

Oatmeal. Love it or hate it, it's that warm, gooey, breakfast paste that Mom used to make on a cold winter morning before you shuffled off to school. The stuff that sticks to your ribs and stays with you for most of the afternoon, like wet plaster on a lathe. Some of you may remember those days. And if Mom was in a good mood, you might have even received brown sugar to sprinkle over the oatmeal, and she might have also let you have a spoonful of vanilla extract to mix in with it. Breakfast was an ordeal back in those days.

Well...not any more. Kellogg and other companies introduced breakfast cereals as an alternative to cooked grains like oatmeal. Of course, you had to sit down at the table, pour the cereal into the bowl, add milk, grab a spoon and eat - and soon that seemed like too much to do. So the American public opted for toaster food like Pop Tarts. But you have to wait for the toaster to warm them up, so we then went to granola bars.

If it takes time to peel, boil and mash potatoes for dinner, we might choose instant instead. A box of powdered potatoes was once the very measure of convenience. Pour out a cup, add water, stir till smooth, stick it in the microwave, heat, then eat. And even that is no longer quick enough. Today's potato solution comes pre-mashed and packed in plastic containers. Simply nuke 'em for a couple minutes, then serve.

Easy as pie. But no one bakes pies anymore, because baking takes too long, so we purchase assembly-line pretty-good pies, frozen stiff, just heat and eat. We nuke instant spaghetti with instant sauce for an instant lunch. And for the kids, it's nukeable mac 'n' cheese, as if boiling pasta is all just too much of an effort. Hamburger Helper, was once mother's little helper in an instant world when dinner took 20 minutes to make: mush together burger and a special mix, bake and voilà!, dinner for four. Forget that. It takes too long. Now mothers can buy "Create-a-Meal" in a zippy plastic bag containing an entire meal for the entire family - meat and veggies included. Just unload it, nuke it and voila! - dinner for four in four minutes. Toss the bag when done.

Save a minute here, hoard an hour there, and life gets busier. We're all busy. Too busy to wait. Even for God. We want instant everything. One of our deepest desires is to

have everything in our lives happen precisely when we want it to, at the very moment of our desire, hope, or need. If we're dirty, we want to be clean. If we're hungry, we want to be fed. If we're poor, we want to be rich. If we're ignorant, we want to be wise. If we're ugly, we want to be beautiful. If we rent, we want to buy. If we're in debt, we want to be debt-free. If we're sick, we want to be cured.

We're afflicted with what some call the Acceleration Syndrome. We want all this now. Like Naaman in our first lesson this morning. Naaman didn't want to use more time. He wanted his healing done the quick way. He didn't want another task, another journey, another job. He expected his healing to be done and over with.

In our story we learn that after Naaman heard he had to spend time to go and dip in the muddy Jordan, he complained that there were cleaner and better rivers at home near Damascus. If all it took for healing was bathing seven times in a river, he could have stayed home, saved time, and swam there. Naaman was used to giving orders and getting an immediate response, not getting orders from nobodies. And like Naaman, we, too, have grown used to immediacy. Every little thing needs to be instantaneous to satisfy us, or so it would seem.

It isn't hard to imagine that Naaman was probably a very busy man. He was a successful general with things to do. He didn't have time for Elisha to sit about sending out a messenger with a detailed prescription for him to follow. Naaman expected, maybe, two minutes for this miracle. He expected instantaneous healing. He expected a one-stop miracle. Which begs the question, do we expect something similar? If not, what do we expect from God? No matter what time, no matter where we are: at home, in church, in school, at work. or on the road, we expect ease and speed. Perhaps this sermon should be shorter!!!

So we shop in super-stores, open 24/7, which have everything under the sun. We don't even take the time to say "Open 24 hours a day and seven days a week" any more. Saying 24/7 is short and quick and understood. In 24/7 super-stores, first we load our

grocery carts full with a week's worth of prepared food, then grab a car battery, pick up a hockey stick, find a blooming orchid and buy our undies. Or, better yet, why leave home at all, when the world-wide-wait (a place where nanoseconds seem like hours) can bring everything to our front door with 24-hour global shipping.

