



## **“The New Citizen”**

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### **Scripture (NRSV):**

#### **2 Kings 5:1-14**

5 Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy.<sup>[a]</sup> 2 Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman’s wife. 3 She said to her mistress, “If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.”<sup>[b]</sup> 4 So Naaman<sup>[c]</sup> went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. 5 And the king of Aram said, “Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel.”

He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. 6 He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, “When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy.”<sup>[d]</sup> 7 When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, “Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?<sup>[e]</sup> Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me.”

8 But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, “Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel.” 9 So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha’s house. 10 Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, “Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean.” 11 But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, “I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand

over the spot, and cure the leprosy!<sup>[f]</sup> <sup>12</sup> Are not Abana<sup>[g]</sup> and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?” He turned and went away in a rage. <sup>13</sup> But his servants approached and said to him, “Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, ‘Wash, and be clean?’” <sup>14</sup> So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

## **Sermon:**

The sermon title, set several weeks ago, is “The New Citizen.” I figured that at the end of the Independence Day weekend, we would have a lot of political and citizenship thoughts in our consciousness. And maybe some questions and comments, even beyond new WWII tanks on the lawn.

Then there’s this strange story from Second Kings; on the surface is a military man being healed. Next down, what are his motivations and who does the healing? And, who are the anonymous voices, or forces, pushing him to that happy conclusion? Also, what exactly is the healing process? The Jordan River may simply be delivering the placebo effect. Or, like our Soap Lake, there may be chemical healing powers. What is clearly stated is that it doesn’t come from political pronouncements. (Maybe we might have a leader who could learn about the limits of power from the biblical King of Israel?) It is a healing from God.

Let’s hold those questions while we look to other factors. We will start with those famous lines from the Declaration of Independence. “We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

Notice that Thomas Jefferson & Co. said all men, not just all Americans. (Yes, it was the later Constitution which enshrined slavery, and yes, we will take the word “men “ as

humankind.) The “by their Creator” part was a daring presumption that human rights were not bestowed by kings, but by the Creator. The word Creator possibly implying the creative force, not necessarily a person. (More about that later.)

Let’s go a bit farther into this relationship between ourselves and the Creator, and maybe to other relationships. Allegiance is one concept. We pledge allegiance “to the flag of the United States of America. And to the republic for which it stands, one nation, (under God), indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Allegiance derives from the word “liege” recognition of the duties owed by the underling to the king. Transfer that to the Flag, a symbol. Then to the Republic, a form of government. Then an indivisible nation. That possible refers to many states becoming one, but then suggests that unity could erase other boundaries between us. (That doesn’t seem to be happening lately.) Then it progresses to those two lofty goals: liberty and justice. They sound familiar and uncontroversial until, in modern times. We see inherent conflict between them.

Rev. Todd Eklof, the Unitarian Universalist minister in Spokane has recently been in the public eye in renaming them Freeequality. Total freedom might imply no internal or external limits on one’s own behavior. Complete equality could mean a limitation placed in such a way that no individual has any more opportunities than any other. Behind these two conflicting ideas lies much of our current civil discord. Issues of free speech and political correctness rage among us, especially among progressives.

So far I’ve danced around the concept of the Creator: God, Yahweh, the universal life source, etc. The focal point of theists vs a-theists. As much as we may laugh at the shortsightedness of the image of that old man with a beard in the sky, anthropomorphization holds a strong place in our tradition and thought. When we describe God as a person we automatically get inherent limitations.

A week ago, in preparing for this talk, I ran into a spiritual crisis by reading from the end of Leviticus. That's easy to have happen when reading that Old Testament book. The second to last chapter has God speaking: "If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, then I will give you: rain, crops, peace, the means to kill your enemies, etc. If you do not "I will appoint terror, corruption, fever, enemies, plagues, etc." Pretty chilling, huh? What is this about? What kind of jerk so desperately needs your praise that he, and I mean he, aims for this total control?

What if we drop this image of God and instead expand to Beneficent Creator? Then we could interpret Leviticus that by living within the grand, beneficial plan of the Creator, then good can ensue. If we turn our backs on divine creation, then the opposite may happen. This would be a plea for a state of nature.

Let's transfer the idea of allegiance, to our relationship with this creator. Now we can listen to, obey, and especially participate with our Creator in the ongoing act of creation. We are our Creator's hands, the implementing force. .

And, if we expanded the idea and role of the Creator, we can do the same for the Created. We can extend the beneficence we experience to our family, then outward our community and yes, our country. That indivisible nation of freedom and justice for all.

Beyond our country, we extend to the world. We needn't ask God to bless America. The blessing is already upon us, and to everyone in the world. We might more ask God to enlighten us, to grant us wisdom and understanding. To ask for the ability to respond to the Creator by our actions.

Then we might have a better understanding of our place in the universe, and even our purpose in life. That is the new citizenship open to us.