

2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c *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. 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. She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in [Israel]! He would cure him of his leprosy."*

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? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me."

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." So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. 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." 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! Are not 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. 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'?" 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.

Luke 17:11-19 *On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."*

I've got to say that I was so taken with Coach Oda's talk from a week or so ago about the Greater and Lesser Selves. The Lesser Self that's full of ego and pride and the need to work hard so it can look good for those around it. And then the Greater Self that lowers the ego and pride boundaries so to still work hard, but instead to be motivated by care for others. The self that views our world as a web of relationships rather than a bunch of individuals striving for their best. Then I went to church and heard these two readings that we have for today...and it occurred to me that the Lesser Self has one constant response to life and the Greater Self has another. In every difficult situation, the Lesser Self says, "NO, BUT..." while the Greater Self responds, "Yes, AND" This morning we have two readings about all this. See if you can recognize the Lesser NO BUT and the GREATER YES AND in our readings.

So, the Greater and Lesser Selves are a natural part of human development. In fact, I'd say that it's important to grow through the Lesser Self into the Greater. Let's go way back to age TWO – the age when saying "NO" becomes a way for kids to gain power in life. The phrase "terrible twos" identifies how often two year old children oppose others by saying NO.

- "NO, BUT that's MINE!"

None of us is two anymore, but I'm sure we remember what "NO...BUT" feels like, and we should remember that while this is a necessary phrase for us to become powerful human beings...*it is NOT sufficient*. In other words, we should figure out how "NO, BUT" helps us stand on our own two feet...

- "No, I'm not going to take on that extra work if it's going to ruin my weekend, but I might be able to help in another way;"
- "No, it would be unethical to cut corners on this project, but maybe we could plan more efficiently..."
- "No, I'm not going to let you continue to bully me with that language; but if you speak to me with respect I will still talk to you."

So, NO BUT is good to learn as we grow, however it is *not good enough as a lifelong response*. And that's because something more is needed if we really want to transcend that lesser self that Coach Oda talked about and connect

with the GREATER SELF: connect with *others* and I'd say connect with *God's creative energy in the world*. For that, we need another response to life, and that response is "YES...AND!"

Anyone who has done any acting, will recognize this as the key response of successful IMPROV SCENE BUILDING. If you and your improvisation partner are given a setting from the audience, "You're in a swamp in Florida!" and your partner says, "Watch out for that alligator!" There's no better way to kill the momentum in that scene than to say, "No that's no alligator but do you want to get on this spaceship?" Your partner responds, "No, that's no spaceship, but do you want to DO something about that ALLIGATOR?" and then the scene ends with the two of you standing there, silent. Much better to say instead, "Yes! The Alligator! AND look, a spaceship...can I give you a ride?" Now you've got a scene that's going somewhere!

So back to our first reading this morning and Namaan the Commander of the Army of Arameans...At two years old, or perhaps 15, or 27, Namaan learned how to use his individual power to say "No, BUT...", though it seems that he never learned to respond to life in any other way. "No...if this foreign prophet is not going to come out, wave his hands over my skin disease and cure me immediately, I am NOT going to do what he says! BUT I will turn my back on this fool for telling me to go bathe in *this* Israelite river." This is the "NO...BUT I WILL" of one with power in Society, in a family, in a workplace – the General pulling rank on the Prophet! And because he can't say "YES, AND" to the prophet Elijah, Namaan stays trapped in his own narrow imagination and cut off from the way that God and God's prophet imagine his future.

And this is true until his servant steps in to say, "Hey, is it that too difficult boss? To bathe in the river? Why not say, 'Yes, I'll do that AND let's see what happens?'" And what do you know, "*he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, and he was clean.*" That's overturning the NO BUT of Personal Power with the Yes AND...of a Self connected to much larger sources of power, of healing strength.

Today's Gospel lesson offers another story of recovery, this time with Jesus traveling along the border of Samaria and Galilee, a region with mixed

populations of Israelites and Samaritans, two rivalrous peoples who were suspicious of, or even hostile to one another. 10 lepers approach Jesus and are healed, but unlike in the story of Naaman, it seems that these people expect Jesus to have more power than they do: "*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!*" Then on their way back home, they discover that he did have mercy on them and they think, *what now?* Do we *have* to turn around and walk a mile and a half back to Jesus? "NO, not today, BUT maybe some other time..."

