

Homiletical Considerations for Disability Awareness Sunday April 14, 2014

2 Kings 5:1-14

- Note that Naaman was considered a great man despite his disability. Consider other people like Helen Keller who have done great things despite a challenge of some kind.
- Notice that help came from an unlikely source. The strong, great, victorious man is aided in the story via a young, enslaved woman who knows of a prophet who might help. When there is a need in your church or community, whose voice is it who speaks up?
- Think about what kind of problem Naaman has. Is it leprosy or his inability to accept a (rather simple) healing by God's grace?
- Notice the domino effect of passing on word – the slave woman speaks to Naaman's wife who tells her husband who takes it to the king of Aram who writes a letter to the king of Israel. From there, Elisha heard about the situation and offered to help. Sometimes there is a sequence of people offering help. How does this model work in your congregation when there is an unaddressed need.
- No matter how powerful Naaman or the two kings in the story are, who brought about the healing?
- Notice that, although he didn't seem to know where to find help to cure Naaman, the king of Israel recognized that it is in the hands of God to heal.
- The prescription for healing is to be washed in the Jordan seven times. Our healing is also found in being washed -- in the waters of baptism. No matter what we can or cannot do, this is the ultimate healing of our human condition.
- How are we like Naaman who was ready to give up when healing didn't happen the way he thought it would? How many in our churches expected a different kind of healing of their bodies or minds and feel incomplete because of that?
- 9. For fun, read ahead to verses 19-27 for the story of Gehazi who became leprous when he tried to extort money from Naaman.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

- At first glance this text may not seem to apply to Disability Awareness Sunday, but Paul is not talking so much about physical accomplishment but self-control, discipline, and perseverance in spiritual things.
- The Special Olympics began 1968, thanks to Eunice Kennedy Shriver. The oath pledged by the participants with physical and mental challenges is this: "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt." How can we use this pledge in our own spiritual race?
- In what ways can we consider our race successful? What are our prizes? What is the imperishable wreath we seek?

- Paul brings up the question of disqualification. Are there those whom we have in essence “disqualified” from our worship due to physical or unseen barriers?

Mark 1:40-45

- Jesus is portrayed as the great healer. He had already healed Peter’s mother-in-law (1:29-31) and then He is sought out by the leprous man. Note that leprosy kept people from the full community and healing brought them back into the fold. How can we bring healing by doing a better job of including those with challenges into our faith community?
- The leper puts his faith in Jesus, whom he knows can choose to heal him. Jesus chooses to be compassionate and His compassion changes the life of this man. As followers of Christ, how can we choose compassion and potentially change the lives of those who are disabled?
- All Jesus has to say is “Be made clean.” Do we sometimes diminish the power of God’s word in providing healing. How healing are our own words?
- One cannot help but see the joy that comes when the leprous man’s life is positively changed. He went out and proclaimed and spread the word. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if people left our churches so changed and joyful, they couldn’t keep silent?
- Healings like these drew contempt for Jesus. We should recognize that not everyone will be thrilled with breaking down boundaries.
- As a leper, the man broke a rule by approaching Jesus for healing. Are there unwritten rules or mindsets that need to be broken in our own churches so we do not keep people from Jesus?
- There is some disagreement among scholars whether the text should read that Jesus was moved with pity or moved with anger. Most translations opt for pity but sometimes we feel anger at a society or system that excludes people. Did Jesus have righteous anger toward the priests and others who continued to exclude this man and others like him? How can anger incite us to change for the better?
- Notice that not only did Jesus reach out His hand, but he touched the “unclean” man with contagious leprosy. Jesus broke the barrier by risking Himself to some degree. Consider how willing we are to welcome disabled people and some of the risks of a slightly louder worship space or more movement. Consider also the importance of safe touch in welcoming someone – think handshake or touching someone’s shoulder.
- This story is about someone who was healed of his disability. Even though Jesus was a healer, He was even more an “includer.” He healed the man so he could be restored to the community. We may still have people in our pews who are disabled; how can we work to be sure they are included?