

This is a transcribed copy of the sermon given at All Saints' Church in Princeton, NJ on 10/09/22 by the Rev. Jane Milliken Hague.

Do you ever have that time when you in the middle of the day in the middle of some disaster in the middle of even a good time, when you stop and say, Is God here? Is God surrounding me? I feel so distant from God. Frequently people think that when they come to the priest and say I feel so distant from God, we have a magic wand and say here, here's God. And yet there are some times when you don't feel that way, even, even in the midst of a beautiful service, with a beautiful choir, in a beautiful church. And sometimes also when we feel most anxious is the time when we feel that God is furthest away from us. Many, many, many years ago, I was going to a very fancy party in Georgetown in Washington DC. And I was nervous, I was anxious. I didn't feel like I had had the right clothes on I was too fat too short. You know, whatever it was, and I I felt like I was gonna be less than, in that moment when I walked into that party. And I was walking down the sidewalk and all of a sudden I heard this voice that said, "Oh, honey, you look hot." Which, you know, you can imagine I whipped around as if "Who the heck are you and how dare you say that?" But it was a meter me and she and her other meter maid. Were there checking the parking and all sorts of things in the middle of Georgetown and I I looked at her and I said "thank you." And for some reason I was 40 pounds thinner and I was 10 inches taller, and I felt like God had spoken through the meter maid. It was that sort of gift of God and I could have easily missed it. But I didn't. And I continue to walk and walked into that party and felt good about myself. I felt strangely God's presence in that moment. There are so many things that blind us to what God is trying to say to us. And sometimes we just have to stop and say, "Oh, look, there's God. Thank you, God."

In our Old Testament lesson this morning, there was a general of the kingdom of Aram, better known these days as Syria and the general and the King were mighty forces in that area and they had invaded and frequently conquered Israel. And the general Naaman was well thought of, he was very rich. He lived in a huge palace. The king thought he was a great man. But he had leprosy. And so, in his mind, he also had this sense

of, oh gosh. Here I am very successful. But something's wrong. Leprosy in the old days in the Old Testament, and the New Testament was sort of a blanket phrase for skin adhesions or skin diseases which, for those who wrote the Old Testament and those who wrote most of the New Testament was considered a fine of uncleanliness. And so you had to keep your distance if you had a rash if you had what was diagnosed at the time was leprosy. Though frequently, we weren't quite sure now whether it was leprosy. Leprosy, as

you may know, is also now called Hansen's disease. It is a bacterial infection which is cured by a cocktail of antibiotics now, so it is curable. In 2020, there were 158 diagnosed cases. It is now considered not as infectious as other things in our life, though little factoid here they've just discovered that one of the major carriers in the United States of what we call Hansen's disease or leprosy are armadillos, but I digress. Naaman heard through his wife, who had heard from a maid servant girl, that there was someone in Israel who could cure Naaman. Naaman listened, listened to his wife who listened to the servant girl. So Naaman went to the king of Aram and said, I hear that there's someone who can cure me in Israel. The king of Aram sent a letter to the king of Israel saying, Please, cure my general here. Well, the king of Israel panicked because here was this major general who had already defeated them in many battles and thought it was a setup, but then Elijah who was the prophet who could heal Naaman wrote to the king of Israel and said send Naaman to me. So Naaman raced off to this prophets house, which you can envision was probably a very small kind of humble abode. Let's just say, prophets didn't make a heck of a lot of money in Israel at the time and there is Naaman with all these chariots, all this gold, all this silver, all his entourage, if you will. And he says to Elijah through the windows here I am please heal me. And Elijah sends out a messenger and says go wash in the river of Jordan seven times. Well, Naaman's pride was hurt. This man didn't even bother to come out. He just said "Go wash in this trickle of dirty water named the Jordan." Instead, I could go home to Syria and wash in all those rivers, they're much better. But then, Naaman heard again, from his people. "You know, why don't you just try it let's just find out if it works." Naaman went to Jordan to the Jordan

River, which was no more than probably 18 inches deep bathed seven times and was cured, was healed, each time in this story, Naaman overcame his pride, his accomplishments, everything, in order to hear God speaking through places and people who did not expect to hear God speak to him through. Naaman went back to Elijah's abode again, spread out his chariots all his gold and all his silver and said, I want to give this to you. And Elijah came out and said, "No, just go." There is no price on God's healing.

In our Gospel, something very similar happened where Jesus is walking on the street, on the road to Jerusalem. Seven lepers cry out to Him, saying, "Master heal us." Jesus looks at them and says, "go show yourselves to the priest. And the priest will tell you that you have been healed." The priests in essence, the Jewish priests will give you the golden card that says you have been healed and you can come back into society. And the 10 start going off to the priest and they are healed. All of a sudden they realize they're healed. A samaritan turns around and says to Jesus, thank you. Now the Samaritans were considered the lowest of the low by people in Israel at the time of Jesus. So again, and sorta a surprising voice that had spoken from a place that you did not expect it to come from. Whether it's a meter maid, whether it's your wife's handmaiden, whether it's your wife, whether it's some prophet who won't even come out of the house, or whether it's understanding that God is there. That's when you notice and feel God's presence. One of the downfalls and a caveat of these healings stories is, that it kind of intimates the fact that if you pray hard enough, you will be healed. And that's not what the story really is about. It's more about noticing God, noticing where God is speaking to you in your universe. And saying thank you, whether you have been healed by leprosy or whether you are just healed inside. I am one of those people who believes that if you feel God's presence you are healed inside. Whether it means that you can walk again or whether it means that you no longer have a skin infection. Something happens inside when you notice that God is present in your life. Oh, look, there's God. When you hear the meter maid saying, wow, there's God. When you hear the lark in the morning, or the beautiful

moon at night when you say look, there's God. God then is present. God doesn't go away if you don't notice God. But when you notice and feel God's presence something inside of you feels better or joyous, more content or calm. To feel God's presence is the healing balm. When my children were younger, we had two boys. And we would sit at the dining room table at night for supper. And to get teenage boys to talk to you is sometimes a little difficult. And so instead of saying how was your day I started to ask them where did you see God today? In what did you see God present? Well, they kind of would roll their eyes but then they would look back in their day and say oh it's when Freddy picked up my pencil for me. Or it's when the teacher called on me or it's when I got picked for the team. Or was when Joe turned to me and said I'm sorry you and I didn't get picked for the team. God is there as long as we notice. Especially God is there. When we noticed when God speaks or acts in unexpected ways. That is where we see and find God. Sometimes it takes our own training sometimes it takes our own noticing sometimes it takes just waking up and saying there is God

Amen.