

Sixth Sunday After the Epiphany
Cycle B RCL
Revised

2 Kings 5:1-15

The Deuteronomic Historian (abbreviation: Dtr) consistently portrays prophets as much more than bearers of a divine message. They are also shamans, endowed with great powers over the natural world and disease. The word “leprosy” in the Bible refers to almost any kind of skin disease; but persons with such diseases were often isolated from the general population for fear of transmission, and so fear of contracting leprosy was widespread and deep among peoples of the ancient East. The cure of Naaman not only proves to this foreigner that Elisha is a true prophet but, more importantly, that the God of Israel is powerful and able to defeat even Naaman’s awful disease.

Psalm 30

This *thanksgiving* psalm recapitulates the original lament that the psalmist prayed to ask for deliverance in verses 8-10. The danger from which he asked relief was the danger of death, expressed here in terms of descent into the underworld, Sheol. The deepest part of Sheol is called “the Pit” (*Abaddon*). Having been saved from death, the psalmist returns to the temple to offer the promised sacrifice and public acclamation of God’s faithfulness

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Mild discipline of the body was a feature of several of the schools of moral philosophy in Paul’s day, most notably that of the Stoics. Paul’s self-discipline, however, which consisted of the privations he has to suffer in order to be faithful to his mission, is not like that schoolish asceticism. His discipline, like that of the athlete, serves another end altogether. Paul does not discipline the flesh for the sake of discipline but for the sake of the Gospel.

Mark 1:40-45

Mark insists that Jesus actively sought to hide his messiahship during his Galilean ministry. Scholars refer to this literary feature of the Gospel as the “Messianic Secret,” and this passage is a paradigm for it. Although Jesus would not have the former leper tell his secret, nothing can constrain the man from proclaiming his cure and thus bringing notoriety to Jesus. The Messianic Secret, therefore, is a badly kept secret that offends some and encourages others to seek out Jesus. The accurate description of the Messianic Secret in Mark by Wilhelm Wrede in 1901 is one of the most important events in the development of modern New Testament scholarship.

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