

## Sermon for Trinity 14 – Luke 17:11-19

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

When you meet someone for the first time, what is the standard thing you do? Does this sound familiar? You stick out your hand and say, “Hello, my name is Pastor Froiland. It’s nice to meet you,” as you grab hold of their hand and shake it. But have you ever wondered why we shake hands? I mean, why hands? Why not touch elbows, or big toes, or rub noses? Why do we shake hands?

It’s kind of an odd ritual. But so are the other greetings out there. In France they kiss hello. Italians hug. In Japan, they bow. Dogs sniff each other. Penguins call out and bob their heads. But we shake hands. In our culture, it’s the custom for greeting.

The fact is our lives and our culture are filled with all kinds of customs. Whether realize it or not, we are a people formed by our customs and the rituals we have. Noon meals. Birthday parties. Exchanging wedding rings. The male bonding of an afternoon fishing on the lake. The pledge of allegiance. Answering the phone by saying “hello.” These are customs and rituals that we rarely think about why, but they go on around us on any given day.

Rituals don’t just embody the basic values of a community; they form and maintain our common life. Whether you know it or not, you are a ritualized person. From your bedtime routine, to the way you worship, you are a knowing or unknowing ritualist.

Customs have meaning. They teach us. They feed us. They shape us. Our customs are full of significance. This is especially true for the way we worship. Our worship is filled with powerful rituals.

Our liturgy is not there for mere empty repetition. It has meaning. Just like a hand shake has meaning and significance, the liturgy has profound meaning and significance. It ensures that God’s grace gets delivered. And it ensures that we have the opportunity to thank God and praise Him.

Consider today’s Gospel reading. Ten lepers cry out, “Jesus, Master [Lord], have mercy on us.” Leprosy is not a pretty disease. Though it’s not always deadly, it disfigures and discolors skin, plugs mucus membranes, gnaws at internal nerves, and banishes its infected ones from society.

Not only were these ten men covered by disease, they were cut off from their families. So they come to Jesus and cry out, “Lord have mercy!”

Sound familiar? They are the words of the Kyrie in our liturgy. “Kyrie” is simply the Greek word for “Lord.” Kyrie Eleison—“Lord have mercy!”

It’s what the lepers were crying out to Jesus. It’s what you and I cry out to Jesus. Not just here in church, but anytime, and any day. When the bills keep adding up, when sickness sets in, when the kids are too much, when they make us worry, when our bodies grow old, when marriages struggle, when depression makes us feel hopeless, when a sinful choice makes a mess of our lives. “Lord have mercy!”

The lepers cry out to Jesus. And what does Jesus do? “When he saw them he said to them, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests ...’” Curiously, He sends them on to the priests.

And without hesitation, they go on their way. Why? That was the ritual in Jesus’ day. In order for lepers to be cleansed, this was standard operating procedure. In fact, Leviticus chapter 14 prescribes a very specific and elaborate custom to be followed for those who desired cleansing from leprosy. Here’s a brief look into it: “The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘This shall be the law of the leprous person

for the day of his cleansing. He shall be brought to the priest ... And the priest shall take one of the male lambs and offer it for a guilt offering, along with the log of oil, and wave them for a wave offering before the Lord ... The priest shall take some of the blood of the guilt offering, and the priest shall put it on the lobe of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot.” (Lev. 14:1-2, 12, and 14).

From our perspective it’s a bit of an odd ritual. But this certainly explains why the lepers would have gone on their way to the priests. By faith, they listen to the voice of Jesus and head for the priest. “... And as they went they were cleansed.”

They cried out, “Lord have mercy!” And mercy was given. Every week in the words of the liturgy we cry out, “Lord have mercy.” Yes, it’s our custom. Yes, it’s routine. But it’s not empty. It’s not meaningless! We sing out with the lepers and all those who have gone before us, crying out to Jesus asking Him to have mercy on us!

