

HUM ... DID I HEAR THAT RIGHT?  
*"What is Wrong with the Rivers in Montana"*  
2 kings 5.1-14

July 3, 2022

Year C: Sunday of Pentecost for July 3<sup>rd</sup>

Butte Aldersgate United Methodist Church

I want to thank you! Wow, the parsonage looks great. You have welcomed me with your hugs, handshakes, smiles; you have reached out through social media; and when I watched the service last week on-line, I could feel your graciousness in welcoming us home to Aldersgate. I also want to thank Heather and Brad and Chuck and Fred who bent over backwards at the end of their week to make sure that this service got ready. It was a short week for me, and it was definitely a short week for them. I couldn't have gotten here today without them. There will be more thanks to come in the near future, but I want to talk about something that I brought up in my newsletter article. You may have noticed that my father is now a retired pastor living in Nebraska; and one of the things he taught me ... Seth, always start your sermon with a joke or with something funny. If people can't remember what your sermon was about, at least they remember the joke.

So, I thought I would start not with a joke but something quite humorous. I am going to share something called misheard lyrics. Let's see if you can figure them out.

1. "We built this city on sausage rolls" ... Jefferson Starship: "We built this city on rock 'n' roll"
2. "These ants are my friends, they're blowin' in the wind" ... Bob Dylan's: "The answer my friend is blowin' in the wind"
3. "I've got two chickens to paralyze" ... Eddie Money's: "I've got two tickets to paradise"
4. "It doesn't make a difference if we're naked or not" ... Bon Jovi's: "It doesn't make a difference if we make it or not"
5. "What a nice surprise when your rabbi dies" ... The Eagles' 'Hotel California': "What a nice surprise bring your alibis"
6. "Scuse me while I kiss this guy" ... Jimi Hendrix 'Purple Haze': "Scuse me while I kiss the sky"
7. "Dreams of war, dreams of lies, dreams of dragon's fire and of baked apple pie"  
Correct lyric from Metallica's 'Enter Sandman': "Dreams of war, Dreams of lies, Dreams of dragons fire, And of things that will bite"
8. "Tummy why? Ain't nothing but a fart hey, ain't nothing but a meat steak"  
Correct lyric from Backstreet Boys' 'I Want It That Way': "Ain't nothing but a heart ache, ain't nothing but a mistake"<sup>1</sup>

I am sure that you can think of some others that come to mind. I thought of those lyrics when I looked over the lesson for today. Let's get right into it.

PASSAGE – 2 Kings 5.1-14

Now there is another thing you will learn about me. I like series – sermon series. Think about it. We don't just watch a TV show and never come back to it. Unless it was

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nme.com/photos/30-hilarious-misheard-lyrics-1427576>

a terrible show. No, we watch it and then we watch the next episode and then the next. Each episode flows into another. Even if it is not a continuation, there is still the same characters that you have grown to love. Some may disagree preaching through a series but with me ... I like this approach; and I believe it helps enhance the worship experience. So, this summer, we are going to do just that in a series called HUM ... DID I HEAR THAT RIGHT? You see, each of our lessons are scripture passages that have been misheard, misinterpreted, led people down the wrong path, led us down the wrong way ... all because of a misunderstanding. And today, we start with a huge misunderstanding. Naaman is practically saying to this captured slave woman, "hum ... did I hear that right?"

Let me share a story with you.

In the darkest part of the night, a ship's captain cautiously piloted his warship through the fog-shrouded waters. With straining eyes, he scanned the hazy darkness, searching for dangers lurking just out of sight. His worst fears were realized when he saw a bright light straight ahead. It appeared to be a vessel on a collision course with his ship.

To avert disaster, he quickly radioed the oncoming vessel. "This is Captain Jeremiah Smith," his voiced crackled over the radio. "Please alter your course ten degrees south! Over."

To the captain's amazement, the foggy image did not move. Instead, he heard back on the radio, "Captain Smith. This is Private Thomas Johnson. Please alter *your* course ten degrees north! Over."

Appalled at the audacity of the message, the captain shouted back over the radio, "Private Johnson, this is Captain Smith, and I order you to immediately alter your course ten degrees south! Over."

A second time the oncoming light did not budge. "*With all due respect*, Captain Smith," came the private's voice again, "I order you to alter your course immediately ten degrees north! Over."

