what was the desire of Naaman's heart? Didn't he have already everything a man could want? Power, prestige, fame, honor? Except that he suffered from a terrible skin disease, a disease that left him disfigured and grotesque and unclean, not whole. His desire was to be cured, to be made whole, to be ... just like any other man.

One day, he heard from his wife who heard from her little servant girl that there was a man, a prophet, in Samaria, Israel's capital, that may be able to help. So he did what people in his position do: he went to the king, secured an

official letter of introduction, gathered a great treasure of silver and gold and fine clothes to offer as payment for his precious cure, and left straightway for the city of Samaria at the head of an impressive entourage of horses and chariots and cargo and servants. He went to get it done.

That's where the story begins, the story of the desire of Naaman's heart, this extraordinary story. I call this story extraordinary because it is no stereotypical miracle story. It is a real story about real people, a story as complex and many-layered and heart-breaking and inspiring as our own lives are complex and many-layered and heart-breaking and sometimes inspiring. There are kings who act like kings and soldiers who act like soldiers, people of power and influence acting like people of power and influence, wielding tools of authority and wealth to get what they want, and there are servants and a prophet and a little girl acting like ... saints!

She's a little girl! An Israelite girl, ripped from her family by the Syrian army, by Naaman's army. She's a prisoner, a slave, a war prize for Naaman's wife, a emblem of Naaman's surpassing savagery. Or what sort of man did you think Naaman to be? He is a great soldier. How do suppose great soldiers get to be great?

Then why, why does this little girl tell her mistress about the prophet? Wouldn't she, shouldn't she, resent the wife of her captor? Wouldn't she have every reason to secretly gloat over her master's distress, over the disease that makes mockery of his honor and glory? But she didn't. She saw, not her oppressor, but a man in pain, and she offers what she knows. The desire of her heart is that he be well.

So Naaman went and presented his king's letter to the king of Israel ... who was beside himself! What? He expects me to do what? He's not serious. He's just trying to pick a fight. What was the desire of the heart of Israel's king? Nothing more than to preserve his own hide. Kings acting like kings, and little girls and servants ...

Elisha heard news of the visit of the delegation from Syria and summoned Naaman to his house. Naaman went, horses and chariots and treasures and servants, ready to meet, and reward, this great man who could give him what he wanted. Only Elisha didn't even come out of the house. He sent a servant with instructions for Naaman to go to the Jordan River, humble Jordan River, and wash himself seven times in its waters.

Now it was Naaman who was beside himself! Doesn't he know who I am? Who does he think he is? This is madness, an insult, a farce. I didn't come all the way to Israel just to take a bath in dirty little Jordan!

Naaman is ready to go home to Syria, unsatisfied, uncured, but all the more confirmed in his battle-wise view of life: that bad things can happen to any man at any time, and all you can do is use whatever strength and wisdom and ferocity you have to stay ahead of terror and death as long as you can. Only his servants called him back.

His servants ... Were they expatriates, too, prisoners of war, foreigners taken in battle, Israelites? Or were they merely poor, lower class Syrians, forced by circumstance or by pecking order to serve in the household of the commander of the army? Who knows? But why do they care? Why do they stop their master and try to change his mind? They go home, they get paid all the same, right? But they do care. They do intervene ... to help him.

So who is wise? Who is strong? Who gets it? Who is wise enough, humble enough, to wait? To wait for the Lord to act, in the Lord's own way, in the Lord's own time? This extraordinary story turns the apparatus of power and wealth and pecking order upside down and inside out!

Naaman listened. Naaman listened to a little girl and believed her. Naaman listened to his servants and believed them. Naaman humbled himself -- we could even say he humiliated himself -- walking into the Jordan, not a mighty commander, but a broken and needy man.

And he was cured. He was given his heart's desire -- to be just like any other man. And he knew. He knew that God is.

What is your heart's desire? Maybe it's not about you at all and maybe it's not about anybody else. Maybe your heart's desire is ... God.

Rest in the Lord. Wait patiently for the Lord. And the Lord will give you your heart's desire.