If Jesus is creating an improv scene here, these 9 leave him hanging! This time they stop the scene NOT because they are surprised by their healing, but because they expect it all along! What's so bad about that? *Well, it still stops the scene if they do not respond... because with no "Yes, AND" the healing in the story stops with them.* THIS is the "NO...BUT" of those so defeated by life that they just tuck away the blessings that come their way and hide. Understandable, but not ideal.

And yet, one of an even lower social rank than these Israelite lepers, a *Samaritan* leper, reaches up and out...he *responds* to his recovery with, "YES!...AND I think I'll go thank the Prophet!" Now the scene can go on! "And you Samaritan," Jesus says, "your 'YES...AND' has made you well! Keep responding to your encounters with God and humans with that sort of open heart." Because when you do, the healing power of God heals you and can move *through* you to others – to Samaritans & Jews, Jews & Gentiles, to those in Power and those who lack it.

Let's look around Chapel again today. All of us are old enough to have felt both powerful and powerless, either personally or socially. I imagine that we've sometimes responded to life, to God, to others with "NO...BUT I..." because we've felt powerful... And other times we've resignedly said "*no...but...*" because we've felt powerless, resentful, defeated.

Part of my story is that I was a person who could pretty much do no wrong in the world until about age 27. I was bulletproof. All A's, Successful High School Football Player who accidentally got into a fancy Ivy League college, taught history in Rome, but then went back to Seminary and had this benign tumor removed from my neck. It was supposed to be no big deal, but

somehow in my recovery from that surgery, my immune system never shut off, I developed a kind of arthritis...and entered 8 years of undiagnosed chronic pain. I used to be a runner and weight lifter but I could no longer do either because my tendons were too inflamed. 8 years. I really went into a tailspin. Then a chaplain's wife introduced me to a doctor who figured out that my surgery had produced a weird sort of arthritis in me that could be counteracted by a set of medications. That won me about 20 years until my system fell apart again after a sledding accident in 2015.

So...powerful and powerless... Early on, my "No...But's" came because I was master of my fate. Later, they came from someone in pain who doctors could not heal. In both cases, saying "No...BUT I" could not turn my life around. And that's because healing generally and the healing power of God specifically is very much a "Yes...AND" answer to the NO/BUT of life's trouble, even to the NO/BUT of suffering and death. For Christians, that's the whole message at the end of Jesus' life. "Yes, the Romans executed Jesus, AND his spirit, his message of love, his spiritual Ohana..in fact, he himself...live on."

So one February morning in the midst of another year long "flare up" of my symptoms, someone called from Hawai'i, from a place called 'Iolani School and said, "Hey, what would you think of coming out here to look at our Chapel?" Yes, AND... "What would you think of moving to HNL from NYC?" Yes, AND... "Then a physician friend, 'What would you think of letting the doctors go, staying with those medications and just swimming every day?'" Yes, AND... "How would I like to get up THIS MORNING and tell you that even though I still have exactly the same medical condition as when I was 27, and even though I still have many ups and downs with it, I can stand here and tell you that the power of the Greater Self is quite alive in me and connecting me to God's creative power in a way that has me saying THANK YOU, YES...AND..."

And How about you this morning? What would it be for you to replace NO BUT in your vocabulary, in your life, by saying YES AND instead? In the moments when you are stuck, or even when you are reflecting, can you actually just say "Yes...And...?"

- *Yes, the first quarter offered victories and disappointments, **AND** whatever happened, I'm going to take a free invitation, without penalty, to start again...to grow? **OR***
- *"Yes, I think this problem with my friend, my teammate, my family member has no good solution, **AND** I'm going to listen and watch for an opening that's big enough for both of us to walk through" **OR***
- *"Yes, I will live this day, with all its love and fear...*
 - *AND just before I lay my head down on my pillow tonight, I'm going to take the opportunity to turn to the wall, to the window, to the ceiling, and say...*
 - *Into the darkness...*
 - *Into the hollow of your heart...*
 - *Into the open depth of God...*
- *Thank You, Thank You, Thank You...*
- *YES...And?"*