Angered and frustrated that this impudent sailor would endanger the lives of his men and crew, the captain growled back over the radio, "Private Johnson. I can have you court-martialed for this! For the last time, I command you on the authority of the United States government to alter your course ten degrees to the south! *I am a battleship!*"

The private's final transmission was chilling: "Captain Smith, sir. *Once again with all due respect*, I command you to alter your course ten degrees to the north! *I am a lighthouse!*"<sup>2</sup>

Think about it ... we tend to hear what we want to hear. We tend to believe what we want to believe. We look at social media platforms that agree with our thinking. We talk with people that pretty much align with our thoughts; and likewise, we tend to misunderstand when we do not understand. Two examples from our text. The King of Israel has already been beaten in battle by Aram. He misunderstands this entire situation. He thinks ... that king who beat us is just rubbing it in; he wants to start another war; I mean you can almost hear him saying, HUM ... DID I HEAR THIS RIGHT?

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<sup>2</sup> Wayne Rice. *Hot Illustrations for Youth Talks: 100 attention-getting stories, parables, & anecdotes*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: ZondervanPublishingHouse. 1993). 24-25.

And then we have a bigger misunderstanding from Naaman. He believes a prophet will cure his skin disease, but the prophet has got to do something miraculous; something unbelievable; something over the top; something with fireworks and akin to a *Raiders of the Lost Ark* movie; and when this doesn't happen, he misinterprets, he misunderstands, and his reaction, he gets angry.

While a woman was waiting to board a flight, a woman sat down to check her phone. She had purchased a package of cookies and started eating. Out of the corner of her eye, this guy sitting just a seat over started eating her cookies.

She couldn't believe it. This guy was eating her cookies. Well, she wasn't going to let this go and so she reached over and ate a cookie while giving this guy her evil eye; and the guy then reached into her bag and took another cookie. Oh, not knowing what to say, she just continued to eat and eat until there was only one ... cookie ... left. And at that point, this guy reached into that bag and finished them off.

Oh, she was disgusted and was just about ready to say something when it was announced that it was time to board. When she got onto the plane, she opened her bag and found her unopened package of cookies.<sup>3</sup>

Hum ... did I hear that right? This woman is expecting, no, in fact, she believes in the worst of humanity. Someone is stealing her cookies. It reminds me of something my old Sunday school teacher, Esther McPherson, used to say, "don't point a finger, because you have three pointing back at you.

Naaman has a misunderstanding. He is expecting something difficult; a magic wand; a climb up a sacred mountain; words to the effect of "all-a peanut butter sandwiches", and what he gets is so easy, so simple, so matter of fact, that he takes offense; and it almost leads to war. Hum ... did I hear that right? All I have to do is wash in your river? What's wrong with the rivers in my country? It's almost like someone saying ... what's wrong with the rivers in Montana? If I were to stand here and preach to you about everything wrong with the rivers in Montana, do you think you would take offense? You better believe it.

Life is full of misunderstandings. For a couple of months, after we booked the moving company to move us, we believed them that we would move out of Gering on Friday and probably move in here on Monday or Tuesday. So, with that understanding, we made plans. We would leave on Saturday, attend church with you on Sunday, stay for Monday so we could open a bank account and then my family would leave on Tuesday where Olivia has college orientation. What's that phrase ... you know how to make God laugh? Tell God your plans. Last week, I called the moving company to confirm, and the first person I spoke with said "I do not see your paperwork ... are you sure you are moving with us?" You know I could hear my heart pounding when she said that; then she put me with her boss who said, "oh, she doesn't have access to moves coming from outside the state." That made me feel better until he said, "your driver is picking you up on Monday and delivering on Wednesday or Thursday." Hum ... did I hear that right? What about our plans? What about me sitting in church with you last Sunday? What about you meeting my family before my wife joins me after we sell our house? What a misunderstanding! I think I would rather steal someone else's cookies then go through that again.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-80.

Life is full of misunderstandings. This is not a sermon where I bash the rivers here in our new adopted state. This is not a message where I long for the rivers of Nebraska. This is a lesson, besides my jokes, that if you get one thing out of it, it is this ... sometimes, often times, we misunderstand the possibilities of God. Think about this ... Naaman only sees what is impossible.

