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The Hard Part

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The Hard Part
Based on
2 Kings 5:1-14 and Mark 1:40-45
Hymn of the Day: "Healer of Our Every Ill" (*With One Voice* 738)
Proper 23C Year A
A play for actors and singers by John Steven Paul
Developed in workshop by Soul Purpose,
The Liturgical Drama Troupe of the Valparaiso University Theatre
For use in the Spring Semester, 2005

Characters:

HANNAH

#1 NAAMAN

#2 Naaman's WIFE

#3 The KING of Aram, later Elisha's MESSENGER

#4 The KING of Israel

#5 Naaman's SERVANT

#6 ELISHA, later JESUS

#7 Naaman's SERVANT

A note from Soul Purpose:

There are many more actions than words in this play. The storytelling style of acting in The Hard Part is the kind you would use to play to an audience of children. Gestures must be large and presence and commitment 100%. At the same time, every move and gesture must be precise, chosen thoughtfully and executed economically. If you know Paul Sills' Story Theatre from the 1960's, you know the style, but you might also look to "Sesame Street" or even "The Wizard of Oz" for style models. The design of costumes and props should be similar to the acting: big, bright, thoughtful and precise.

HANNAH:

(*With a basket of food.*) Once upon a time, there was a group of outcasts. The group was made up of people of all ages, men and women, from different places. They had two things in common. They were Jews. And they had a leprous disease. A thousand years ago, Moses, the Lawgiver, laid down the law for a leper. In the third book of the Law, it is written:

LEPER #1:

"The person who has the leprous disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be disheveled; and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.' He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.

HANNAH:

And so the lepers lived, if you can call it that, as outcasts separated from society.

It is practically impossible for us to imagine the hopelessness and the desperation of the leper, for they are cut off, not only from the community, but also from the purification rituals of the Temple. They are unclean and they cannot become clean.

As HANNAH finishes this speech, several actors come out wearing ragged robes. With their left hands they partially cover their mouths. On their right hands are latex gloves. At the end of HANNAH's speech they shout out...

LEPERS:

UNCLEAN!

In unison, they raise their right (gloved) hands, splay their fingers, and press their right hands flat against their chests.

HANNAH:

My brother Thomas has a leprosy disease. According to the law, he must live separate from the community. Once a week, I take food to him. I love him and I'm not afraid of him or the other lepers.

In their loneliness and despair, the outcasts re-tell the stories of Ancient Israel. Sometimes they permit me to join them in their story-telling.

LEPER #2 offers HANNAH a "prop" from the play the lepers are about to perform. This is an invitation to a clean person from an unclean person to join in the storytelling. The prop that #2 offers HANNAH is a scarf that the "Young Captive Israelite Girl" puts around the head of "Naaman's Wife."

We re-enact the victories of the kings and the legendary deeds of prophets like Elisha.

One of our favorites is the story of Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, who was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram.

LEPER #1, Thomas, steps forward and draws his sword in a warlike gesture.

LEPER #1:

The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy.

Now he lifts his other hand, gloved in white.

HANNAH sets down her basket of food and enters the play in the role of the young captive Israelite girl. She carries the red scarf.

HANNAH:

Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel...

LEPER #2:

... and she served Naaman's wife.

HANNAH ties a colorful scarf around the head of LEPER #2 to indicate that #2 is the wife of the noble NAAMAN.

HANNAH:

(To LEPER #2) If only my Lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.

LEPER #2 goes to LEPER #1 and tells him what the young girl has said.

#2:

If only my Lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure you of your leprosy.

NAAMAN's wife looks "meaningfully" at him. NAAMAN resists the idea at first but then gives in with obvious reluctance.

So Naaman went in and told his lord, the King of Aram, just what the girl from the land of Israel said.

NAAMAN goes to LEPER #3, the King of Aram, and says:

#1:

"If only my Lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure me of my leprosy."

#3:

Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel. (*#3 gives an elaborate scroll to #5*)

ALL:

(With great enthusiasm!!) He went!
Except #1 & #3

#2:

Taking with him ten talents of silver,

#5:

six thousand shekels of gold

#7:

and ten sets of garments.

*HANNAH, #1, #2, #5, #6 & 7 begin the procession from
“Syria” to “Israel.” This is a long journey, even grand
processions commissioned by kings get tired and wear
down...*

#5:

He brought the letter to the King of Israel, which read, “When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of leprosy.”

When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said,

*The KING OF ISRAEL (#4) rends his clothes while
#6 makes a loud rattling sound to underscore the
tearing.*

#4:

Am I God, (*#5 runs away in fear*) to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me.

#6:

(Entering as Elisha) But when Elisha, the man of God heard that the King of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king:

#6 (ELISHA) crosses stealthily over to #4 (the KING OF ISRAEL) and drops a note where he will see it.

#4:

(Finding the note, picking it up and reading it) “Why have you torn your clothes? (looks around to see where the note came from) Let him come to me, (he looks over to NAAMAN’s procession) that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel.”

NAAMAN and his entourage groan. And then...

#3:

So Naaman came with his horses and chariots –

HANNAH, #1, #2, #4, #5, & 7 begin the procession from the KING’s house to ELISHA’s house.

