

**Message: "We Harvest What We Plant"****God's Left Hand**

Susie was spending the weekend with her grandmother. Her grandmother decided to have lunch in the park on Saturday. It was a nice summer day and everything was beautiful.

Her grandmother remarked "doesn't it look like an artist painted this scenery? Did you know God painted this just for you?"

Susie said, "Yes, and God did it left-handed."

This confused her grandmother a bit, and she asked, "What makes you say God did this left-handed?"

"Well," said Susie, "we learned in Sunday School Jesus sits on God's right hand!"

**Sometimes we need a different perspective on grace.** Let me give you a head's up: today we're going to be interactive. I'm going to ask you to speak to each other, pray for each other and – as you are led, speak out!

**God's blessings come to us in many ways.** Blessing is a word we hear and use a lot. Jesus spoke about blessings. There are a lot of prayers about blessings. We say the church is a place of blessing. You may be asked to give a blessing over a meal.

**So I have a question: what's a blessing?** [*what do you think?*]

I believe a blessing is when God's Spirit touches you. It makes you feel good, like someone saying "I love you" and giving you a hug and a kiss.

**God's blessing reminds us God loves us.** This means God does special things for us because God likes us and wants us to like God. God wants us to share our love with other people. We all deserve God's blessing. After all, God made us and said it was good.

**If you ever forget or get down,** here's something you can say "God loves me. I love God. And I love myself and others, too."

[*Let's practice this. Close your eyes. Take a couple of deep breaths. Now say this, "God loves me. I love God. And I love myself and others, too." Do that a couple of times as you breathe. When you're ready, open your eyes and rejoin us.*]

**How do you feel?** I think it’s crucial for us to look inside and see God’s love. When we love ourselves, we know how to give love to others. We know how to pass our blessing on. And we can pass our blessing forward, no matter what our situation or circumstance may be.

**That’s what happened to Naaman.** This general, the head of one of the world’s great armies, was suffering with a skin disease. It was probably maddening. He didn’t know where to turn. Then, one day, an Israeli servant girl – captured during a battle, had the courage to tell him a prophet of the God of Israel could heal him. Despite her situation, this woman dared to offer a word of hope. She passed her blessing on.

**To Naaman’s credit, he listened.** And then he acted, boldly. Naaman swept into court, terrifying the king, who thought he was there to overthrow him. The rich and powerful didn’t have an answer.

**Then Naaman got a quiet word from the prophet Elisha.**

So he and his entourage showed up at the door, expecting pomp and ritual. What Naaman got was a servant who told him what to do: wash in the small, local river. Elisha didn’t even appear.

**Naaman was enraged.** We get it. It’d be like general Eisenhower showing up and being told to talk a walk in the local park. As Rodney Dangerfield used to say, “I don’t get no respect!” What’s up?

**Elisha knew.** God’s blessing comes to those whom God chooses. Respect and honor are due to God, not those who serve. Elisha knew God could heal this foreigner, this unbeliever. And when God did, the power of Naaman’s testimony to his king, people and household would be a powerful message about God’s grace and blessing. This is a very different message than what we often hear from those who embrace the values and morals of the world.

**It’s not unusual to struggle with our view of God.** We often find ourselves worshipping false images of God, just like Naaman. Perhaps you’ve worshipped a God-of-impossible-expectations, a God-who-cannot-be-pleased? When perfectionism is a motivation in our life, we tend to want to worship God in the same way. We’re driven and compulsive and won’t accept anything less.

**Maybe you've focused on a God-who-doesn't-care?** Perhaps your family was emotionally distant or stoic when you grew up, so you see God as removed from the world, transcendent and uncaring? This way leads to struggles with despair, particularly in a world where there's so much pain and suffering. Perhaps you had a harder life and so you find yourself worshipping a God-who-abuses, a strict and judgmental God? This way can make us fearful or even freeze us, making change difficult.

**Many of us share Naaman's problem today.** We find it difficult to accept God's love in the way it's offered. We want to do something to earn it, find favor, to have merit in God's eyes or to direct it. Tell me what to do to have God's love and earn eternal life and I'll do it!

**Yet God's love is freely given by grace.** Grace is undeserved, unmerited, unearned favor. It's a free gift from God. All we can do is surrender and receive it. Listen to the servant girl. Hear your co-workers. Do the simple thing. Keep your ego in check and receive grace as it's offered.

**And there lies a problem.** We tend to see grace as something we're entitled to (we aren't) or we want to accept God's love with conditions. We want God's help in *these* areas of our life, but not in *those* areas of our life. We try to pick and choose how we'll accept God's love. This limits us. You know God isn't limited by our limited view.

**To see God as loving, we must believe we're lovable.** To know God wants us to let go of our self-destructive behaviors, we must believe we're valuable. This makes surrendering to God challenging. The fear of being hurt, rejected, judged or condemned by friends, family and others, can keep us enslaved. We're caught in our sins and the lies we tell ourselves and others. It's why Jesus' words are so powerful, "*God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him*" (John 3:17).

