



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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February 12, 2012

Epiphany 6

Sermon Text: [2 Kings 5:1-14](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [2 Kings 5:1-14](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 32](#)

Second Lesson: [2 Corinthians 1:3-7](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Mark 1:40-45](#)

Christian Love Gives With No Expectation of Return

You see this in a girl and a prophet

You see this in the actions of God

The Word of God we are looking at today is our First Lesson, all about Naaman, a little servant girl, the prophet, the king of Israel, and our God. Did you ever stop to think a little bit about one of the first passages you probably ever learned? “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...” ([John 3:16](#)). Have you ever thought about that word “love” there and what it means? We use the word love in so many different ways in the English language. When it says “God so loved the world,” is it talking about how I feel about my wife? Is it talking about how I feel about my kids (most of the time)? Is it talking about how I feel about the Detroit Lions? Is it talking about how I feel about pie? What is it talking about? Think about all the different ways we use “love”. I sure hope my love for the Lions isn’t the same as my love for my wife, right? There are a lot of different kinds of love. What is he talking about there?

Of all the examples I gave you, did you notice how you and I use the word “love” for all these different things? I get something out of all of them, right? All of these things that I love do something for me on some level. This affection or family love that I have...I love my wife because she’s made me a better man than I would be without her. That’s fine, but I’m getting something out of it, right? She’s made me a better man. Pie...I obviously have gotten something out of pie. It’s hanging over my belt right now. The Lions...what do I get out of them? Disappointment. Heartache. Brief glimpses of promise. But I get something back, right?

So what does God get back when it says “God so loved the world”? Does he need you and me? This has got to be completely different, completely other than how we use the word “love” so often in the English language, right? It’s something different. It’s a Greek word that’s different than the four other kinds of Greek words that are used for love. This is the word “agape”. It’s different. It’s love that gives without expectation of return. It’s love that gives without merit. Love that gives unconditionally. Love that acts for the benefit of those being loved, not for the benefit of yourself. That’s God’s love, right?

When we think about that little girl, the little slave girl, when we think about the prophet, and we think about God, we see that kind of love in action. As we consider these Words from 2 Kings, we have to think...What about me? Do I love that way? Or am I closer at times to the king of Israel who is afraid to show any kind of love because it

might cost him? So we have to think about it. Where am I? Where are you? And how can I get better at doing this, because I sure want to.

Love without expectation of return...that has to be the definition of what this little girl does, right? If anyone had any reason not to be concerned about this big wig general guy, Naaman, it would be this little girl. The armies had come and bands had come from Aram and the enemy of the people of Israel, evidently, and had taken her captive. They took her away from her homeland, maybe away from her family, we don't know. But now she is not living where she wanted, and she's a slave to Naaman's wife. My sinful nature, and I'm guessing maybe some of your sinful natures, would be if I was in her shoes and looking at that general Naaman, I'd be thinking "Good. It serves you right to take me away from my home. I hope that leprosy is painful. I hope another chunk falls out of your skin." Evidently the kind of leprosy Naaman had was one that allowed him to continue to function. There were some leprosy diseases that were the skin disease that would attack the skin, harden it, make big crusts and big scabs. Parts of the skin would at times then fall off. It was evidently something that Naaman did not enjoy because he wanted to be rid of it. This little girl knew it. And in love for the person that had taken her out of her home, in love for the person that had made her a slave, she says to her mistress, "If only he'd go talk to the prophet in Samaria because God can do stuff to fix this." Isn't that an amazing love? Isn't that just an incredible love?

Love acts for the benefit of the other, not just for the benefit of self. Love is not concerned about being right. Love just acts for the interest of someone else. You and I could defend this girl and say she was right to not speak up and help Naaman. But she couldn't defend that because she loved. She loved as God loved her.

Naaman was pretty well to do. He takes off with his chariots and his horses and he goes and talks to his king. The king says, "You bet Naaman. You've been a great guy. I'd love to help you with this. Here's a letter. Take it to the king of Israel because if there is a prophet in Israel in Samaria there, the king certainly must know him and he must know the God that the prophet talks about, and they can work together, and they'll see to it that you get healed."

So Naaman heads out, chariots, horses, evidently pretty well to do and pretty well thought of. When it says he was highly regarded, it means the king took good care of him because he takes along 750 pounds of silver and 150 pounds of gold. I don't think he was carrying it in his pocket. When he says he's taking along horses and chariots, this is kind of a pretty big caravan that is taking off and going. Here is a well-to-do guy that is going and he is evidently pretty excited that he might be able to get healed because he's willing to give away an awful lot of gold and an awful lot of silver.

Then the letter gets to the king of Israel. We think the king of Israel was probably Joram at this time. The 10 Northern Tribes had split off. The king of Israel, Israel was the 10 Northern Tribes. All Godless kings. They all worshiped false gods. They didn't worship the Lord. And the king at this time is no different because his reaction is he

tears his robes and says “this guy is trying to start a war with me. I’m not God. I can’t make dead and bring back to life. I can’t heal this guy. No one can do that.” All he sees are the problems this request is going to cause him, right? Who does he love more than anyone else pretty evidently? Himself right? He doesn’t see it as an opportunity to show love to Naaman. He doesn’t see it as anything else than “this is a problem for me. I don’t like it.”