We have instant mashed potatoes, instant delivery, instant credit approval, instant messaging, all for our instant lives! So, is it any wonder that in lieu of the immediacy we are used to in our lives that perhaps people these days believe they need an instant God? Think about it, Just add prayer and voilà! Our hopes are met! You might say that Naaman in today's narrative wanted an instant God. But, as I'm sure we are most likely all we aware, some things aren't instant. God isn't instant. God doesn't do what we want when we want it. God does things the right way, according to his will, in his perfect timing, not always necessarily the quick way.

Naaman's idea of the Lord God is a God who does his bidding. At the very least he expects Elisha to do his bidding. Naaman was a great man who demanded quick and great results. He believed Elisha would come out, wave his miracle working prophet hand over his leprosy, pray a prayer, and be done with it. Unfortunately it doesn't happen that way, not for Naaman, not for us. We've constructed a world where time is saved, where instant is the norm. But God chooses his own time, and we are kidding ourselves if we even think that we can order the Lord to do whatever we ask of him.

Naaman's problem was that he was a successful general of a conquering army. People did what he told them to do, and most likely they did it quickly. He was smart, clever, able, rich, well-dressed, and rode around in the latest, updated chariot pulled with sleek horsepower. No one stood in his way. He was a somebody, who thought everybody, was a nobody. In fact, Elisha who was most likely a nobody, in his eyes didn't even get up out of his seat from his tea time, or step to his front door, to greet the general. No, instead Elisha just gave him instructions, and his task for Naaman is anything but instant. Elisha's assignment, his directions take some actual effort, travel, and time. If Naaman

wants healing, he'll have to put in some work. If he wants healing, it will be done in God's time, not Naaman's.

The lesson to be learned, our take home for today if you will, is that there is no accelerated, or instant spirituality. Although perhaps from time to time it may feel like we have received an immediate and instant answer to a prayer, especially if we have been praying hard enough. But, the apple, as we know, doesn't ripen in a day. You don't go to church, attend one service, one Bible study class, and expect to be spiritually whole. We may shave minutes and seconds off our daily lives using instant anything, but none of that changes God's time, or the length of our days on earth, or how God chooses to respond to us.

Naaman thought a return to complete health depended on his obtaining a cure for his leprous skin condition. Elisha's diagnosis and proposed treatment, however, reveal that Naaman needs more than his skin cleared in order to be restored to full health. What he needed most was his attitude adjusted. And it is only after Naaman finally lets someone else take the reins, only when he humbly submits himself to the plain, muddy waters of the Jordan, that he finally experiences the healing he longed for. And his journey toward health teaches us that to be healed and whole, to experience "a fulfilled existence" or "serenity," we must remain open to all the possibilities a life of faith might present to us.

Before the healing miracle in today's narrative, I think we need to remember that Naaman kept an open heart throughout most of the story. He began by being open to the suggestion of a Hebrew slave girl. He was open to seeking help from the enemy of his people, namely Israel. He was open to meeting with the Israelite king. He was even open to meeting with the prophet Elisha.

Although his pride resisted to the last moment, Naaman ultimately revealed himself to be open to the wise words and counsel of his servants. In response to their urging, he was at last open to the simplicity of the act required to give him healing

(bathing in the River Jordan). Through his obedience Naaman becomes fully open to the grace of God, of Israel's ONE God, enabling him to be healed.

Similarly, God answers our prayers, our hopes and our desperate needs on his schedule, not ours, which is eternal and beyond time, above time, and never a mere matter of seconds saved, or hours hoarded. God healed Naaman. God will heal us, too, and give us new life. Maybe not in the quick ways we want. Maybe not in the ways we expect when we come knocking on his door, demanding our needs be met. Maybe not even in the ways we think we need.

God does heal wounded hearts. God heals burdened souls, and sometimes bodies, or minds. God heals, God cares, and God loves. God loves us enough to have sent a carpenter, a shepherd, a savior, a High priest to teach us the right way to live in this world. Christ came to teach that real healing isn't a matter of perfect skin or good health. But rather, Christ came to teach all of us to build our lives around faith in him. And hopefully with the help of God's gracious Spirit our response is to believe in him! He leads us to eternal life in heaven, after all, where all our woes and hurries vanish, where there awaits a banquet of slow cooked goodness, and where time itself, saved or lost, is laughable. And thanks be to God for that. Amen.