

## Recover Each Morning -- Epiphany 6B

A little wordplay might help in understanding what God is trying to have us know in the scriptures we've heard today. Starting with the word 'cover,' we can take a journey that makes good and useful sense of these seemingly very different texts.

We think of our lives from beginning to end and beyond, as under the care of a loving God: God is our cover. Whatever common use of the word gets us to respond best doesn't matter so much as realizing, admitting and accepting that **God is it**. When we snuggle into our beds, we get under the covers. When it starts to rain, we run for cover. When we try something risky, especially in conflict with enemies or adversaries, we want someone to cover us, give us some cover, cover our...backs. When we want to learn about something, our teachers cover the material for us. The list goes on and on. It's warmth, safety, assurance and the ability to deal with the situation at hand, whether threat, opportunity or simply the business of a normal day. And so, if my life is a book, God is its cover. As we used to sing back home, "Got the you and me sister, in his hands, he got the whole world in his hands."

What can and does happen is that we leave this truth, this coveredness behind and venture out into the world in search of greater, more significant truths...so we think. Fame, fortune, excitement, power, all of these things seem greater than the simple truth, that God has already covered us, covered all our bets. In today's story, the great general Naaman is famous, rich, exciting and powerful. So are the athletes of whom Paul speaks. And the leper Jesus heals is understandably far too excited not to tell everyone what has happened to him. But all his wealth doesn't help Naaman conquer his illness, and the fame Paul's

athletes pursue is, at best fleeting. The leper doesn't function as an example of anything, he just gets Jesus in a lot of trouble. All three of these become, in a godly uncovered. But it is entirely normal and legitimate. They have their own free will, and so do we. We have to get out of bed in the morning, leave our covers and take some risks in order to survive and flourish and get stuff done. What gets dis-covered in this process are the fears that trick us into leaving God behind, like our old security blankets. Our eyes become dazzled and our hearts are set on fire by what we think is greater than God's cover. As if.

We seek fame because we fear insignificance; we seek fortune because we fear insufficiency; we seek excitement because we fear boredom; we seek power because we fear weakness. All of these are natural urges; nobody wants to live anonymously in obscurity, poverty, dullness and subjugation. But without an awareness of God's surrounding presence, God's "cover," there is no way for us to tell when enough is enough. With fear running our lives, our instincts run rampant and we, as a famous man once said, "balk at investigating them," unless and until they get us into real trouble. These fears are the enemies that will kill us if we ignore them. Just look at the paper and read about poor old Brian wanting heroism to go along with his fame and fortune. It is easier to fight off hordes of godless invaders coming over the hill to burn our homes, than it is to admit the destructive power of what we allow to rampage within us and get us to live uncovered lives.

God can, and will help: I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up, and did not let my foes rejoice over me. I cried to you for help, and you have healed me. You brought up my soul from Sheol, (aka "h.e.double hockey sticks") restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit. Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to God's holy

name. For his anger (ever notice how when we screw up, we say God is angry with us?) his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning. As for me, I said in my prosperity, "I shall never be moved." (And when all is well, we think it's only what we deserve.) By your favor, O Lord, you had established me as a strong mountain; (But when) you hid your face; I was dismayed. To you, O Lord, I cried, and to the Lord I made supplication.

So this last image is what's going on in Namaan's story. He demands healing and tries to exercise his fame and fortune and power to force himself upon those whose help he needs. But none of that does him any good. It is only when he listens to a slave girl, the most marginal creature in his society, one over whom he has direct power and control, that he gets the help he needs. She, in turn sends him to the most marginal person in the whole country of Israel, a crazy Samaritan prophet. It's only when Namaan swallows his pride and follows precisely the seemingly random instructions of this utterly insignificant peon, who says to go swimming seven times, that Namaan gets his medicine and is healed immediately! What he gets is recovery, recovery of what still is that always was, in himself and his longing for spiritual nurture.

It is no accident that we use the word recovery to signify healing. It is especially apt in the world of addiction treatment where recovery is the whole game. Folks who have not experienced the horrors of addiction personally, or in a loved one, or who are experiencing themselves it but don't know that's what it is, often look puzzled or dismissive at the idea of recovery. But once the heart is opened and the process begins, no other word works. Briefly, the big lie that addictions engender is that the addict can somehow re-experience a

perfect feeling they once had, the feeling of utter liberation from fear. Of course this never happens; addicts are looking for something that never satisfied them in the first place – it just felt like it for a second or two. Yet, as the saying goes, addicts will fight to the death for the right to stay sick. It is only when they start to get back in touch with what truly is that always was, that true re-recovery begins.

We often wonder why Jesus so frequently tells people to keep his miracles a secret. As precious as Jesus' divinity is to us as Christians today, we have to set that preciousness aside to understand his motivation. What Jesus really wants us to do is take our recovery from God alone. If we run through the streets pointing at a certain man and shouting, "There! There! That fellow does the healing!" then when that fellow leaves town, we will be left uncovered and once more desperate. But if we give the credit to God, who is not a personality but a principle, we can never be left uncovered, we will never be spiritually naked. Even when physical disease or death arrive, the miracle of re-recovery can continue to take place within us and make us whole.

Saint Paul's surprisingly modern-sounding, and dramatic athletic training image, (remember, he was trying to inspire a bunch of hellenists, and they were into their sports), his image can help us see the same point. We stay in spiritual shape by continually recovering one truth: nothing else will save us and heal our souls except that which was and is and is to come, the love of God, as embodied in Jesus and living on in each of us. And though weeping may endure for the night, the encounter with God's endless healing love can, in thought, in word and indeed be each morning's joy; we are recovered.