

Proper 23, Year C

- I'd like to talk with you this morning about prophets
- Prophets, it turns out, are pretty important people in God's kingdom
- We sometimes think of prophets either as slightly more divine fortune tellers – think of prophecy as just predictions of the future –
 - or we think of them like people who were merely speaking to one particular moment in time
- Now prophets are not soothsayers because predicting the future has never been what prophecy is – Biblical prophecy sometimes references future events, but in the form of visions of the future that is in store if God's people do – or do not – listen to what God is telling them to do
- And the reason for that is also an explanation of why the prophets aren't merely historical curiosities, either
- Because their primary task is the interpretation of God's will to God's people – interpreting the will of God to the people of God – that's what makes the prophetic books of Scripture so important
- Because while Scripture isn't exactly an instruction book for life – can't just open up to a passage and read something that gives you an answer for how you ought to ask – you can sometimes get some extremely clear answers about God's will from the prophets
- The prophets are, historically, the ones who told the chosen people of God how God wanted them to act and what God wanted them to do
- And they did it in a way that was basically timeless
- I don't just mean that their poetry was beautiful, although it often was – and maybe 'timeless' isn't even the word – but in a way that was thoroughly rooted in time – in all of time, rather than just one moment of it
- My favorite example of what I mean comes from, believe it or not, Walt Disney World
- Loren and I – big Disney fans – got engaged there, honeymooned there, first anniversary there – Loren's lost track of how many times she's been
- Been often enough that we've tried to see just about everything you can see, including attractions that most skip over – and one trip, went to a walkthrough exhibit that was sort of tucked away in Disney's Hollywood Studios called "Walt Disney: One Man's Dream"
- Something like a museum, with artifacts and prototypes from various projects that Walt Disney was involved in – can see some animatronic robots, for example, or scale models of

various building projects

- But one of most interesting was something called a multiplane camera – camera designed for animation – had up to seven different panes of illustration, creating layers of scenery – each pane can be moved at a different speed in relation to the camera – giving the animation a great depth
- Previously, animation was all drawn on more or less the same plane – either the same sheet of paper or a clear piece of celluloid over top of paper – so all you really got was action in front of a background
- But with the multiplane camera, all of a sudden, animation was no longer just two-dimensional – it had depth, it had realism, you were immersed in it, could just **feel** the scenes spanning much more distance than you ever would have thought possible from animation
- That's the feel that prophecy is meant to invoke
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- Think of our prophecy from Elisha today – all the depth it has
- In it, he tells the Aramaean commander Naaman to go wash himself seven times in the Jordan River to cure himself of leprosy
- There's quite a lot lying in the background of that prophecy
- The Jordan River is a place already rich in symbolism even by the time of Elisha – it's the river that the Israelites crossed over when they finally entered the promised land, so it's something of a gateway between wandering in the wilderness and entering into the blessing of God – the Jordan already means deliverance to all those who would later come to hear what Elisha told Naaman to do
- And for Elisha, it's the river that he and his predecessor Elijah crossed when Elijah was about to pass on his prophetic mantle to Elisha – and when they did, they passed on dry ground – evoking yet another moment when God's people are delivered; that one from slavery in Egypt into freedom across the Red Sea
- But it isn't all just background – there's the truth of God's will for that moment in time – Naaman is indeed healed, does indeed come to realize that there is a prophet in Israel, and that the God of Israel is the God of all creation – able to heal leprosy through this muddy little creek called the Jordan River
- That's true, incidentally, if you've never been there – a lot of pilgrims to the Jordan River are at least surprised, if not downright disappointed, when they see that this river that

plays such an enormous role in the history of God's people is in reality somewhat smallish – maybe 50 feet wide and 15 feet deep

- So it's no wonder that an outsider like Naaman, who just recently crossed the Jordan to come see Elisha, is so unimpressed – they've got much bigger and better rivers at home!
- It takes his advisors urging him to give it a try for him to really truly see what I think perhaps the biggest point of Elisha's prophecy – perhaps the biggest point of using the littlest river – God wants to show through Elisha that God works not only in the majestic, but also in the mundane
- That's the message that this prophecy carries into the plane of the future
- That our experience of God isn't always meant to be earth-shattering moments – our life in the faith isn't spiritual high after spiritual high
- However much we might prefer to have deeply spiritual mountaintop experiences, the places where God promises to meet us most regularly are delightfully everyday
- That's not to say that we can't see God's hand at work in a breathtaking scene from God's creation – but we see God far more often in the terrifically mundane elements of bread and wine – those once a week moments that also evoke so much of the history of God's chosen people, bring that history present here with us, and foreshadow the heavenly banquet to which we all will someday be irrevocably invited
- And we see God in the joyously boring elements of oil and water at Baptism – when we are drenched in the waters of creation, the waters of the flood, the waters of the Jordan and know that we too are delivered by the God who meets us there and shows us a glimpse of the waters of the river of life, bright as crystal, with the tree of life on its banks that will heal and cleanse the nations once and for all
- And we see God in some of the most unremarkable and unimpressive places imaginable – like wandering through the desert or on the banks of a muddy river – and even, eventually, crying in a manger and suffering on a rough wooden cross
- It's not only from Elisha and the prophets but also from our own experience that we learn that God accomplishes the majestic using the mundane
- And sometimes God's will for us is simply that we will recognize God's presence in those moments – those unremarkable, everyday moments – that we'll be aware that wherever we go, God is already there, ready to work miracles when we least expect them