

**July 3, 2022**  
**"Getting In Our Own Way"**  
**Psalm 30 / 2 Kings 5:1-14**  
**Pastor Tim Emmett-Rardin**

Amy and I have been married for almost 16 years now. I wish I could say that we've fully moved beyond the practice of passive-aggression with each other – you know, sitting on our frustration or irritation or anger, what we're actually feeling, and pretending that everything's alright when it clearly is not. Expressing our frustration or irritation or anger indirectly, instead of making the effort – and it does feel like an effort – of just saying

I wish I could say that we've moved beyond, but we haven't, though I think it's true that we don't do it as often as we used to. And I also think it's true that we've gotten pretty good at reading each other, and calling each other out – so that at least we EVENTUALLY get around to saying what we want and need to say. Speaking our peace. Being honest about what we're feeling, what we need.

Passive-aggression, of course, is just one of the GAZILLION ways we decidedly imperfect human beings manage to get in our own ways. There is much in life that we cannot control, unlucky or unfortunate or unfair or unjust circumstances and obstacles that get in the way of authenticity and abundance, healing and wholeness. But we tend to make things worse by getting in our own way of getting what we most deeply want and need. Of fully embracing and expressing who we are. Living wholeheartedly as author and research professor, Brene Brown, describes it. Or undividedly, as theologian and educator Parker Palmer describes it. Without shame or fear or any need to prove ourselves. As God intends.

Consciously or not, we make life harder for ourselves. We don't address, or maybe aren't even fully aware of, the things that get in the way of doing what we know, deep down, is best for us, for our families, our friends, our organizations, our communities.

I know you know what I'm talking about.

Brene Brown again, she the noted researcher of things like shame and fear and vulnerability, provides a working list of just some of the things we may need to confront

and let go of in order to get out of our own way. Easier said than done, but here's her list:

- we need to let go of what others think of us
- perfectionism
- numbing and the avoidance of pain
- learned powerlessness
- anxiety as a lifestyle
- fear – of not being good enough, attractive enough, smart enough, whatever enough, fear of failure, of rejection, of conflict, of scarcity; the list goes on
- the need for certainty
- the need for control
- the tendency to comparison
- the myth of self-sufficiency
- pride
- overwork or overfunctioning or even exhaustion as some kind of status symbol, productivity as a measure of self-worth
- being cool or fitting in
- self-doubt and “supposed to” behavior

I'm sure some of those things resonate for you more than others, and I'm sure we could add a bunch more to that list, but you get it. We are ALL, unfortunately, prone to getting in our own way.

Which brings me to our reading from 2 Kings, as Pat just shared with us. The healing of Naaman, commander of the Aram army – a mighty warrior, we're told, but also a man who suffered from leprosy.

By way of background, it's important to note that Aram is the Hebrew designation for Syria. Located northeast of the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah, in much of what is present-day Syria, southeastern Turkey and parts of both Lebanon and Iraq.

It's also important to note in this story that Aram or Syria was an enemy to Israel, often at war with Israel. Among other exploits, the eventual fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile were aided by the Arameans.

So the healing of Naaman by Elisha, the prophet of Israel who succeeded Elijah, as I understand Pastor John described last week, is significant. The healing of Naaman, the Syrian, by Elisha, the prophet of Israel, is significant.

Jesus even references it in the gospel of Luke, when he's teaching in the synagogues, quoting from Isaiah about the Spirit of God anointing him to bring good news to the poor and release to the captives. He cites Naaman's healing as an example of prophets not being accepted in their hometowns, as an example of previous judgment on Israel, noting that there were many lepers in Israel at the time of the prophet Elisha, but none of them were healed except for Naaman, "the Syrian." The foreigner. That reference almost gets him killed on the spot. But that's another sermon for another day.

In any case, back to Naaman. One of the young girls from Israel who is captured in a recent raid, forced to serve Naaman's wife, tells her that there is a prophet in Samaria, in Israel, who can heal Naaman's leprosy.

Naaman gets permission from the king of Aram to go to the king of Israel, along with a letter to formally request the healing, and a whole bunch of stuff to gift to the king of Israel.

The king of Aram seems to think that Elisha is somehow connected to the royal court of Israel, so that the king of Israel would know how to interpret the request for healing. But Elisha works independently, so the king of Israel doesn't make the connection and assumes that the request is made of him. He tears his clothes, a sign of distress, and exclaims, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man – that is, the king of Israel – sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy, just look at how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me."

