

Go and Wash

29 February • Monday of the Third Week in Lent

2 Kings 5:1-15

¹Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favour, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valour, but he was a leper. ²Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife. ³She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." ⁴So Naaman went in and told his lord, "Thus and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel." ⁵And the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel."

So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. ⁶And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy." ⁷And when the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me."

⁸But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel." ⁹So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha's house. ¹⁰And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean." ¹¹But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, "Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the LORD his God, and wave

his hand over the place and cure the leper. ¹²Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. ¹³But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" ¹⁴So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

¹⁵Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him. And he said, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant."

Meditation

Naaman was at the peak of his military career, a well-decorated commander of the army of the king of Syria. He was probably second only to the king of Syria (2 Kgs 5:18) who favoured him highly. He was greatly honoured and revered by his people. He was the only Gentile who was given the title "a mighty man of valour" the same title that was given to Gideon (Judg 6:12), Jephthah (Judg 11:1), David (1 Sam 16:18), Jeroboam (1 Kgs 11:28) and Eliada (2 Chr 17:17). Through him, the Lord gave Syria many victories!

Beneath Naaman's armour, leprosy was slowly spreading in his body. While his people celebrated every victory he won, he was agonising with great pain when his perspirations contacted his leprous lesion in his body. Leprosy is a highly contagious disease in ancient times, thus he had to keep himself away from people! Unknown to all his fans, Naaman was fighting a losing battle in the

dark! He knew his days were numbered before leprosy claimed full victory over his life!

A servant girl who was taken captive from Israel became the carrier of good news to Naaman, “The prophet in Samaria is able to cure his leprosy!” Why should Naaman listen to her? Under such adverse situation, this girl excelled and earned the trust of her master and mistress.

Naaman went on his way to Samaria. He was directed to prophet Elisha who refused to meet him but gave him a simple prescription through a messenger: “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times...” He was expecting Elisha to perform a ritual over him, but instead he received a DIY instruction. Naaman was disappointed, angry and turned away. However, he was blessed with good and faithful subordinates who did not add fuel to his anger nor instigate him to teach Elisha a lesson. These clear minded subordinates heard words of promise: “Wash, and be clean.” Naaman did – he was completely healed of leprosy!

Leprous darkness fell as shadows as a new day dawned over Naaman, and he declared, “Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel!”

Prayer

Father, You spoke to Naaman through his servant girl, through his subordinates and through Elisha. Give me compassion, courage and boldness to speak words of encouragement to those who are struggling and suffering in pain, and to point them to You, their only source of hope and healing. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Action

Compassion and care for people require courage and boldness to act. Naaman's servant girl cared so much for him that she courageously pointed Naaman to Elisha, a prophet in Israel who was Syria's enemy. When Naaman was disappointed and angry with Elisha, his subordinates were bold enough to ask him to heed Elisha's advice. We need compassion with courage and boldness to act.

Though Naaman was a mighty general, he exhibited humility and self-control. When he was angry with Elisha, he did not turn against him but he simply turned away and he was willing to listen to the counsel of his servants. "Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city" (Prov 16:32). To be good leaders we need to possess humility, self-control, and clear mind to process what we hear before we act.

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What Is Your Greatest Fear?

1 March • Tuesday of the Third Week in Lent

Exodus 14:10-18

¹⁰When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD. ¹¹They said to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? ¹²Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." ¹³And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. ¹⁴The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent."

¹⁵The LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. ¹⁶Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. ¹⁸And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gained glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."

Meditation

What terrifies you? We all have fears. What is your greatest fear? My greatest fear is the loss of control i.e. when I can't do what I want, when I want – and I have to depend on others. What is your greatest fear? Fears have a way of paralysing us – freezing us in our tracks.

That's why it was ironical when Moses told the people to "stand firm." The people were already "frozen" by what they saw. Of course Moses did not mean that literally, but fear often has that effect on us.

Yet our fears need not be all bad, for at least two reasons. Firstly, our fears need not be bad if they drive us to GOD. In this case, at least the Israelites "cried out to the LORD." Your fears can either freeze you or it can force you to GOD. Whatever drives you to GOD can't be all that bad. Your fears can be good for you - it reminds us that we need help and hopefully drive us to the LORD. Then, our fears need not be all bad because what terrifies us may become opportunities for GOD to display His splendour.

