

Luke 17:11-19
Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
October 12, 2025

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

When [Jesus] saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. Then, one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

If you like to 'study' our lectionary (the church year's assigned readings), hearing today's Gospel Reading may have actually made you think of the Thanksgiving Service! In about six weeks, we'll hear this Gospel account again, as we do *each* year, in the context of a turkey dinner with mashed potatoes, the Macy's Parade, football on TV, and – through all of that – the expected exercise of more intentionally meditating upon all the reasons to thank God during that national observance.

That may be a 'calendar' context for this reading, but that's not the *Scriptural* context of this account, and it's important to hear it in the context of Scripture and the historical truth of Christ's earthly 'calendar', if you will. The Scriptural context is the full slate of parables we've just heard in the last 4-5 weeks, followed by Jesus' very plain words we heard last week; and *now* he's on his way to Jerusalem and finds opportunity to put this all into flesh-and-blood

reality. Where the pharisees were proud and self-righteous, *assuming* a seat at the holy table of God's temple dwelling with His people, the lepers stand at a distance, knowing their shame and unclean-ness.

That Jesus is on his way to *Jerusalem* ought highlight the lepers' real need. As much as we could identify them as real-life manifestations of poor Lazarus (from the parable a few weeks ago) with all their open sores from diseases of the flesh, their true need has to do with Jerusalem, because Jerusalem is the place of the temple. And without the mercy of Jesus, without the healing of divine cleanliness, they have no access to the holy place of God. Indeed, the reader/hearer of this text must understand that the lepers were not only physically afflicted, but were ceremonially unclean and therefore not allowed into the temple to benefit from the things of God.

Jesus knows this is their true need... not just temporal healing, but access to eternal healing. So, when he plans to provide them their physical healing, he does so with a focus on their renewed spiritual cleanness: "Go show yourselves to the priests," He commands. "Go show yourselves to the priests, that you may have access to the things that *eternally* matter." Yes, we may be eager for Jesus to remove all our temporal ills, afflictions, daily-life problems; but he knows that access to the eternal things is far more merciful.

So, He tells the ten lepers to show themselves to the priests... and they all begin to depart for the priests. But, now, here's the 'twist' (if you will) in the account... that when they all realize they are healed, nine of ten continue on and put their hopes in the judgment of the priests without stopping to consider that He who healed them and thus won for them new access to the holy things has more authority than do the priests! They just go on to the priests! But, by doing so, they have taken unto themselves the error of the pharisees, seeing their cleanliness in the sight of the laws of the temple rather than in the mercy of the Messiah.

So, yes, they are physically cleansed. Yes, they may gain approval of the priests. Yes, they may gain access to the temple. But what is the old temple of stone when the new Temple of the Incarnate God-man is among you? What good is it to gain the approval of the priests of the old covenant when the great High Priest of the new things to come is on the scene? What good is it to be physically, temporally cleansed without also recognizing your spiritual, eternal need is also answered in this same Jesus to whom you have just cried and who has answered your prayers? What good is it to go to Jerusalem with a focus on *your* righteousness when you can follow Jesus to Jerusalem with a focus on His *perfect* righteousness, which leads to *your* salvation?

We could debate whether the nine were just following Jesus' word when he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." But the

visual is apparent: they went on ahead with hopes in the temple, the priests, the Law. But the one who turned back to praise God (and, by turning back, you might even think of the word ‘repent’), the one who repented and praised God with a loud voice and fell at Jesus’ feet – that Samaritan – had no use for the temple of stones, but praised the Temple enfleshed, the Temple Incarnate.

Thus, in this text, instead of always focusing on the leper’s ‘thanksgiving’ (which is certainly not wrong to do, but simply a bit of tunnel vision if that’s all we ever focus on), we ought focus on this connection between the Jerusalem of the old temple and the Jerusalem of the new temple. Did Jesus not during Holy Week say of himself, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again.” Did the same Jesus not say *of himself*, “Something greater than the temple is here”?

