

## God's Table Song

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Community Presbyterian Church - Rochester, Minnesota

4th Sunday after Pentecost - July 3, 2022

Texts: 2 Kings 5:1-14, Galatians 6, Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

### SCRIPTURE READING 2 Kings 5:1-14

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. And the king of Aram said, "Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel." He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy." When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me." But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel."

So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage. But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

### RESPONSIVE READING (paraphrased from Galatians 6)

My friends, if you see someone do wrong,

by the Spirit you've received, restore them with gentleness.

**Help them out of that pit; don't climb into it yourself.**

Bear one another's burdens: this is what the law is really about.

**Don't embarrass yourself thinking you're better than others.**

Do work you yourself are proud of; don't fuss about your neighbor's.

**Live your life, not somebody else's.**

Those who are learning in the Word should share with their teachers.

**You might be deceived but God isn't: you reap what you sow.**

If you sow desire you will reap more desires.

**If you sow the Spirit, you will reap the Spirit, and its eternal life.**

So don't grow weary of doing good; don't give up: the harvest is coming.

**Whenever you have an opportunity, work for the good of all,  
especially those in the family of faith.**

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

After Jesus had set his face toward Jerusalem and did not look back or turn aside, he appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.' "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Your Word, our Light; your grace, our hope; your love, our life. TBTG

When the world is too heavy to bear and I start thinking we're all going to sink under the weight of it, I hop on my bicycle and outride the grief and chaos. I had to do it a couple of times this past week. And as I was crossing a bridge in a quiet park, with the birds singing overhead, I registered a man sitting there in one of those high-tech wheelchairs like the athletes use in the Paralympics. He was perfectly imitating that distinctive cardinal call. "Singing to the birds?" I asked, as I flew by. He twinkled at me: "Something like that!" All of it happened in less time than it takes to tell, but ever since then, I find myself grinning as I remember. I will never know his name. I will never know why he was in a wheelchair, or how he learned to whistle that way. He'll always be anonymous to me. But it fed me. It's still feeding me.



Bread for the journey, some call these moments. I like to think of them as what dog trainers call "high-value treats," the ones that really make your dog sit up and pay attention. And God's high-value treats are delivered fresh along the bike trail; or the walking path; or in the Garden of Life, where neighbors and passers-by regularly come to rest and be fed.

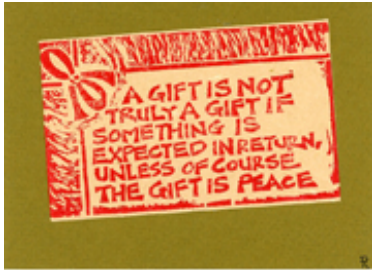
It occurred to me this week that one of God's great gifts to us is the awareness that things are wrong with the world. You may call this conscience, or ethics, or intuition. Sometimes this certainty is quite different from an accepted moral code. The wrongs of slavery and land theft were accepted as the price of nation-building, and the wrong of trashing the natural world was accepted as the price of progress. A denial of voice, choice and agency was accepted as the price of being black or brown or female. Standard-issue morality doesn't always square with divine insight. The cardinal bird sings a different tune than the courts and the Congress and so does the Spirit. God's song starts inside us, and it's not always the headline acts that sing it most clearly.



Did you notice who had the answers in our Bible stories today? Who held the truth? The nameless ones. The little anonymous child. Naaman's faithful entourage. Would a king and a general really trust a captured slave girl? Naaman had to trust Elisha's unnamed servant in order to be healed. In the Gospel, it was 70 unknown disciples, not the 12, whose names we kind of know. How much did those 70 have to trust Jesus, to go out empty-handed, like beggars? And *Jesus* trusted *them* with the

most precious gift of all, the astonishing news that God's goodness, God's reign, was waiting right on people's doorsteps, ready to come in. And at least some people trusted them, and welcomed them, and fed them. The nameless ones, the actors with the bit parts, the ones lost to history—they *changed* history, too. They came back bursting with joy and confidence. Even demons obey us? Now *there's* a high-value treat! What started out in both stories as bad

news—the bad news of leprosy, the dire situation of a poverty-stricken people under the knuckle of the Romans—ended up as good news: the peaceful, glorious reign of God is among you.