That’s where our sin lives, isn’t it? We can’t look beyond love for self to see opportunities to love others because it might cost us something at some time. So we spend a lot of our time listening to our sinful nature and just loving ourselves more than unconditionally loving others.

The prophet finds out about it. The prophet is kind of ticked with the king as he probably usually was because the king had no use for God, and he sends a message to him and says “Send him to me. I’ll show him that there is a prophet in the land. I’ll show him what God is all about.” The love that the prophet shows to Naaman is pretty amazing. He wants him to know the power of God. When Naaman shows up and this caravan pulls up out front and he comes and knocks on the door or sends his servant, whatever it is, Elisha doesn’t even go out. Here’s a big wig coming. This is a Senator showing up at your house. Are you just going to send him a message with one of your kids? “Take a left. Go down that way and that’s how you get there.” You are going to go out and talk to him. This is your chance to talk to someone important, right? Elisha doesn’t. He sends a messenger out to say “Go jump in the river seven times and you will be clean.”

The prophet shows love by wanting the man Naaman not to focus on the prophet. He wants him to focus entirely on God. God’s power could heal him. It was not Elisha that was healing him, so Elisha doesn’t have to come and kiss up to this powerful man with all this wealth. Instead the prophet says, “I want you to know it’s all about God. Just go jump in the water seven times and your skin will be like that of a young boy.” Naaman gets kind of upset. The rivers in his home town are a little nicer than the old stink water Jordan. He takes off in a rage.

Then you see his servants show him love. The servants say to him, “If he told you to crawl back to your home town on your knees, you would have done it. If he had told you to do something great and difficult, you would have done it. He says to do this. Why not do it? You have to believe what the prophet said is true. You believe the promises of the prophet and his God and then God does great things for you.” Then Naaman jumps in.

You have to wonder what he was like the first six times. Was he self conscious? Was he kind of looking around to see who was looking at him? Was he still irritated? You have to wonder what he was like when he got out the seventh time and sees that he’s healed. In a football game, do you think he would have gotten flagged for excessive celebration in the end zone? What do you think he did? This is the kind of stuff I wonder about when I read Scripture, but God doesn’t tell us. God doesn’t say this is all

about learning what Naaman did. God is telling us it's all about learning about God. It's about his love and how he acts through people that love, and how he acts in a way that puts others' interests ahead of his own and how he desires that...what did Jesus say? "I want you to love others as I have loved you" ([John 15:12](#)). He wants us to love unconditionally, without merit, without an expectation of getting something back from your object of love. That's what we see the prophet do. Naaman offered him a whole bunch of money and the prophet wouldn't take it. He wanted him to focus on God. That's what we see the little girl do. That's what we see our God do for this man. And that's what we know our God has done for us.

Our God has made promises to us that are fantastic and things that we can't really wrap our heads around. He says that through water and the Word of God, he creates faith in our hearts. He says that when we come and receive wine and a wafer, it's really Jesus' body and blood for the forgiveness of our sin. He says that through faith in Jesus' life and death that took away our sins, our sins are forgiven and heaven is open to us. And his Spirit leads us to believe these truths, that our God loves us and is not demanding things from us. He just loves us because that's the nature of our God. Then he asks us to go and do likewise.

Now we have every reason to, when we are focused on the love he has for us. Then it's not about what I can get out of someone else (I'll do this for you so you'll do this for me). It's not about how I'll be right so I don't have to be loving. God says speak the truth, but speak the truth in love. If we can't speak it in love, we should just shut up. We can't hide behind "but it's right so I can be unloving". We need to speak the truth in love. We need to love one another in these kinds of ways that demonstrate it's not about us, it's about just loving like God has loved us.

Our God puts opportunities for us to do that all the time. But it's hard. It's so hard to love in this way because your sinful nature and my sinful nature does not want to do it. We are willing to love when we get something back, when we get something out of it. We are willing to love then, but to love as God loved us? When someone is attacking you, when someone is just attacking you and what you have done because you love God and they are coming at you with full forces, it's kind of hard to love them, isn't it? Yet, that's exactly what our God called us to do.

Think of Jesus. When he died on the cross and said "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing" ([Luke 23:34](#)), he knew that many of the people he was dying for would not believe in him. Yet he still loved them. You and I are going to show love to people and we aren't going to get anything back from them, except for at times maybe grief, maybe heartache, maybe disappointment, maybe pain, but our God calls us to love in that way. The only way you and I can do it is by staying close to our Savior, going back to our baptism daily and drowning the sinful nature in us that wants to be right and wants to get our way, to make faithful use of his Word and the Lord's Supper so that we stand in awe of the fact that our God loved us without condition, and then find in that the opportunity and the strength to go and love one another. That's what Christians do.