

The Cleansing of the Ten Lepers

Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity — Luke 17:11–19

Based on the sermon by Rev. Joshua DeYoung, Pastor, St. John's Lutheran Church, Racine · September 6

Opening Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain what You promise, make us love what You command; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Text: Luke 17:11–19 (ESV)

¹¹On the way to Jerusalem [Jesus] was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance ¹³and lifted up their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” ¹⁴When he saw them he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went they were cleansed. ¹⁵Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; ¹⁶and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Then Jesus answered, “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? ¹⁸Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹And he said to him, “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”

Lutheran Confessional Connections

- Small Catechism, The Creed, Second Article: “I believe that Jesus Christ... has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person... that I may be His own.” The Samaritan’s story is this article in miniature.
- Small Catechism, Sacrament of the Altar: Christ’s true body and blood, given “for you” for the forgiveness of sins — the fulfillment of the bodily nearness of Christ that the Samaritan experienced at His feet.
- Augsburg Confession, Article IV (Justification): We are justified freely for Christ’s sake, through faith, when we believe that we are received into favor for Christ’s sake.
- Augsburg Confession, Article XII (Repentance/Confession): True repentance consists of contrition (“Lord, have mercy”) and faith that believes the Gospel, that sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake — mirrored in the structure of the Divine Service.
- The liturgical Kyrie (“Lord, have mercy”), retained in the Divine Service (Lutheran Service Book), takes its language directly from cries like that of the ten lepers.

Discussion Questions

Law: Recognizing Our Need

1. The ten lepers were defined and isolated by their disease. In what ways does sin isolate us — from God, from one another, from ourselves?
2. There is a distinction between our physical suffering and our deeper spiritual condition as those “dead in... trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). Why is it important not to stop at physical or emotional healing when we come to Christ?

3. Why do you think the liturgy places the Kyrie (“Lord, have mercy”) near the beginning of the Divine Service? What does it teach us to confess about ourselves before we hear the Gospel?

Gospel: What Christ Does

4. Jesus sends the healed lepers to the priests. What does this action reveal about how Jesus relates to the Old Testament ceremonial law, and about His identity as our true High Priest and Temple?
5. All ten lepers were healed, but only the Samaritan is told, “Your faith has saved you.” What is the difference between the healing the nine received and the salvation the Samaritan received?
6. How does this text guard against thinking that our thanksgiving, our returning to Jesus, is what earns His favor? Where do you see faith described as a gift rather than a work?

Application: Thanksgiving and the Life of Faith

7. The sermon connects the Samaritan kneeling at Jesus’ feet to our own reception of Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper. How might this connection shape the way you prepare for and receive the Sacrament?
8. Why were only nine of the ten silent, and what might keep us today from returning to give thanks after receiving God’s mercy?
9. The Samaritan “went from being the most to be pitied, to the most to be envied... from being an outcast to being a member of the family of God.” Where in your own life has Christ done something similar — turning what seemed like loss into belonging?
10. How can this text shape your own prayer life this week, both in crying out “Lord, have mercy” and in returning thanks?

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, You came into our world and became unclean to make us clean. You took our sin into Your body and gave us Your life in exchange. As the Samaritan leper once fell before You in thanksgiving, so give us faith to receive Your mercy and hearts quick to return You thanks and praise, both now and as we come to Your Table. In Your name we pray. Amen.