(#3 continues) – and halted at the entrance of Elisha’s house.

#1, #2, #4, #5 & 7 arrive at the entrance to ELISHA’s house.

(Getting a message from ELISHA, #6, #3 now continues) Elisha sent a message to him saying...

#3 goes to NAAMAN, #1, and gives him the message)

#1:

(Reading) “Go wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean.” I thought (#3 runs away in fear) 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 leprosy! Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean? (He turns and goes away in a rage.)

#5:

But his servants approached him and said to him,

#7:

My lord, if the prophet had commanded you to do something hard, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, “Wash, and be clean”?

NAAMAN goes down and washes himself in the bath of water seven times. The other lepers count off each washing. There is rejoicing and the discovery that NAAMAN is now clean. But almost immediately, the other lepers realize that they themselves are not clean and they begin to move away.

Only HANNAH and her brother, LEPER #1, remain.

LEPER #1:

Stay away from me, Hannah. I must remain separate. I am unclean.

HANNAH:

I have visited you like this for years, Thomas, and I have not become ill.

LEPER #1:

Not ill, but unclean... It is the Law, Hannah. “He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he *is* unclean.” The people of the village will shun you as they shun me. Leave me alone.

HANNAH:

You know I don’t care what the people of the village think.

LEPER #1:

Hannah, you are my sister and you know I love you. Your visits cheer me up. We have come to depend on the food you bring us. But you can’t make me clean; no one can.

HANNAH:

A man came to the village some days ago. A healer. He is a man of God. He has helped many people. If only you would come and see him, he would cure you of this leprosy.

LEPER #1:

A man of God? God has separated himself from me. God has forgotten me.

HANNAH:

Go to him, Thomas.

LEPER #1:

If God wants to make me clean, he can do it here and now! (*waits, expecting no miracle*)
Besides, I can't go into the village for any reason. Even if there were no law, the people fear me.

HANNAH:

Who cares about them? Why are they afraid when there is nothing to fear? They hate you and I hate them... they're filthy, they're rotten, they're –

LEPER #1:

Unclean?

HANNAH:

Oh, Thomas, that's not what I meant, I...

LEPER #1:

You know how hard it has been for me to be separated from the community, and from God. Now, in your anger, will you be so quick to separate yourself?

HANNAH:

But all they've done to you! I can't forgive them.

LEPER #1:

I don't want to go to your healer, but I will, if you will come with me. Can he do all that you say he can?

HANNAH:

I have seen him heal others, Thomas. All they did was go to him. That's the hard part. Go to him. Ask. If he chooses, he can make you clean.

*HANNAH and LEPER #1 walk together to where JESUS is.
They separate.*

LEPER #1:

Unclean! ... I am leprous. If you choose, you can make me clean.

LEPER #1 raises his hand to JESUS (#6). His hand is gloved. JESUS stretches out his hand and touches LEPER #1¹. LEPER #1 lowers his hand.

HANNAH steps toward LEPER #1, then approaches JESUS.

HANNAH:

Unclean! ... I hate my neighbors.

LEPER #1:

If you choose... (*HANNAH does not complete the sentence*)

LEPER #2:

Unclean! ... I hate myself.

The LEPER raises a gloved hand. JESUS goes to the LEPER, stretches out his hand and touches him or her. He repeats this action after each cry. While he is touching the LEPER another LEPER says...

LEPER #1:

If you choose, you can make me clean.

LEPER #3:

Unclean! I am addicted.

¹ In the language of acting, the actor (note I do not say male or female) playing JESUS is trying to get out of the village. That is his intention. Each leper that comes to him presents an obstacle to his intention of trying to leave the village. The leper gets JESUS' attention with "Unclean..." Then, JESUS is presented with a choice: "if you choose, you can make me clean." JESUS goes to the leper who has called to him and touches that leper as a sign that JESUS will not ignore the leper or keep himself from the leper. After he touches a leper, JESUS again tries to leave the village. Finally, when HANNAH finishes the sentence, "if you choose, you can make me clean." JESUS turns to the lepers as a group and says, "I do choose. Be made clean." He directs the lepers to the font, but tells them directly and firmly, "Now don't you tell anyone." They go to the font and JESUS proceeds to leave the village.

The action following LEPER #2's line above is repeated after each petition.

LEPER #2:

If you choose, you can make me clean.

LEPER #4:

Unclean! I am paralyzed with fear.

LEPER #3:

If you choose, you can make me clean.

LEPER #5:

Unclean! I am failing.

LEPER #4:

If you choose, you can make me clean.

LEPER #7:

Unclean! I am sick. And I'm going to die.

HANNAH:

(HANNAH kneels) If you choose, you can make me clean.

JESUS walks to HANNAH and reaches out his hand to touch her.

JESUS:

(To all the lepers) I do choose.

JESUS walks up the steps toward the cross. At the top, he turns to the LEPERS and says...

JESUS:

Be made clean!

Now the LEPERS come down to the bowl of water. They wash themselves in the bowl of water. They peel off the latex gloves. They turn toward JESUS at the altar.

Pause.

JESUS:

(sternly) Now DON'T you TELL anyone!

Pause.

The LEPERS run to pick up their instruments and leave the playing area swiftly, making a joyful noise.

END