

Ordinary people (2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c)

In 2 Kings 5, the VIP characters aren't the ones who make a difference.

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October 11, 2019

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I've always been fascinated by Rosa Parks.

Maybe it's because she spent the last 40 years of her life down the road from me in Detroit. As a native Michigander, that's a point of pride for me. But I think it's more because she wasn't a "big person." She wasn't a senator or governor or president. She wasn't a spiritual leader or a masterful general. No, she was a seamstress and secretary of the Alabama NAACP, living her life in the state capital of Montgomery.

Yet she is arguably the fulcrum of modern American history, and it all started because she said no. She was asked to give up her seat in the front of the bus to a white man. That was the law. But on a December day in 1955 she refused, and she was arrested for violating the law.

That simple act changed everything. Without Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr. wouldn't have become the leader of the boycott campaign. Without her, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s would not have taken off. Without her, there would have been no Civil Rights Act or Voting Rights Act. The history of the United States hangs on this one woman who changed the world as much as any "famous person."

The story of Naaman fascinates me for the same reason. The people who move that story, the people that God works through, are the "little people." Naaman is a

leading general of Aram, which is modern-day Syria. The Bible says that God handed victory to Naaman, which is interesting. Naaman has a beautiful wife, and he is a great military leader who's probably rich. But there is one little problem: he has some kind of skin disease. This leaves him dealing with embarrassment and isolation.

One day his wife is being attended to by a servant girl. She is an Israelite who was captured during a raid by the Aramean army. This young girl—who was not of the same culture as her masters, who probably lost family in the raid, who would probably never see her homeland and loved ones again—happens to say something to Naaman's wife. "Oh, if only my master could meet the prophet of Samaria, he would be healed of his skin disease," she says. Naaman learns of this and is filled with hope. Maybe this prophet can cure him.

What is fascinating here is that this servant girl, who is living basically as a slave, shows kindness to her captors. She is kind to the people responsible for causing her sadness. She wouldn't have to be nice to Naaman; she could inwardly rejoice that he has this skin problem, seeing it as divine punishment. Instead she shows kindness and compassion. The girl plays a critical role in Naaman being healed of his illness and coming to know God.

This story has a number of VIPs in it, and they are indeed important people. But the people who move this story, the people who help Naaman see God, are the "little people." The ones who make a difference are the people who aren't even named.

All around us, everyday people make a difference in this world. They are called by God to do God's work. They may not seem important, but through God they can change things. Just as the servant girl changes Naaman's life, just as Rosa Parks changed the world, we who are claimed by God can be God's witnesses in the world—showing kindness, standing up for justice, expressing joy, and so on. God can use us ordinary people. God chooses faithful people, not necessarily famous ones. Those faithful people can change the world.