

Sermon for Trinity 14 – Luke 17:11-19

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

Jesus was making His final journey to Jerusalem. This would be His last journey to the Holy City, for on the upcoming Passover festival, He would die on the cross to cleanse sinners. But this time, He made a slight detour that took him through Samaria and Galilee. And on the way, as He was entering a town, He was met by ten lepers who called out to Him.

These lepers called out to Jesus from a distance. They didn't just come right up to Him. Why? They were keeping the law. Which law? The ceremonial Old Testament Law from Leviticus: "The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hairs of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.' He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp." We assume that these 10 lepers were following that law which was proscribed for them. Living outside of civilization. Torn clothes and loose hair. But they did deviate from the law in one point. They were supposed to cry out only one word, "Unclean, unclean." However, when Jesus comes, they do not cry out, "Unclean." What do they say? Four words (six in English) they cry: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." For the lepers, "Unclean" was the cry of doubt and despair. But "have mercy on us," that's the cry of faith. Both calls recognize the reality of the lepers' uncleanness, but only "Lord, have mercy on us" puts trust in a Master who can heal and save.

Guilt and sin still plague us like an internal leprosy. It would be embarrassing for others to know the hurtful and harmful actions, words, and thoughts that we keep inside and don't want others to know about. While we aren't physically separated from each other like lepers outside the community, in our minds and hearts we couldn't be farther from each other.

The liturgy is a great help to us here. We don't sing about ourselves, "Unclean, Unclean, Unclean," though it is true. No, we sing in faith, "Lord have mercy upon us. Christ have mercy upon us. Lord have mercy upon us." So our guilt, sin, and shame are laid at the feet of our King and Master, no longer to keep us in doubt and no longer to keep us in despair.

"Lord, have mercy upon us." This prayer of faith is powerful. So powerful that Christ simply says to the lepers: "Go and show yourselves to the priests." He doesn't say, "Yes, I will have mercy on you; you will be clean." They already trusted that Christ would accomplish that which they asked. What more needed to be said than the necessary result of their answered prayer? It's as if He meant to say, "There is no need for asking, because your faith already has it before you began to ask. You already became clean in My eyes when you began to expect this from Me. Nothing more is necessary except this: go and show your cleanness to the priests. As I regard you and as you believe,

so you are and so you will be.” And if this Merciful Lord, by the power of His Word, had the power to cleanse leprosy, how much more does He make us clean from all sin by His almighty forgiveness for us!?!

As they went on their way, the lepers were cleansed. In fact, they were no longer lepers. The torn clothes, loose hair, separation from community, the call of “unclean,” – all that’s gone now. Back to society, back to home, back to family. “But only one of them, when he saw he was cleansed, turned back and praised God. Now he was a Samaritan.” Which means he used to be unclean on two counts. One, he was a leper. Two, he was a Samaritan. Which means he was not in the line of Israel. But who the Lord calls clean, is, in fact, clean.

But then Christ asks the questions that we want to know, too. “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” I would suspect that all ten lepers were thankful. Who wouldn’t be gushing with gratitude to family and friends about being cured? Who wouldn’t give credit where credit is due and say, “Jesus of Nazareth did this for me!” Thankfulness is not what separated the nine from the one. It was faith. And this unearths a chilling fact. Ten were healed. But only one was found faithful. Nine were not. Many call out, “Lord, Lord” but their hearts remain far from Him, and He does not know them. Many can jump through the hoops, have great thankfulness, and even appear very righteous in an outward way, and still lose the crown of eternal life. How can we spare ourselves from such an end? Repent. Turn from your sins and believe Christ died for them. Come again and again to this place. We have a great need that is only satisfied here. Pray the prayer of faith, “Lord, have mercy upon us!” Receive His forgiveness even as you do now: Christ died for you and forgives you all your sins. You are free.

In faith, the Samaritan turned back and praised God with a loud voice. Where did he praise God? Not before the priests. Where then? At God’s feet. “He fell on his face at Jesus’ feet giving Him thanks.” The Samaritan trusted that no earthly miracle worker could heal leprosy, but only God, the God who stood before him. If the Lord Jesus could heal the body, what couldn’t He do?!? He would also forgive sinners unclean in their own sins. This trust led the Samaritan to bear fruit of faith: “to fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” “To thank and praise, serve, and obey Him.”

One last word of comfort our Savior says to the Samaritan; one last word of comfort our Savior says to us. “Rise and go your way, your faith has saved you.” Not only was he healed from leprosy but saved. So we are, too. For Jesus’ name means, “the Lord saves.” Yes, indeed! We are saved and go our way in dying to self and living for our neighbor in thoughts and actions of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; against such things there is no law. God your way; you are free. Amen.

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