Here what was intended by their enemies to be their burial ground - was turned by the LORD into a doorway of deliverance. So mighty was the deliverance that the Israelites would henceforth refer to this as their definitive moment. The crossing - was a prefigurement of a greater deliverance to come - the Cross. That is now our definitive moment. For in it, the LORD took our greatest fear - of death - and turned that into His greatest deliverance! What is your greatest fear? May it drive you to the LORD and may you witness His mighty deliverance this season.

Prayer

Dear Father, You know what holds me back. I confess my fears to You. I let these fears drive me to You. I cry out to You. Help me see beyond the fears, to see You, my loving Father, whose love is far greater, larger, stronger and truer. Deliver me from my fears. Free my heart to Your love. For I ask all these in Jesus' name, amen.

Action

List down the fears that freeze you. Bring them one by one before the LORD. Confront your fears with His loving Presence.

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Steadfast Anchor of the Soul

2 March • Wednesday of the Third Week in Lent

Hebrews 6:13-19

¹³For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, ¹⁴saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." ¹⁵And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. ¹⁶For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. ¹⁷So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, ¹⁸so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. ¹⁹We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain,

Meditation

Life on earth is unpredictable. No matter how well we have prepared for our future, not every plan will succeed the way we had hoped life would turn out. Part of the reasons for the unpredictable nature of life is because we have to work with all kinds of people in our network of relationships and deal with external factors beyond our control. Fortunately for us, in the main, most of the people we relate to are decent people and they are the ones who can be trusted and we freely entrust ourselves to them. When we get married, we trust the persons we married. This trust is sealed with an exchange of vows before God and the company of witnesses. When we have excess funds which we have

to put away for rainy days, we deposit the funds with a bank or invest with well-regarded financial institutions. We trust that the bank and brokers will keep our funds safe and release the funds when we need them. We trust our government to deliver the basic services by providing schools, health-care, adequate transport system, security and housing.

Ordinarily in good times, we do not have many reasons to question the trust which we have placed on others. Looking at Singapore in the last 50 years, for example, we have been fortunate to be blessed with relative peace and social harmony. Except for those who are chronically poor and those caught in serious illness, life has generally been good.

But circumstances can change and trust can be betrayed. Sometimes this happens in the closest of relationship when a spouse decides to break the marriage vows. The established bank may betray our trust when it pursues risky business and cut deals which benefit the executives, bankrupt the bank and impoverish the depositors. Or when the government of the day is made up of politicians who are bent on fattening their personal coffers than to manage the state wealth for the benefit of the citizens. Or when different interest groups in a country decide to push their own agenda instead of serving the broader common good, even if their action might contribute to racial mistrust and ignite civil unrest. The sad truth is that the picture sketched here is not unreal. Such betrayal of trusts have happened all over the world, fuelled primarily by human sinful nature. If we were to look only at what is happening in our troubled world, instead of living in hope, we may end up in despair.

But in today's text, we are assured that even if we cannot place our complete trust in people and institutions, we can always trust God completely. He promised to bless Abraham and his descendants. He kept His promise and we are the heirs of the fulfilment of this promise. Humanly speaking there might have been occasions when Abraham might be wondering how God was going to bless him and his descendants when he did not have any child of his own. We must not forget that he had to wait for 25 long years after the promise was first given before Isaac was born. Thankfully, when God promised, He keeps His promise despite occasions when we may wonder if God remembers His promise at all.

The example of Abraham's faith in God and walk with God, and how God kept His promise to Abraham is a lesson for us to remain faithful to God, even in times when God seems so far away, because we know He can be trusted when all else fails.

There is hope in God who keeps His promise.

Prayer

Teach us Lord to trust in You, especially when things are working out well and we have been blessed. When we are tempted to look only to the people, things and powers of this world for support and security, remind us that the only one who offers real hope and who deserves our complete trust is You. Amen.

