

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ! Amen

Naaman was the Commander of King Aram's army. He was held in high regard by the king because he brought many victories to his king and country! But, he had a major problem, he had Leprosy or as it is called today Hansens'. It was a dreaded disease caused by a long term infection that leads to nerve damage of the skin, respiratory tract, and eyes. It can result in a lack of ability to feel pain which can lead to loss of body parts from repeated injuries or infection. People lived in fear of it and thought it extremely contagious, so lepers were thrown out of their communities to live either by themselves or with others who had the disease. Today it can be treated. That context is important to understanding the story. And now, back to the story.....

So, when Naaman's wife's Jewish servant shared that there was a prophet who could heal him, Naaman made his way to him. Only when Naaman found the prophet, Elisha didn't even go to the door to speak with him! Elisha sent someone with a message, "Go, wash in the Jordan 7 times and your skin will be restored." Well, Naaman flew into a rage! How dare Elisha ignore him.... a person of his stature and accomplishments! Who did Elisha think he was?

It's interesting, isn't it? We think things should be a certain way. And so did Naaman! He railed against what Elisha told him to do! But when we read the story in II Kings 5 we see that he eventually did rise to the best in him, go to the river, wash, was healed, and came to believe in the one true God!

Fifty years ago, in the predecessor Lutheran church body; The Lutheran Church in America, women who heard God calling them to the Ordained Ministry rose to the very best in them answering that Call! Back then the world was a very different place. Women were not permitted to serve as clergy! But against all odds they heeded the call of God, rose to the best in themselves, met the challenges and difficulties and changed the face of the church! Then again, 10 years later, the church ordained the first woman of color and again 10 years ago when members of the LGBT plus community were first ordained! Today we give thanks to God and remember all those who rose to God's Call to the ordained ministry bringing their God given uniqueness and abilities to further God's kingdom! It is a time of celebration yet, not really new to the body of Christ!

You may have noticed the first hymn today #458; 'Praise and Thanksgiving Be to God' is a Baptismal themed hymn. It was selected to remind us that God created everything and still today, everything starts with God, as all of us are love and claimed by God and one in Jesus the Christ.

While praising Trinity for this gift, notice that the 4th verse states, "Here now renew your church, through this symbol given" Those words are a reminder that WE are the church. The lesson from Galatians 3: 26-29 reinforces this, "for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." [NRSV]

Because of the issues with my back, I can't get up from a bed, so I sleep in a Lazy boy lounge chair that can electronically position my legs and back. I call it my electric chair. At night I double a sheet to lay over the chair and then put a doubled sheet over the top of me. I need to remember that when the sheets are put into the washing machine. They need to be fully opened if the water is to wash and cleanse them thoroughly! This is a good image of baptism AND our relationship with God!

We are led by Jesus the Christ who we need to listen to and co-create with not to keep everything a certain way but to open ourselves to Divinity's vision through prayer and worship! There is a saying, 'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever!' [Heb.] Only Trinity remains unchanged, even though we have not known or experienced God's totality, the church is a living organism which in some ways is always changing!

God is the Alpha and Omega of all time and things. Through our baptism we all have been called. WE are the church on earth who participates and co-creates with God. We do that by being in conversation/ prayer with Christ Jesus individually and in gatherings, to see where we are being led and then using the abilities God instilled in us to bring about Spirits will! Being our unique selves with our combination of abilities to serve God thereby serving all of creation!

This is what Brother Martin Luther called the Priesthood of all Believers. We are to be little Christ's in our every day lives. That's how we witness to the Good news of God's love, Christ's death and resurrection, and the Holy Spirit's constant presence and live into and carry out the will of The Holy Spirit, not just for ourselves but for all parts of creation! To do that we need to be our unique authentic selves and use ALL the abilities we are given.

Today, Marla Freiwald is affirming her Baptismal vows. It is an important day in her life and in her faith journey. It is important for us too, as we are reminded of Jesus promises to us and OUR promises to participate in and with his His church.

Back in the day when I was confirmed, the pastor selected a Bible verse specifically for each person to be read during the Affirmation of Baptism service. Some still do that today. The one selected for me was Matthew 28: 18-20. Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you! And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age!

This is not just the commission given to Marla or me at Confirmation or even at my ordination. It is OUR baptismal commission and calling! Christ Jesus has claimed us, loves us, created each of us with our own special personalities and abilities all to reflect Spirit's love and serve God and all creation! We Are Church! We are Called!

Or as Bishop Elizabeth Eaton has selected as a theme for the ELCA:

We are Church! We are Lutheran! We are church together! We are church together for the sake of the world!

Thanks be to God in Christ!!! Amen!