

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
Luke 17:11-19 (hymn: “Jesus, Refuge of the Weary”)  
September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012

Perhaps there was none wearier during the days of Jesus than those who suffered the deplorable marks of Leprosy. And perhaps one of the greatest examples of suffering and then healing from the hand of Jesus comes in the Gospel text for today – the ten men Jesus met on His way between Samaria and Galilee. They stood at a distance and cried forth for the mercy of Jesus. They needed it. Not only were they miserable because of this horrible disease, they were also miserable because they were excluded from their families, unable to live with those who were considered clean.

Those who were weary need Jesus. Jesus, Refuge of the Weary. He is the place to go. He is the place to be. And when we have the opportunity to sing such magnificent hymns like the hymn with the same title, we often times wonder... how did such a hymn come about? What does a weary hymn writer look like? Perhaps he would be someone who could associate with people like the men in the Gospel text. Well, the man who wrote these words was weary, but not sick with a disease. He was weary over the condition of the world. Allow me to tell you about him.

Girolamo Savonarola was a Dominican monk who lived a generation before Martin Luther. Some called him a reformer in his own right – but nothing like Luther. He first served in the order at Bologna and it is said he joined without the knowledge of his parents. He heard a powerful sermon by an Augustinian in the town of Faenza and it changed his life. He renounced the world and joined the monastery. In 1481 or 1482 he was sent by his superior to preach in Florence. In this center of the Renaissance he immediately opposed with great energy the pagan and often immoral life prevalent in many classes of society. He was a bold preacher of repentance. Many from Florence did not like his energy, his proclamations, and his boisterous and enthusiastic sermons. But some did – and he began a revolution that would bring many citizens against the disdainful worldly practices of both civic and religious leaders. He believed he was chosen by God to reform not only the church, but also the government as well.

These words from the hymn he wrote seem to suggest a battle between God’s saving grace and a world that cannot redeem us. Look at the first stanza of hymn 423 again. Instead of singing them, let’s read them together.

*Jesus, refuge of the weary, Blest redeemer, whom we love, Fountain in life’s desert dreary, Savior from the world above: Often have your eyes, offended, Gazed upon the sinner’s fall; Yet upon the cross extended, You have borne the pain of all.*

Jesus is the refuge of those who walk about the world in a state of weariness. He saves us from this desert – this nothingness – that is referred to as the world. To Savonarola the world and its vices were a huge stumbling block to the people. To those lepers who called out to Jesus in the text, disease was the stumbling block and nothing could save them from it except the sweet words of Jesus. And all He had to do was call their healing out with His lips. Their lives went from a desert dreary to living in cleanliness. God made them this way. He makes us – diseased with sin – this way as well. He does it with His Word. He calls it out and makes it so.

Savonarola was concerned about the spiritual state of the citizen of Florence. He took things too far. He wanted to get rid of all the leaders because he thought of them too corrupt. He tried to establish a theocracy where Jesus Christ would rule over all civil matters of the people. Teenagers followed him in mobs and crusaded against luxury and immorality. It is said that they would search homes for expensive items, even musical instruments, which they confiscated. People read the Bible and went to church instead of the usual entertainment of sports and theater

productions. Business people returned what they had gained illegally. Cards, dice, jewelry, cosmetic, wigs, and lewd pictures were gathered and burned.

One can almost hear those severe words from this Dominican monk at the beginning of the second stanza of the hymn. Let's read this together.

*Do we pass that cross unheeding, Breathing no repentant vow, Though we see you wounded, bleeding, See your thorn-encircled brow? Yet your sinless death has brought us Life eternal, peace, and rest; Only what your grace has taught us Calms the sinner's deep distress.*

If only Savonarola would have looked to Jesus and His Words before changing things so drastically. Jesus healed and gave life with His preaching of repentance. He didn't send His disciples to steal items from kings. Rather, Jesus preached the Word and He led by example. Repentance can and should be preached. Repentance should be demonstrated. In our falls from putting Jesus as our head, we dare not persist. Instead of breathing no repentant vow – we speak, approach our Lord with a contrite heart, and seek His mercy that we do not deserve. Jesus shows the kind of mercy He gives when He brings back from death men who were not dead but dead to the world. He heals them and by His blood does the same for you and me.

Through Savonarola's preaching his popularity grew. A rich man named Lorenzo de Medici brought him to the church in Florence, Italy. Michelangelo, the great sculptor, often listened to his sermons there. His popularity did not last, however. When some of his predictions failed, public tide turned against him. His denunciations of the papal excesses made enemies with the pope. In the city people rioted and eventually a mob took him prisoner. He was condemned to be tortured, hanged and burned.

Let's now look at the final stanza and read it together.

*Jesus, may our hearts be burning With more fervent love for you: May our eyes be every turning To behold your cross anew Till in glory, parted never From the blessed Savior's side, Graven in our hearts forever, Dwell the cross, the Crucified.*

The hymn writer, a zealous Dominican monk who lived in the 1400s, had strange ideas. I'm sure the kind of "burning hearts" he had in mind was not suppose to resemble his eventual death. But the words of this Lenten hymn ring quite true for us today. They are good to sing and good to keep in mind. And no matter what the season our eyes turn to the cross of Christ and that is the kind of thing for Christians that set our hearts on fire. Jesus healed ten men in the Gospel text today. Ten, you know, is called the "complete number" in the Bible. This is important because He completely heals you, completely all by His graceful work on that cross extended. He brings you back to life like he did to the men with leprosy.

Some think that today we stand at a distance from Jesus like the men with leprosy and call out to Him to have mercy. Not so. Jesus brings us into His presence. He is with us and we are with Him. What a privilege and honor to be in the presence of our Lord who heals us from unrighteousness. "Thanks be to God," we say. We give thanks and gratitude to our Lord who has given us so much. I'm so very glad you are here to do just that. I'm so very glad, especially for you, because you are here receiving the life Jesus won for you. Amen.

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

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