

## Disappearing fracture-lines

2 Kings 5:1-14; Mark 1:40-45

A 10-year-old girl slipped and fell as she played in the pig pen on her parent's farm. Lifting herself up from the dirt she cradled her arm turning bruised and swollen. That afternoon her mother took her for an x-ray. "There's the fracture" said the radiographer pointing on the x-ray to the thin white crack-line cutting through the bone in her wrist. An open cast was applied, 'open' so to allow for the swelling, and they went home.

It was Sunday a few days later, and as usual, the girl went with her mother to Church. During Communion the mother took her daughter into the Lady Chapel, a room reserved for prayer, and together they knelt at the altar rail.

The chapel was dark, but warm, the glow of candle-light illuminating the space. Her mother put an arm around her waist, and the girl felt the weight of another's hand upon her shoulder. She looked around to find a few church friends had come in to pray for her. The girl felt a little uncertain about what was happening but with her mother there she allowed the moment to unfold and it was something a bit special.

A few days later the girl was taken back to hospital to have the open-cast removed and a full-sized one put on in its place. The radiographer re-x-rayed the girl's arm. Sitting in the waiting room, waiting to be seen, the girl's mother was called into the office. The new x-ray was lit-up on the screen and the radiographer told her that he could no longer find the fracture. The little white crack-line he saw a few days prior had disappeared. Dumbfounded, the doctor applied the cast anyway - but the little girl, curiously and carefully moving her wrist up and down, knew something was different – her broken wrist had been healed.

A miracle healing. Have you yourself experienced such a thing or know someone who has? Perhaps an account like that of the man with leprosy in our Gospel today. He called out to Jesus asking for healing and when Jesus touched him and commanded: "be made clean" our text says 'immediately' the man was healed. We have for sure heard stories of people today claiming miracle healings too, from addiction, cancer, pain. The account you recall may have involved the work of a "faith healer" or like the story I've just shared, perhaps it came about during a chapel visit with laying upon of hands and prayer. Whatever the story you recall, I can imagine you recall it with mixed feelings. With feelings of doubt, and of hope. Doubt that it is real, and hope that it could one day be real for you, or for someone you love.

We all long for a quick and glamorous version of healing. It is what we pray for especially when we are in a bad way. I've dared to ask Jesus for such a thing, for myself, and for others. It is a moment of vulnerability for us, of fear too, and of faith. Vulnerability, because its humbling to ask *anyone* for help, let alone God, and fear because hmmm it may not work, or perhaps that it will work! And faith, because like a person scourging through their wallet trying to find enough change to buy their hopeful child a lollipop at the counter, we too in our moment of asking for healing scourge through our being trying to find enough faith to convince God of our sincerity, hoping with all our might that we can do it. I don't know about you but for a lot of us I think we learn during times like this that as much as we say and believe our faith is big and strong, and can move mountains - that in reality, especially when we are vulnerable, it is often slippery, intangible, and impossible to grasp.

Scourging for faith, and feeling vulnerable and afraid seems the complete opposite of how Naaman, the Aramean felt about asking for healing. He expected a grand and glorious healing quick and marlaceous when he travelled from Aram to Israel with a full entourage of horses, and chariots, silver, gold, and fine clothing.

Naaman was a famous military hero who had won many battles, a powerful and popular man in the ancient Near East who expected a certain reception from the king of Israel and Israel's prophet Elisha: saying "I thought that for me the prophet would surely come out, and stand and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and would have waved his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy" (v. 11).

Maybe we are not looking for grandeur, for honour and glory, but we would like the same kind of quick and glamorous healing Naaman thought he deserved.

Unlike the man with leprosy in Marks Gospel, who despite Jesus commanding him not to, goes and tells anyone of the miracle - if Jesus were to gift us healing, I'd think we would be more than satisfied not to tell a soul for the rest of our lives, if it meant we could have the healing we so desire.

Naaman, as it turns out, did *not* get the reception he had planned for. Here he is standing outside Elisha's front door, having been sent there by people who otherwise did not know what to do with him, and he has arrived there dragging his entourage with him like a heavy suitcase full of stuff he doesn't need, only to be meet at the door, not by Elisha, but by a unknown messenger who hands him a prescription, without consultation I might add, to go and bathe in the dirty river Jordan seven times. Naaman came expecting the best treatment only to be sent away with nothing more than a measly 10 pack of Panadol. He expected more. Why come to Israel if all he had to do was bathe?

We all want to be cured by the wave of a hand over the spot of affliction. We all want to be able to cure like this, but more often than not the long road to healing is neither quick nor glamorous; it can be as tedious as bathing in the dirty river Jordan seven times.

When it comes to healing God is not interested in command and control, politics, popularity, wealth, chosen people, or showing off - God's care rather often comes through quieter means. With Naaman, God's particular care came to this non-Israelite through the wise but anonymous voices of the lowly, and the simple act of a healing bath. They came through the suggestion of a young slave girl "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy," the instructions of a lowly prophet "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times," the encouragement of servants "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, you would have done it. Why refuse to do the required action just because it is easier?" and the complete washing in the Jordan.

Jesus heals – working hard to make little white crack-lines disappear from the bones of our being. We may never experience a big-ol miraculous healing, but non-the-less Jesus *will* heal us along life's road and ultimately forever at the end of time. We know this. We can also be more aware of it, of God's particular care for us that comes through the lowly. A quiet visit to the Lady Chapel for prayer, the hand of a friend resting upon your shoulder, a visit from a friend, watching children play, weeding the garden, being touched through the words of a hymn, appreciating rain, or a beautiful sunrise, marvelling at God's providence for the birds, and for flowers, giving and receiving Communion. All these, and much much more, may be healing moments for us.

We would like to be in control but, fortunately for Naaman and all of us, our journey towards wholeness is in God's hands, but we might become more aware of the unfolding this in our lives, of God's particular care for each of us, and find there - peace.