

he theme for our morning's meditation is that, 'God suffers in all those who suffer in this world.' Today is also ear-marked as Leprosy Sunday and we particularly remember and pray for those who have been affected with Leprosy. Our own Church has responded to it over the past 39 years with the Leprosy Patient Children's Education Fund through which we support over 150 Children. Suffering is something that all of us face at some point or the other. When we go through a period of suffering we ask various questions: 'Why me'? 'Why I am going through all this?' 'What have I done?' 'Is God punishing me?' 'Is God angry with me?'

In the OT reading this morning, Namaan the Syrian commander of the King of Aram was a great man and was highly regarded because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier but had Leprosy. Leprosy in ancient times was treated as a dreaded disease and people with leprosy were treated as outcasts. So in spite of having everything he still was suffering. The narrator informs us that there was a little girl from Israel who had been taken captive by the raiders of Aram. She was the one who was helping Namaan's wife. The little girl was a girl of faith. She told her mistress that if Namaan went to see the prophet who was in Samaria then he would cure him of leprosy. Leprosy was incurable at that time. What we see here is the concern and compassion of the little girl for her master even though she was a captive. There was no remorse but rather love for her master's well-being. We may even question why God allowed the little girl to be captured and undergo suffering. But God works everything for the good of our salvation. Here the little girl is used as an agent to bring healing to Namaan and also to make him encounter the living God of Israel. The little girl's compassion reflects something of God's heart. The little girl suffered with her master. She wished that her master would become alright. In a similar manner God suffers with those who suffer in this world. His wish is our well-being, our shalom - our completeness and he wants to heal us. The little girl also had confidence in God and was willing to testify about this God even in captivity.

So Namaan took a recommendation letter from his king to the king of Israel along with gold and silver and gifts. The king of Israel read the letter and tore his robes and said 'Am I God?' Nobody could cure leprosy except God and Jehoram King of Israel thought that it was a ploy to attack him. However, when Elisha the prophet heard about him he asked him to be sent to his house.

Namaan went with his horse and chariots to Elisha's home. Elisha did not even come out but sent a messenger to say to him: 'Go wash yourself seven times in the Jordan and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.' Namaan was upset because he had hoped that Elisha would come out and see him and probably wave his hand over him. His pride was hurt. He also did not consider the Jordan to be a very clean river in comparison to the rivers of Damascus. So he turned and went off in a rage. Namaan was not humble. His ego was too big because he was

the commander of the army. Namaan's servants give him good advice. They tell him if Elisha had asked him to do something great then he would have done it without any questions. He had nothing to lose because it was a very simple task given to him. Namaan then dips himself seven times in the Jordan and he is completely healed. It was the power of the Almighty God that changed this patient of leprosy into a cleansed man.

In Namaan's healing we see that God is a God of compassion and reaches out to all who suffer. Whether we go through physical sickness or mental agony, death, a failed business, debts, or a broken relationship or any kind of suffering, we can be assured that God understands our pain and suffering. He knows this because he himself trod the path of pain and suffering as he went to the cross. God's compassion reaches out to us and he suffers with each one of us who suffers. He wants to restore and heal us. May we turn to him, be washed like Namaan and be healed.

Shalom
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