The gift that's been working its way into my brain all week is that things get hard, but then they get better. Then they get hard again. Then they get better. I got ridiculously happy when I found this little quote: "If ever there was a time for tears and a grief of spirit, this is the season...: such thick darkness, such universal shame, such dreadful shatterings have overtaken us and are so likely to overtake us more and more." And the reason it cheered me up so much is that

even though those words could have been written last week, they were, in fact, written in 1650, and I happened to know that the same writer, a few years later, gave one of the best descriptions of glowing spiritual health ever written: "Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness, and bearing with one another and forgiving one another and not accusing each other, but praying for one another and helping one another up with a tender hand." His name was Isaac Penington, but that's not important. His words sound like they're straight out of Paul in Galatians. These gifts of God, the high-value treats we get along the way, are free and steady, and ask nothing in return. Unless the gift is peace. Then we have to live it, share it. Pass it along.

What changed in those years between Isaac's darkness and fear, and the love and tenderness he came to know? The world hadn't suddenly been restored to sanity. His own sanity, his own spirit had been reborn. And fed. And led, through prayer and through his connection to hundreds of nameless people who were tapping into a higher truth and wisdom. The river of tears met the ocean of God's love and the result was joyful, fruitful, enduring life.

My dear friends, I am so very fond of this small, strong band of believers. And I have to tell you we find ourselves at the most amazing crossroads. Even as we might fear for the survival of the planet, the health of our nation, the future of our congregation, or our own lives or the wellbeing of our descendants, we have encountered a great opportunity in the gift of a generous bequest. But the point is not the money; the point is that Margaret trusted all of you, her friends, to go out and do something good. The even more important point is that God has entrusted us with the good news that God's own peaceful, glorious reign of God is near, right on our doorstep, waiting to come in. Just as Jesus entrusted the anonymous 70 with the same good news. And Jesus didn't give *them* a single dime to get it done with! Can we do it? Well, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers."



The time is now, and yet there is all the time in the world. We don't rush headlong into anything. What we do first is to pray, to ask the God of harvest to send out laborers. They may be



ourselves; they may be those we support, our partners in ministry; they will almost certainly be nameless in the grand scheme of things. But in the small scheme of here-and-now, we come together, as sisters and brothers. We know one another, we know each other's' names, we know each other's' strengths, and frailties. We come together in love and peace and tenderness, and sit quietly before God, calming our minds, and waiting in hope and in trust. In days and weeks to come, I promise, I will be calling us back again and again to prayer: beginning here, beginning now. I guarantee, pay attention and you will find those high-value treats—all along the way. Our common prayers and God's overflowing gifts will give us all we need for this journey.

Right now, I invite you into prayer that's not asking for answers or framing specific needs, but simply opening the doors of our hearts for God's seed to be planted there, so God can use us. Prayer like this takes practice; so let's begin practicing now; try it in your prayers at home or throughout the day. We'll use this as a breath prayer:

As you inhale, think: Sow the Spirit

As you exhale, think: Reap the Spirit

Continue in silence.

### Prayers

Bountiful God, you are always more ready to give than we are to receive; you trust us more than we trust ourselves. Plant in our hearts a little seed of confidence so that we may go out and reap the harvest of joy already ripe and waiting.

Even when times look dark, help us to remember, we have your grace to feed us, and your Spirit to lead us, and your world that needs us.

We hold in your eternal Light those situations that run contrary to your will: anywhere that the few abuse their power to hold the many back, or destroy their homes, their nations, their ideals; we hold in your healing light those you have given us love and care for, all those we name in our hearts. Protect those who travel this holiday weekend, help us to cherish our freedoms, and remind us that independence is meaningless without interdependence on one another. We pray in the name of Jesus - Amen.

## Announcements

Welcome

Happy Interdependence Day

Communion Sunday

Berne pizza signup

Ice Cream social

Volunteer 7/15 10 a

7/16 1 pm, or 4 pm clean-up

Land acknowledgement

Thanks to all participating