But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God and would wave his hand over the spot and cure the skin disease! (verse 11)

He believes that only something over the top can cure his skin disease. He misunderstands the message. The girl, who is unnamed, she sees what is possible. There is no misunderstanding with the power of God.

Christopher Wren, who designed St. Paul's Cathedral in London, wrote about the reactions of construction workers who were asked what they were doing. Those workers who were bored and tired responded by saying, "I'm laying bricks" or "I'm carrying stones."

But one worker, who was mixing cement, seemed cheerful and enthusiastic about his work. Asked what he was doing, he replied, "I'm building a magnificent cathedral."<sup>4</sup>

I have a brick, here. Bricks are made out of clay and water. Bricks can come in different sizes and colors and shapes. Some bricks are heavy, some are light, some bricks are used to break windows, some bricks just lie in the garage collecting dust, others are used as a paper weight, and some decorate a walkway; and some bricks build a church.

If you think this sermon is about bricks, you misunderstand. If you think this message is about building material, you misunderstand. If you think this lesson is not about you and me, you misunderstand. If you think the possibilities of God are hard, you misunderstand. The power of God can and does come in simple ways. My move here didn't go the way I wanted or planned; but it got us here. Now I'm just looking for that miracle genie to unpack my boxes. God's power may come from something as simple as dipping yourself into a river in Montana; and it might be as easy as recognizing those simple miracles around us.

There are some great stories found in Robert Fulghum's book about Everything you learned in Kindergarten, but here is my favorite. My grandfather Sam called me up last Tuesday to ask me if I'd take him to a football game. Grandfather likes small-town high school football--and even better, the eight-man ball played by crossroads teams. Grandfather is a fan of amateurs and small scale. Some people are concerned about how it is that good things happen to bad people, and there are those concerned about how bad things happen to good people. But my grandfather is interested in those times when miracles happen to ordinary people. Here again, he likes small scale.

When a nothing team full of nothing kids from a nothing town rises up with nothing to lose against some upmarket suburban outfit with new uniforms, and starts chucking hail-Mary bombs from their own goal line, and their scrawny freshman tight end catches three in a row to win the game--well, it does your heart good.

Murphy's Law does not always hold, says Grandfather Sam. Every once in a while the fundamental laws of the universe seem to be momentarily suspended, and not

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 135-136.

only does everything go right, nothing seems to be able to keep it from going right. It's not always something as dramatic as the long bomb or the slam-dunk that wins ball games.

Ever drop a glass in the sink when you're washing dishes and have it bounce nine times and not even chip? Ever come out after work to find your lights have been on all day and your battery's dead but you're parked on a hill and you let your old hoopy roll and it fires the first time you pop the clutch and off you roar with a high heart? Ever pull out that drawer in your desk that has a ten-year accumulation of junk in it--pull it too far and too fast--and just as it's about to vomit its contents all over the room you get a knee under it and stagger back hopping on one foot doing a balancing act like the Great Zucchini and you don't lose it? A near-miss at an intersection; the glass of knocked-over milk that waltzes across the table but doesn't spill; the deposit that beat your rubber check to the bank because there was a holiday you forgot about; the lump in your breast that turned out to be benign; the heart attack that turned out to be gas; picking the right lane for once in a traffic jam; opening the door of your car with a coat hanger through the wing window on the first try. And on and on and on and on.

When small miracles occur for ordinary people, day by ordinary day. When not only did the worst not happen, but maybe nothing much happened at all, or some little piece fell neatly into place. The grace of what-might-have-been-but-wasn't, and it was good to get off scot-free for once. The ecstasy of what-could-never-happen-but-did, and it was grand to have beat the odds against for a change. Or the bliss of just what-was-for-a-day when nothing special took place--life just worked.

My grandfather says he blesses God each day when he takes himself off to bed having eaten and not having been eaten once again. "Now I lay me down to sleep. In the peace of amateurs, for whom so many blessings flow. I thank you, God, for what went right! Amen."<sup>5</sup>

I hope you do not misunderstand this message. God's ways can be as simple as welcoming you home ... to Aldersgate ... welcoming you home to what is possible ... welcoming you home to the ways you can be the brick that builds the church. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Fulghum. *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten: Uncommon Thoughts on Common Things*. (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1993.) 177-179.