

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Mar 24th 2014

“When shall I go and behold the face of God?” (Psalm 42:3)

Naaman, a military commander, was used to giving orders. The slave girl, who had been captured by his army, showed kindness toward her captor. “Go visit the prophet of my people. He can help you.” This time the commander listened. His chariots were piled with silver, gold, and fine garments, but Elisha did not bother with treasure. He sent Naaman to plunge into the River Jordan seven times. Only with the coaxing of his servants did Naaman reluctantly take the plunge.

To be healed, Naaman had to listen to those beneath him. He bared his flesh like a baby. With his affliction no longer hidden, Naaman followed the prophet’s direction and plunged into a muddy river. Naaman’s search for healing took him down from his lofty position. In his great need he left home and came to do what was unthinkable: he humbled himself in the sight of all. Healed of his disease, Naaman returned to give thanks and confess that Elisha’s God was true.

Often we long for signs. After all, we live in the age of science; without evidence or proof what good are hopeful words? Like the motto on the Missouri license plate, we are the “show me” people. Where do I find the face of God? Where is the sign that shows me faith is real?

At a distance we follow life in a casual way. Only after we put a face on the words, do we hasten to understand and seek truth. Afghanistan was far away until the young man from down the street who went to school with our son was killed in the war. Gay people were just another group until a daughter confides in her parents. The debates over immigration are unending until a man we know is picked up while driving his grandchildren to school and held in detention. Science esteems the universal, but it is the particular that rouses us from lethargy to enter more deeply into the complex realities of the world.

Jesus’ neighbors were enraged when he suggested that they did not know him. Of course, they knew the child who had grown up in their midst. Like the Nazarenes we are often captive to the familiar. We long for signs but miss what is right before us. If only we would sink lower to see like a child. Then when we pause before sleep to examine the day, we might be surprised by God’s face.

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