Action

Recall or look up some hymns which carry the theme of hope and trust. Sing the hymns with Christian friends

and share how the hymns might have spoken to you.

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I Am the Bread of Life

3 March • Thursday of the Third Week in Lent

John 6:35-40

³⁵Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ³⁶But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

Meditation

Many of us are familiar with the saying, "You are what you eat". We not only need enough food for energy but the right kind of food to grow healthily and live well. Even in times of relative abundance, people fall sick and die from poor food choices, whether for economic or gastronomic reasons.

This is even truer in our spiritual life. Jesus attracted a large crowd after feeding the 5,000 (Jn 6). But He told them they will not be satisfied by the physical food alone, echoing the prophet Haggai: "You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill." (Hag 1:6)

They needed another kind of food for the soul which

Jesus called the “bread of life”, nourishment that satisfies man’s hunger for purpose in life, meaning for our suffering, strength in times of adversity, and hope in times of desolation.

This bread, Jesus said, is not found in any philosophy or moral code, but in a living relationship with Himself: “I am the bread of life”.

That is why He came to us: that we might come to Him, believe in Him, be healed, refreshed, strengthened, instructed and inspired to follow Him. No one who comes to Him will go away empty-handed but all will be deeply satisfied.

Are you surrounded by material abundance and starving spiritually? How are you feeding that hunger? If it’s only with inspirational slogans, religious entertainment, popular psychology and conventional wisdom that “makes sense”, are you missing Jesus, the “bread of life” Himself?

Today, let us choose the bread that truly satisfies. Feast on this bread by communing deeply with Jesus in Word, prayer and sacrament, and let His life energise every fibre of your being as you serve this bread to others.

Prayer

Dear God our Father, You have created us so that we will always be hungry, thirsty and never finding rest until we are found in You. Help us to reject the counterfeits of this world, and relish joyfully the true bread of life that comes from heaven, Jesus Christ Your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Action

Keep a daily appointment to meet Jesus in Word and prayer. Pause during Holy Communion in church to appreciate deeply and reverently His gift of life, forgiveness and healing. Talk to Jesus in your daily life – as the first instinct, not the last resort.

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We Walk by Faith Not by Sight

4 March • Friday of the Third Week in Lent

2 Corinthians 5:6-15

⁶So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

¹¹Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. ¹²We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. ¹³For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Meditation

I like this meaningful quote, “God didn’t promise days without pain, laughter without sorrow, or sun without rain, but He did promise strength for the day, comfort for the tears, and light for the way. If God brings us to it, He will bring us through it.” Many a time when we encountered difficulties in life, we looked at them by sight and felt desperate, hopeless and sorrowful. But the Scripture today encourages us not to look at those

earthly matters by our sight. Rather, we should 'walk by faith'.

The word 'walk' denotes the idea of Christian living, and such daily conduct is built 'by faith'. The phrase 'by faith' is a highly debatable concept. Is it referring to 'belief, the inner dispositions against "work"', 'faithfulness in keeping God's promise', or 'relying on the content to which we believe in'? With Ralph Martin, the famous New Testament scholar, the third option, that is, 'the body or the substance of our belief' is my choice for this devotional meditation. In Paul's words, such 'faith' can be embellished by the following elements with the usual Pauline metaphors:

Even though our bodies (tents) will be destroyed one day, we will have new and immortal bodies (new building) given by God (2 Cor 5:1-4);

We desire to be with the Lord than to stay in our present state but far from the Lord (at home) (2 Cor 5:8);

There will be a judgement for all of us one day (2 Cor 5:10);

Since Jesus Christ has died for us in love, let us live for Him and for others (2 Cor 5:13-15).

As we are meditating on the written words, let us behold Christ the revealed Word of God, and walk in accordance with what we are taught and what we believe in. Christ is our Lord, and we are His followers, and so let us walk with Him.

Prayer

Lord, since we have believed in this new hope, let us have the desire to be with You more than just at home in

the body. Let us share with others our 'hidden treasure' that You put in our heart. Amen.

Action

Look at your mortal body. Look at all the earthly possessions that you have, and then gaze at the Crucified One. All these things shall become shadowy in the light of Christ our Lord. Then show to others that 'I no longer live for myself, but for Him who died and was raised for me'.