And yet, for how many weeks of recent Gospel Readings did we hear of self-righteous pharisees who were so certain of their salvation, why? – because they were heirs of the old covenant that centered everything on God’s presence in the temple. But here the Samaritan – this foreigner – praises God for true deliverance... deliverance in Christ Jesus, deliverance not only of temporal need, but of the greater, eternal need.

Consider how often in recent weeks we heard of a particular audience – whether a man in the crowd, the pharisees, even the disciples – who seemed to be focused on a lesser need when Jesus

was focused on the true, eternal need. That's so often the problem we have in daily life: we idolize the temporal, consume ourselves with the temporal (even to the point of assuming our righteous standing before God, so he'll understand when we put higher priority on the temporal), and we believe our riches can answer the needs of the temporal, and we end up eventually despairing over the temporal!... and all the while, Jesus has continually pointed us to our greater need, our greater concern – to constantly run back to the greater need, the better safety, the higher priority and heavenly joy of being united with God through our sacrificial Lamb and perfect Intercessor, Jesus Christ.

Thus, the lepers are a historic, manifest illustration of us: the true disease is not one of the 'surface flesh' (the epidermis), but of the heart. The Lord sees the wickedness, the illness, the disease of the heart – He established the Law of Moses and the temple life to teach us and keep us focused on this disease of the heart and our need for God – and He says through the prophets (for example, the Word of the Lord through His prophet Jeremiah), "Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place... Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods... and then come and stand before me in this house?" (Jeremiah 7).

That's the great disease! – that our hearts convince us we may go live contrary to the Ten Commandments, then come and

stand before God in his house and claim righteousness. Has He not spoken plainly: “Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place”? But, like the lepers before us, we are too diseased to amend ourselves, and we are left to cry the beggars prayer, “Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon us. Lord, have mercy upon us.”

And He does. Jesus has mercy upon us. And, having been healed, having the heart been made new in the forgiveness of His baptism, we *may* come stand before him... notice, not just ‘in the temple,’ but before *Him*. There’s our hope; *He* is our hope. Somehow, in our text, only the foreigner knew that. The other nine believed that God’s dealing with man was to be found in a place. The Samaritan (whose own people worshiped God in a different *place* – “on the mountain,” the Samaritan woman at the well once confessed)... but *this* Samaritan knows that God’s dealing with man was to be found in a Person... and thus, the foreigner (much like Ruth in our Old Testament Reading) could say of those who hoped in Jesus, “Your God shall be my God.”

That’s the hope of us foreigners... just like Ruth... that the God of Israel is merciful and compassionate to see all sinners everywhere – no matter whether they are children of Abraham or far off children of Adam – all sinners everywhere the God of Israel calls to be beneficiaries of His sacrificial Lamb and, thus, to be cleansed of their sinful disease by the blood and merit of Jesus.

Therefore, Jew and Gentile alike may sing the praises of God... because Jew and Gentile alike have access to him *through Jesus*, and *only* through Jesus. Unique to this intercessor and mediator, this High Priest of the true heavenly temple, unique to Him is the sufficiency to make all sinners one, by cleansing and forgiving each sinner in Himself, that all may fall at his feet and worship, just as the Introit proclaims:

“Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the *city* of our God My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together! I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles.”

In other words, *thanksgiving*. It is not a day on the calendar. It is a way of life. It is the Christian’s way of life. It is *your* way of life. It is the exhaling of the one who lives with confidence in God, and therefore with penitent lips, loving conduct toward one another, and a thankful heart.

If last week’s refrain was true – “the righteous by this faith shall live,” then this week’s refrain is also true – “your faith has made you well.” But, interpret that rightly. Your faith isn’t rewarded because of how great and sincere and genuine it is. Rather, your faith is in the right object – namely Christ Jesus and his mercy – and faith in Christ does make you well, not *only* in the forgiveness of sins, but

in all its ripple effects... unity with God and access to his holy gifts, a clear conscience before Him and confidence in His will, love toward one another and in our mutual baptismal life... even the ripple effect of being rid of all our disease and affliction and even death itself... as we healed lepers eagerly anticipate the resurrection of our flesh and life in the New Jerusalem and on Mt Zion in the life of the world to come.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

Rev. Mark C. Bestul
Calvary Lutheran Church
October 12, 2025