

Pastor T.C. Arnold
14th Sunday after Trinity
Luke 17:11-19
Sept 1st, 2013

Jesus heals you by speaking His Word. Be thankful like the Samaritan who returned to Jesus. Jesus heals... be thankful... the end. That's what the Gospel reading and sermon text is all about this morning. What else is there to say? Many of you know, I turned forty last week and maybe because I'm getting "older" I'm getting grumpier about sermons and Bible stories. I've preached on this text so many times before. For crying out loud, this is also the text for Thanksgiving Day. We are grumpy about the fact that Halloween candy has been out in the store for weeks already. Maybe we should be grumpy about a Thanksgiving Day reading already being read on September 1st. Jesus heals... be thankful... the end.

But that's not the end. There's more. Here are a few extras about this text that you might not know. The men Jesus healed were Jews with the exception of one Samaritan. We know that Samaritans and Jews didn't get along too well. We heard how that was the case in the sermon last Sunday about the Good Samaritan. But that really doesn't matter all that much in the story we hear today. It doesn't matter because leprosy breaks down the barrier of culture and class. A person with leprosy is the same as anyone else with leprosy. They are put off, cast out, shunned from society. They are unclean... no matter of the social status, color of their skin or what religion they happen to be. Leprosy breaks down all those barriers and then builds one great big barrier between what is considered clean and unclean. That is, even more forcefully spoken, what is alive or dead.

People with leprosy were as good as dead. They were dead men walking and talking. When they received the diagnosis of being a leper the priest would speak the burial rite over that person. He was considered dead... separated... a complete outsider. Mind you, this action of the priest is important to know when Jesus sends the "healed" men who had leprosy to the priest so they can be pronounced alive again.

Jesus heals by speaking His Word... even more... He makes the dead come alive. Now, that's what I said was one of the two meanings of this story. Jesus our High Priest pronounces us, who are dead in our sins, alive by grace through faith. Jesus puts life on us, He clothed us with it at Baptism, and He puts in our mouth at Holy Communion. We sinners, who continue to fall, who continue to stand with St. Paul and say, "*I do the things I wish I wouldn't do and I don't do the things I wish I would do,*" have a Jesus who calls out His Word and says you are forgiven. That's what Jesus does. He heals by making the dead alive.

Jesus teaches a number of things that would be insightful for those who are teaching the faith. First, the miracle is a sign that the messianic era of salvation is present in the man who can make people alive by speaking simple words. Second, the cleansing comes for Jesus, whose holy flesh reaches out in compassion and mercy to a leper. The one who is "clean" crosses over the boundary to the one who is "unclean" in order to make him clean. This is also indicated by how Jesus crossed over the border between Samaria and Galilee. Third, Jesus supersedes the Old Testament holiness code with His own holiness... cleansing unclean men.

Now, what about the thankfulness part... and how do we understand it. I know what you want to do. I know how you wish to understand it. You want to measure the thankfulness. The reason why I know you want to measure thankfulness is because in your thoughts and words,

you perhaps measure thankfulness with what you have done for others. “I did all that and they didn’t even say thank you.” Jesus gives you the ratio as to how many will say “thanks.” Ten men were cleansed and one came back. I’m no math whiz but even I know that’s only 10%. That’s human nature... and have been those that keep score of the “thank yous” handed out for the good that we have done. We like that.

Jesus was upset because 1 in 10 came back to worship in thanksgiving. The others took for granted what they received and were only thinking of themselves. That’s easy for any of us to do in this “me first” society. I would like to think I would be the one going back to worship in thanksgiving the one who made me alive, rejoined with the world again. But, I might not have. I might have been all caught up in myself enough to forget. Because, I forget from time to time. So do you. It’s not that we don’t appreciate the gifts our Lord gives. I think we all do. It’s that we at times are so caught up in the rigmarole of this world, we don’t take the time to say, “Thank you, Lord, for all you have done for me.”

You know who came back to say thank you, right? That’s correct. It was the Samaritan of the bunch. The Jews who were cleansed did not even say thank you to one of their very own. It was an outsider – the one people would least expect – that came and worshiped the Lord in thanksgiving. Here we are. We are the good bunch because we are in the Lord’s House of thanksgiving and yet the Bible tells us that it wasn’t even one of those you would find in the Lord’s House who came back after receiving the gift of being made alive again. Jesus reached across a barrier that separated the dead (men with leprosy) and the alive (Himself) and made the dead alive. That’s mercy poured out, beloved in the Lord. That’s a mercy that knows no bounds, no divisions, no social class, and no kind or sort of sin that is simply too bad to forgive. Jesus overcomes it all in His unique and loving mercy.

Luther once said, “He who would be a Christian must learn to remember that with all his benevolence, faithfulness and service he will not always reap gratitude, but must also suffer ingratitude. But this should not move us to withhold help and service from others.” Such a blessing when we are able to say, I serve my church – or – I serve my needy neighbor not in order to receive the gratitude they offer – but because I’m called by my Lord to do just that. You are called, beloved in the Lord, to service. You are called to a service that happens sometimes to be ingratitude because no one saw it, no one paid any attention, or no one even recognized it as service. The service is still the same. And when we serve the least of these, as Matthew tells us in His Gospel, we are serving the Lord Jesus Himself.

Jesus heals. Give thanks to God. That’s all that needs to be said, right? Yes, plus have faith in worship like the outsider Samaritan. Yes, plus behold the mercy of Jesus poured out to you as He breaks down dividing walls... whether that be social class, disease or even sin – the worst disease of all. Jesus breaking through in mercy is at the heart of this story. Yes, a nice miracle. Yes, a lesson in thanksgiving. But most of all faith and mercy are on display. Faith and mercy are ours through Jesus. Thanks be to God. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.