We sing it here together, but we take it with us every day of the week. The liturgy is meant to be lived and not just simply performed on Sunday. When the ritual of the liturgy seems like it’s becoming mundane, boring, or irrelevant, it’s not the fault of the liturgy. Rather it’s because the meaning has been forgotten or is no longer lived outside these walls.

Think about this for a minute. Let’s go back to our example: When you and I shake hands with someone, we know what it means. We know what it symbolizes. It can be a sign of agreement or coming to terms on a deal or welcoming someone. But typically what hand do you shake with? Your right hand, correct? What if someone would shake hands with you using their left hand? What would you do?

In some countries of Africa or the Middle East, if you offer your left hand as a greeting, you would be giving great offense. In fact, it would be like greeting someone here in America with an extended lone middle finger.

So our customs have meaning. But if it isn’t taught we lose its meaning and the opportunity to have our lives shaped by it.

Customs must be taught. Like placing your hand on your heart for the national anthem, opening and holding the door for women, or standing during the 7<sup>th</sup> inning stretch of a baseball game; if it’s not taught ritual can lose its purposeful practice, but never its meaning or value.

“Lord have mercy upon us. Christ have mercy upon us. Lord have mercy upon us.” It was said by unclean lepers covered by disease. You and I are unclean, covered with our own sin. But Jesus had mercy upon those lepers and made them clean. Jesus has mercy upon us and makes us clean.

Baptized into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, we are washed clean, named and claimed as God’s very own children.

Every week the words of the Invocation not only invoke God’s presence in our worship, but they remind us that we live by His name, washed clean and forgiven. By grace, these words (In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit) were imprinted upon you in baptism. And so, by grace, they are spoken at the start of worship as a powerful reminder that God has had mercy upon you and continues to have mercy on you.

When Jesus had mercy on the lepers what happened? “Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving Him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, ‘Were not ten cleansed? Where are the

nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?' And He said to him, 'Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.'"

Realizing his cry for mercy had been answered, the Samaritan returns, "praising God with a loud voice" and "giving thanks" to Jesus. But Jesus asks, "Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

Was Jesus angry because the other nine didn't come and give Him the proper thanks due Him for the mercy He granted? Not likely. Jesus was upset because only one returned to be affirmed in his faith.

Let's be clear: Jesus didn't need the lepers' thanks. In fact, He doesn't need *our* thanks either. God is God, regardless of our thanks to Him. "God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray ... that God would lead us to realize this and receive our daily bread with thanksgiving." Our thanks is important because it makes us all the more mindful of God's love and mercy for us.

We are intentional thanks givers because doing so makes us all the more aware of the gifts of grace that we have been given by God. By being a thanks giver – like the Samaritan leper – we receive all the better God's gifts of grace. Being a thanks giver allows us to exercise our faith in Christ and enjoy the life He grants us. We give thanks that we have received an incredible gift: God's forgiveness. When someone gives you a gift, what are we customarily taught to do? We are to say, "Thank you."

Every week the liturgy provides us the opportunity to once again be thanks givers for the mercy and forgiveness given to us through Jesus Christ. With the Samaritan leper, and all those who have gone before us, we praise and we thank Christ, not because He needs it, but because it makes us grow in confidence and hopefulness of God's continual gift of mercy for us. We take it with us, we live it – like the Samaritan leper.

The liturgy comes from the Scriptures. It's full of life and full of meaning for us. This is why the liturgy is meant to be lived and not just performed here on Sunday. "Lord have mercy!" Say it when you face life's troubles. God will hear your prayer.

When you live the liturgy there is witness to Christ in the way that you live. As thanks givers we proclaim what Christ has done and so give witness to Him through our thanks.

Your very life becomes a witness to Christ because you live being a forgiven, mercy filled, thanks giver. Living the liturgy is nothing other than taking the truth and gifts of our weekly worship with you as you go on your way, where you live it, and by living it, you share Christ. Amen.

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

*This sermon (with slight modifications) was written by the Rev. Dr. L. V. Woodford, pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Mayer, MN. It can be found in his book Great Commission, Great Confusion, or Great Confession? Wipf and Stock Publishing (2012), pg. 205-210.*