

God's Conduits

a sermon based on

2 Kings 5:1-14 & Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

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A lot of times when people think of conduit, they think about that metal tubing on the wall that building codes require, but which serve protect otherwise exposed wires. But that's not my first thought. My first thought is giant reels of orange tubing that we used to lay in the ground when I worked for Illinois Bell. Yes, it could protect cables, but that wasn't the main reason we put it in the ground. We usually put in conduit in those places where we couldn't easily bury the wire. So instead of trying to bore a hole under a road or a creek to pull a wire through, if a conduit was already there all you had to do was tie your cable to the pull line that was already in there, pour in some lube and you'd get that cable right where you needed it to be. That's all conduit does. It doesn't convey phone signals. It doesn't conduct electricity (or at least it shouldn't), it's just there so that those other things can get through. On its own, it's not that special. Maybe that's why it's easy to dismiss.

In that passage from 2 Kings we heard about Naaman. He was the commander of the army for the king of Aram. He was an important guy; but he had leprosy. Which meant that people would treat him like a leper. Leprosy was contagious, people didn't want to get close or stayed away lest they too become afflicted. That would be hard no matter who you were, but maybe more difficult for such a prominent man.

Listen though to the story. First, a slave girl mentions to his wife that there is a prophet in Israel who could cure him. So Naaman goes to his king who sends him off with ten talents (about 750 pounds) of silver, six thousand shekels (more than 150 pounds) of gold, ten sets of garments and a letter for the king of Israel asking for permission to come to meet the prophet. (2 Kg 5:5) In today's money that silver was worth about \$160 thousand; the gold almost \$3.4 million. This guy really wanted a miracle.

That scared the king of Israel. Was this a trap? How could he cure this man's leprosy? But then Elisha, the prophet, says, send him to me. Naaman goes, and he's expecting to get his money's worth. Then the prophet doesn't even come out to greet him. Instead his servant comes out to give the command, "Go wash in the Jordan seven times" (2 Kg 5:10) What? I paid for a miracle. I expect a miracle and I expect something impressive. Right? Isn't that how they happen on TV? Somebody goes up to the stage in a wheelchair, people stand him up so that the healer can smack him on the head, and then whammy, the guy starts dancing. Where's the flair in going down to wash in the river. Naaman even says, "I could have washed myself in a river in Damascus." That is until his servant – the nobodies speak up. And the ask him, if the prophet had given you some great challenge, you would have done it, right? So why not do this simple thing? When he does he's healed.

It might be tempting to praise Elisha in this for providing Naaman with healing. But let's look again. A slave girl told him about the prophet. A servant gave him the instructions for healing, and his own servants had to convince him to take advantage of the opportunity to claim a blessing in the simple act of dipping himself in the Jordan seven times.

God used ordinary people and ordinary stuff to heal Naaman.

In the church, we often think about the big names: Peter, James and John, and Paul as the guys Jesus relied on. Then we're confronted with a Gospel lesson that tells us that Jesus selected seventy disciples to send out to share the good news, to heal people from their infirmities, and even to cast out demons. Think about that. He chose a bunch of regular disciples. That's important. He didn't choose them because they were special. He chose them because he trusted them to be faithful. So he told them to go out to the different towns, and if they were rejected, not to waste time trying to convince people that they were good guys, but to shake the dust from their feet and to move on. And if they were accepted to stay with the first person who welcomed them and to accept whatever food they were given. In other words, he told them to go out and meet new people, and if somebody welcomes you to be happy with that somebody and not to look for someone else who may have a nicer house and nicer guest room or who can feed you better food. Be content. Be faithful. Because you're there, God is going to do some wonderful things.

I think that's the word for us, today. God isn't calling us to be spectacular Christians. He's not necessarily calling us to be a spectacular church. What he is calling us to do is to meet people where they are, and to react with the same joy if the janitor or the CEO wants to know us more. And then to be happy with whatever that brings.

A lot of us spend a lot of time trying to win people over, don't we? In fact, if someone rejects us we might even want to pursue them more. Jesus says, "Don't waste your time." (Now I don't think that means he's given up on them.) Don't waste your time worrying about who doesn't like you or trying to impress them. You don't need to. He thinks you're impressive enough. You're made in the image of God. By your willingness to enjoy the company of whomever you encounter – by your willingness to be faithful – by your willingness to just be there and accept them – you become God's conduit. You don't have to do anything special. God will take care of that, and he might even do it in some pretty ordinary ways.

I always find it ironic that the seventy are successful until Jesus goes up the mountain of Transfiguration. It's when he comes down that he's confronted by the man whose son they can't heal. What's his reply? "This kind only comes out by prayer and fasting." (Mt 17:21) In other words, it wasn't you that did the healing it was God working through you.

You are God's conduits. Jesus says that those who accept you, accept him; and those who reject you, reject him. (Lk 10:16) You might not feel important. You might not think just chatting with someone in the hair salon, the bowling alley or even the tavern is a particular holy thing, but those are exactly the moments when God can use you best. Because you're there, he has a way to touch a life – to offer healing – to bring peace and joy. That's pretty powerful stuff. It doesn't depend on you being special or even thinking that you're special. It happens because God loves you, and his love flows through you.

On the other hand, if you've been waiting for some special miracle, thinking that you just need to find the right thing to do or say to get it done, rethink that. Instead, take a moment to look around and see where God has been reaching out for you in ordinary people and in ordinary ways. Quit trying to impress others and accept those who accept you for who you are – because that's how God loves you.

I'm going to sum this up this way. Conduits are useful by where they are – but they have to be somewhere. Be somewhere – be with people who want you there and don't waste your energy on those who don't, so that your endeavor of living faithfully and righteously might be the channel by which lives are transformed – maybe even your own when you discover God's blessing for you through some ordinary but faithful soul. AMEN.