

21. March 2022

God acts in His own way

2 Kgs 5:1-15a

Naaman, army commander to the king of Aram, was a man who enjoyed his master's respect and favour, since through him Yahweh had granted victory to the Aramaeans. But the man suffered from a virulent skin-disease. Now, on one of their raids into Israelite territory, the Aramaeans had carried off a little girl, who became a servant of Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, 'If only my master would approach the prophet of Samaria! He would cure him of his skin-disease.' Naaman went and told his master. 'This and this', he reported, 'is what the girl from Israel has said.' 'Go by all means,' said the king of Aram, 'I shall send a letter to the king of Israel.' So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten festal robes. He presented the letter to the king of Israel. It read, 'With this letter, I am sending my servant Naaman to you for you to cure him of his skin-disease.' When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes. 'Am I a god to give death and life,' he said, 'for him to send a man to me and ask me to cure him of his skin-disease? Listen to this and take note of it and see how he intends to pick a quarrel with me.' When Elisha heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent word to the king, 'Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, and he will find there is a prophet in Israel.' So Naaman came with his team and chariot and drew up at the door of Elisha's house. And Elisha sent him a messenger to say, 'Go and bathe seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will become clean once more.' But Naaman was indignant and went off, saying, 'Here was I, thinking he would be sure to come out to me, and stand there, and call on the name of Yahweh his God, and wave his hand over the spot and cure the part that was diseased. Surely, Abana and Parpar, the rivers of Damascus, are better than any water in Israel? Could I not bathe in them and become clean?' And he turned round and went off in a rage. But his servants approached him and said, 'Father, if the prophet had asked you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? All the more reason, then, when he says to you, "Bathe, and you will become clean." 'So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, as Elisha had told him to do. And his flesh became clean once more like the flesh of a little child. Returning to Elisha with his whole escort, he went in and, presenting himself, said, 'Now I know that there is no God anywhere on earth except in Israel. Now, please, accept a present from your servant.'

The words of the prophet must be followed, because God is with him. Naaman, who was sick with leprosy, had to learn this lesson. But it was his servants who helped him to understand, because Elisha's actions did not correspond to what he had imagined. Naaman reacted with disgust to the indication that he should dive seven times in the Jordan, which was by no means a mighty river. Were there not better waters in Damascus? He was about to walk away in anger, but his servants reassured him and gave him the right advice: The prophet must be listened to... And then Naaman experienced the miracle of his healing and drew the right conclusion: *"Now I know that there is no God anywhere on earth except in Israel"*. Let us remember that this was precisely the intention of the prophet Elisha: *"Let him come to me, and he will find there is a prophet in Israel."*

Again and again it happens like this: God's action and his intentions meet with resistance that comes from our own ideas. When things do not come to pass as we imagine them, we may even react with a rejection of God and his plans, as can be seen in Naaman's anger.

This could also be one of the primary reasons that hinder spiritual advancement. Our own ideas can become so ingrained that they become a kind of idol, because they have become allied with certain fields of the soul, so to speak.

Let us look closely at the example of Naaman, so that we too may learn the lesson.

It was legitimate for Naaman to seek healing from the prophet of Israel, as his Jewish slave girl had advised him. What was not legitimate was to imagine beforehand how this healing should happen. His angry reaction indicates that he was bound by his own ideas.

So, in Naaman's case, the legitimate hope of a healing (which he could not have achieved by his own means) had been mixed with a false and overly emotional expectation. In that sense, his reaction was somewhat predictable.

This can be an important lesson for us too. Again and again we can turn to the Lord for this or that. But, at the same time, we must restrain our imagination, which pretends to tell us how the Lord should fulfil our requests. Otherwise, so-called 'chimeras', as the Desert Fathers called those fantasies and thoughts that deceive us, will enter into us.

We could say that Naaman's chimera was to imagine how the prophet would proceed to work his healing: *"Here was I, thinking he would be sure to come out to me, and stand there, and call on the name of Yabweb his God, and wave his hand over the spot and cure the part that was diseased!"*

If we do not restrain our fantasy, which easily allies itself with our desires, we will be creating on our own a reality that will often not correspond to God's real action. Then we will not be able to perceive and recognise how God works; we remain trapped in our illusion.

So let us bring our requests before God with great confidence, but let us leave the 'how' of the fulfilment of our requests in his hands, and let us be attentive to God's action. And let us not forget to thank him when he has heard our request!