

Sermon for Trinity 14 – Luke 17:11-19

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“And [one of the cleansed lepers] fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving Him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan.” Spoiler Alert! You’ve heard this warning before. Someone says it to alert those who haven’t yet seen or heard the outcome of an event. Maybe it’s a book with an unexpected ending. Or the climatic episode of your favorite TV show. Or the surprise ending of a movie. Or the baseball game you have DVR’ed. Spoiler Alert is to warn you that the information to proceed in that person’s words will give you some indication of the conclusion, if not ruin it altogether. Of course, to share that information is to “spoil” the book, movie, or game. Perhaps it’s happened to you: “Oh, that’s a great book! Too bad the main character DIES in the end!” Did you have to give it away!?! Or “Yep, that win will really put the Royals in good position come playoff time!” Come on! Where’s the spoiler alert!

Our Lord doesn’t give the Spoiler Alert warning either in today’s Gospel. The story of the ten lepers is an account of how God’s mercy was, already in the time of Jesus, extending beyond Israel to all people. It was as if Jesus was so impatient in waiting for His own command to make disciples of all nations to be fulfilled that He was already doing Himself. God had a particular order in which the Gospel was going to be preached. First it was to be preached in Jerusalem, then in Samaria, and only then throughout the world. Christ told the disciples: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” St. Paul said it this way, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” But Jesus interrupts that order and steps out of line by enlisting the Samaritan leper as His follower. He spoils the whole order of things! None of this was supposed to happen until the Acts of the Apostles chapter 8 when Philip the evangelist was sent to Samaria to convert large segments of the population there. By converting the Samaritan leper, Jesus got ahead of Himself.

According to God’s plan, Jesus was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. God’s timing would allow for the preaching of the Gospel to the Samaritans and Gentile pagans only after He had opened the door of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Only at that time would the Holy Spirit be let loose in the world. Salvation begins in Jerusalem and, only after Easter, in Samaria. Jesus, in working faith in the heart of the Samaritan leper, was reaching forward a few years into the yet-to-come and taking an event out of its expected sequence. He was spoiling the future! But how did this Gospel begin?

“When [Jesus] saw the [ten lepers] he said to them, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went, they were cleansed.” They plodded along the way, hoping that His words would come true. It was the ten lepers had been cast out of everyday society because of their disease. Their mandatory distance from normal life was to prevent leprosy from infecting everybody else.

According to the Center for Disease Control, leprosy outbreaks in our country today are not a major concern. It’s not a disease we much encounter here anymore. But while infected rotten flesh doesn’t affect us, the works of the flesh certainly do. “... Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies ...” these alienate us from God and our neighbor. We have taken part in them and have no less spent our lives removed from family, from contributing to society, and from God, even as the 10 lepers were. The difference though,

in sin, we choose this separation, but the lepers were forced into it. They could only call out from a distance way outside of their community.

Until He came. At the word of Jesus, they were healed.

Each of the ten lepers as they followed the instructions of Jesus to show themselves to the priests, must have marveled that their scaly skin, rotten flesh, and self-amputating limbs were restored like those of a newborn. The ridiculous suggestion of Nicodemus that he should crawl back into his mother's womb and be born again had in this account actually come true. The ten lepers were each beginning a new life. The one Samaritan leper experienced the same physical miracle, but a greater miracle was worked in his inner self. He was born to a lively hope in Jesus Christ. The God who had regenerated his body had also converted his soul. He knew what it meant to be baptized into Christ.

The healing of leprosy is about as close as a living person gets to experiencing the resurrection. The process of living deterioration and death is reversed by the miracle. Those who are prematurely old become youths. But the Gospel for this day of the healing of the lepers was more than a proclamation that the Messiah was here in Jesus. No, it was also a spoiler – a foretaste of the preaching of the Gospel to all people, even to the far ends of the earth, and especially in this place! Here is the account of a God who is so restless, who is so impatient with His own plans for the salvation of the world that He spoils the ending – He gives it away when He gives a foretaste of what He intends to do on a much larger scale.

In Jesus, God works salvation in our lives in ways that we could never imagine. God does things in unexpected ways. He does things at unexpected times and in unexpected places that often seem out of joint to us. We might plan, but God has His own plans. In St. Matthew's Gospel we see this in the centurion's sick servant, the Canaanite woman, and the centurion at the cross. These were gentiles who clearly confessed the Christ. They were not of the house of Israel in the traditional sense. No one could have predicted that God would have worked His grace through them. St. Luke tells the same story. Last week's Good Samaritan knows the real will of God in a way that the priest and the Levite do not. The healed Samaritan leper realizes that faith first recognizes not merely that there is a God, but that this God is working for us only in Jesus. In this same vein, God's kingdom is opened to us.

And that's why God gives us the ultimate spoiler today. He just couldn't wait to tell us in the end. I'm telling you that the very proclamation of eternal life in Christ Jesus is yours today. What will be announced when the books are opened, when the sheep and goats are separated, and when all heaven rejoices is yours today, since God can't help but spoil the ending: Jesus has covered all your sins with His blood and you are forgiven. At the word of Jesus, you are healed.

But there's another spoiler as well: The marriage supper of the Lamb, the one that's supposed to take place at the end of the ages, is actually happening today. I'm telling you that in this place, God is bringing eternity before us today. I'm telling you that the angel's words are for us: "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." In the body and blood of Jesus, God proclaims the reality of our forgiveness and eternal life right now! He couldn't wait! Spoiler alert: You are children of God in Christ Jesus: now and for eternity! Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✨BJF✨