**God's love doesn't condemn.** It frees us from the hurt, lies and shame of the world. God's love drives out fear. God's love is made perfect and it's most powerful when we feel most vulnerable. We aren't relying on our strength then. We're relying on God's strength. And this simple, act of faith changes lives, blesses families and gives nations hope.

**A person with a heart for God can't help themselves.** They can't keep from sharing God's blessing with others. Nothing can hold them back, even their own fear and timidity. God wants to bless us to make us fruitful. The best way to receive God's abundant blessing: empty yourselves by pouring God's love into others, blessing them. When you empty yourself, you're a cup waiting for God's grace to fill you back up until grace overflows into the lives of everyone you meet. I believe Paul understood this gift when he wrote his letter to the Galatians.

**Paul's words remind us to share our blessing.** What we plant is what we harvest. God's blessings lift our burden and help us to carry burdens too great for any one of us to lift. I believe this is one reason why it's important to be part of a community of faith. There are burdens we, as persons, can't bear alone. There are burdens households can't bear alone. And there are burdens we, as a congregation, can't bear alone. Fortunately, there's good news.

**We aren't alone!** God is with us. And all who are truly part of our community of faith join in to help us lift our burdens. We don't sit back waiting to be served or invited. I think that's what makes God moments holy. The needs of the people intersect with God's Spirit and the blessings we've received. These are moments when blessings and favor are being poured out. What we plant, we will harvest. All we need do is join in, freely and willingly.

**And so, to join in the work of the Spirit in our lives, I invite you to share God's blessing this week.** Do it at home, at work, in the market, everywhere you go. At this point, I hope you're thinking "Okay, I'm game, but how?" There's no better time to begin than the present. Please turn to the person seated next to you and ask this question:

**"How may I ask God to bless you?"**

Then pray for God to bless them (*silently or as you choose*)

I invite each of you to do so now.

**Thank you for sharing.** I know it's uncomfortable. We either never learned how to do this or we're out of practice. I can tell you blessing others gets easier the more you do it. After all, God made us to do so.

**We’ll make time during the service to share our blessings in the upcoming weeks.** We’ll include blessings given and received. The reason is simple: when we share our experiences of God with others, we begin to anticipate and look forward to the ways God is present with us. God’s Spirit is always working in, with and through us. That’s grace. And it’s a blessing, the gift of hope. It’s the way to a great life.

**This is the way to truly know God loves you!**

Let us pray:

*Lord, help me to be the person you want me to be today. Take away the desires that shouldn’t be there, and help me be single-minded in my focus and my pursuit of you. Help me to follow you and be transformed by your love so I may bless others with the same love. Bless us when we live generously, sharing your love with others, passing our blessings on. We commit ourselves to you in faith and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

## **2 Kings 5:1-14 (CEB)**

Naaman, a general for the king of Aram, was a great man and highly regarded by his master, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. This man was a mighty warrior, but he had a skin disease. Now Aramean raiding parties had gone out and captured a young girl from the land of Israel. She served Naaman’s wife.

She said to her mistress, “I wish that my master could come before the prophet who lives in Samaria. He would cure him of his skin disease.” So Naaman went and told his master what the young girl from the land of Israel had said.

Then Aram’s king said, “Go ahead. I will send a letter to Israel’s king.”

So Naaman left. He took along ten kikkars of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. He brought the letter to Israel’s king. It read, “Along with this letter I’m sending you my servant Naaman so you can cure him of his skin disease.”

When the king of Israel read the letter, he ripped his clothes. He said, “What? Am I God to hand out death and life? But this king writes me, asking me to cure someone of his skin disease! You must realize that he wants to start a fight with me.”

When Elisha the man of God heard that Israel’s king had ripped his clothes, he sent word to the king: “Why did you rip your clothes? Let the man come to me. Then he’ll know that there’s a prophet in Israel.”

Naaman arrived with his horses and chariots. He stopped at the door of Elisha’s house. Elisha sent out a messenger who said, “Go and wash seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored and become clean.”

But Naaman went away in anger. He said, “I thought for sure that he’d come out, stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the bad spot, and cure the skin disease. Aren’t the rivers in Damascus, the Abana and the Pharpar, better than all Israel’s waters? Couldn’t I wash in them and get clean?” So he turned away and proceeded to leave in anger.

Naaman’s servants came up to him and spoke to him: “Our father, if the prophet had told you to do something difficult, wouldn’t you have done it? All he said to you was, ‘Wash and become clean.’” So Naaman went down and bathed in the Jordan seven times, just as the man of God had said. His skin was restored like that of a young boy, and he became clean.

**Galatians 6:7-10 (CEB)**

Make no mistake, God is not mocked. A person will harvest what they plant. Those who plant only for their own benefit will harvest devastation from their selfishness, but those who plant for the benefit of the Spirit will harvest eternal life from the Spirit. Let’s not get tired of doing good, because in time we’ll have a harvest if we don’t give up. So then, let’s work for the good of all whenever we have an opportunity, and especially for those in the household of faith.