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They Shall All Know Me

5 March • Saturday of the Third Week in Lent

Hebrews 8:8-13

⁸For he finds fault with them when he says:

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord,
when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah,

⁹not like the covenant that I made with their fathers
on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out
of the land of Egypt.

For they did not continue in my covenant,
and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.

¹⁰For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel
after those days, declares the Lord:

I will put my laws into their minds,
and write them on their hearts,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.

¹¹And they shall not teach, each one his neighbour
and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord’,
for they shall all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest.

¹²For I will be merciful towards their iniquities,
and I will remember their sins no more.”

¹³In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete.
And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to
vanish away.

Meditation

The book of Jeremiah tells us that God’s people, from
the youngest to the oldest, the least to the greatest, shall

know God under the new covenant. Such knowledge does not come literally from the law, “You shall know the Lord”, which is knowing God only at a superficial level. On the contrary, it is a personal encounter with Him.

The Pharisees tried to know God by following the law. They did not have a personal encounter with God and His Word. Instead, they took pride in criticising the behaviours of others. For example, they criticised Jesus’ disciples for not washing their hands, not observing the Sabbath, and so on. They placed great importance on the text and not the purpose which the law was given, therefore they never knew God.

Even though they had an outward form of godliness, gave tithes, prayed regularly, performed religious rituals, listened to numerous teachings, and even wore the law on their foreheads, yet they never knew God from His Word. If they had known God, they would not have persecuted Jesus who was sent by God. They were not living consistently in accordance to the Word of God.

The author of the book of Hebrews showed us the difference between the old and the new covenant with reference from the book of Jeremiah. The new covenant promised us that God’s people will know Him.

Reflection: A personal encounter with God means that every believer will truly know God in the spirit.

Prayer

Our glorious Father! Fill us with Your Spirit of wisdom and understanding, so that we will know You and have

a personal encounter with You.

Action

Listen to the Word of God with a prayerful heart.

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I Am the Light of the World

6 March • Fourth Sunday in Lent

John 8:12-20

¹²Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” ¹³So the Pharisees said to him, “You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.” ¹⁴Jesus answered, “Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. ¹⁵You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. ¹⁶Yet even if I do judge, my judgement is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. ¹⁷In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. ¹⁸I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.” ¹⁹They said to him therefore, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” ²⁰These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

Meditation

Why would Jesus declare that, “I am the light of the world (v12)” when God has already declared, “Let there be light,” in Genesis 1? The declaration reminds us that there exist other forms of darkness within the cosmic, global, organisational, or individual dimensions. In such darkness, we can lose many things: vision, hope, direction, purpose, jobs, relationships, even our identity.

Just as the Pharisees ignored Jesus’ declaration, focusing instead on legal technicalities and the validity

of His testimony (vv13, 19), we can miss and ignore the Light. Perhaps darkness has become a comfort zone. Just as prisoners who have been kept in a dark cell cringe from light that enters through open doors, one may choose to avoid the Light to hide unsightly things: shame, lies, indulgences, idols, and/or ungodly motives.

The good news is that darkness cannot hide us from God! He who knows His own origin and destination (v14) lights our path, giving us hope, direction, purpose, and life. “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness can never extinguish it” (Jn 1:5). Therefore, we do not need to fumble, stumble, and fall any more.

Jesus promised to those at the temple that “Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness...” (v12)

Let us follow the Light out of our:
dark tunnel (“tunnel vision”);
slavery from addiction or bad habits;
wilderness (state of being lost); and
troubles and the snares of temptations.

Follow the Light into your “Promised Land” – to hope, to life, to glory!

Prayer

Pray for the Lord to search your heart (Ps 139:23-24). Welcome Lord Jesus as Light of the world to shine into your life, family, and all that you are involved in.

Pray that He will dispel all darkness, grant you spiritual illumination, and determination to follow Him.

Action

Reflect and list any “dark” areas that you are resistant or hesitant to let His Light shine into.

Commit to declare Jesus as the Light of your world, especially over these “dark areas”, for the next seven days.

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