The presumption being that in making what the king of Israel understands to be an impossible request, the king of Aram, Syria, is stirring up trouble to justify another raid.

That is not the case, and somehow Elisha gets wind of it and sends his own message to the king – inviting Naaman to come to him so “that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel.”

Naaman comes, but Elisha sends a messenger out to him, telling him to “wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean.” That’s it. That’s all he needs to do to be healed.

But Naaman GETS IN HIS OWN WAY. Call it pride, call it arrogance, call it whatever you want, but he rejects Elisha’s simple instruction and leaves in a rage. He wanted Elisha to come out and meet him himself, to perform some dramatic ritual to cure him; he came with a preconceived notion of what the healing should look like and severely underestimated Elisha’s power. He further suggests that two rivers in Damascus, in Syria, are better than all the waters of Israel, so why would he degrade himself by washing in the Jordan River?!

Naaman gets in his own way, in the way of his own healing, apparently content to continue living with leprosy rather than follow Elisha’s simple instruction. But fortunately for Naaman, his servants speak up. His servants! Just consider for a moment the power dynamics at play, the risk, the servants daring to call their master out, to tell him he’s wrong – encouraging him to get out of his own way!

Sometimes we need help to get out of our own way. Sometimes we need someone else to hold the mirror up when we can’t see ourselves. As Parker Palmer writes, the journey “has solitary passages, to be sure, and yet it is simply too arduous to take without the assistance of others. And because we have such a vast capacity for self-delusion, we will inevitably get lost en route without correctives from outside of ourselves.”

Sometimes we need a little humility to face the truth. “If the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult,” they say, “would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, ‘Wash, and be clean’?”

We could imagine Naaman reacting defensively and even violently toward his servants, to such a forthright and boundary-breaking appeal, but he doesn't. As far as we know from the story, he immediately goes down to the Jordan and does exactly what Elisha instructed him to do. And he is healed, his flesh "restored like the flesh of a young boy."

## **PAUSE**

One of my favorite rock bands, the Eagles, have a great line from their song, "Already Gone":

*So often times it happens that we live our lives in chains  
And we never even know we have the key*

Friends, so often times it happens that we get in our own way. We keep getting in our own way, again and again and again. We keep making it harder for ourselves.

But with that awareness, and the acknowledgment that life can be hard enough as it is, may the divine Spirit open us more fully to ourselves. To be kind and gentle and graceful with ourselves. May the Spirit unblock, unlock and open us to greater humility and self-awareness, to increasing honesty with ourselves and with each other. Open us to what we most deeply desire and need, to that which is life-giving, to possibilities for healing and wholeness and new life beyond the walls we intentionally and unintentionally build around ourselves and each other. Open us to our and each other's genuine, authentic, God-given selves.

It's a process. We are all beings in process. As Brene Brown suggests, "... cultivating a wholehearted life is not like trying to reach a destination. It's like walking toward a star in the sky. We never really arrive, but we certainly know that we're heading in the right direction." It's what she calls "soul work."

In that spirit, I want to close with a song from the singer-songwriter, Susan Werner. She moved to Philly from the Midwest in 1987, to get a master's degree in voice from Temple. And eventually launched her career here, playing in places like the old *Tin Angel* in Old City – which is where I first saw her.

In any case, the song is called, "Standing In My Own Way." A prayer for all of us.

*There goes me / Giving in easily  
Trying too hard to please / Soft in the middle*

*Faithlessly / Chickening out on me  
Blaming the big machine  
Cursing in riddles / Frightened and little  
Standing in my own way*

*Here am I / Questioning where, how, why  
Watching my life roll by / I don't want to blow it, no*

*Contrary me / Begging to disagree  
Making mistakes in threes  
Wrong and I know it / Too proud to show it  
Standing in my own way  
Standing in my own way*

*You naysayer  
Oh you're doing what you do best again  
Get out of my way you betrayer, no  
Don't be so damn sure  
You'll win*

*'Cause we are through / There's not enough room for two  
I'm stepping right over you / Open that front door*

*'Cause here I come / Banging my broken drum  
I've got you on the run  
I'm winning this old war / There will be no more  
Standing in my own way / Standing in my own way*

May it be so.