

The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity, A²D 2010

Luke 17:11-19

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

1 Ten lepers were cleansed, but only one was saved. Ten were given the gift of health; only one received the gift of faith. All ten cried out to Jesus, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us,” and all ten received the same deliverance from the leprous decay of their flesh, but to only one of them did Jesus declare, “Your faith has saved you.” All ten had faith to approach Jesus and to receive healing from Him at the beginning, but by the end of the account, only one has retained that gift of faith. Only one, the Samaritan, the outsider, turned back and praising God with a loud voice fell at the feet of Jesus and gave Him thanks.

2 All the dead will be raised when Jesus returns because he defeated death for all. But only the saved, only the elect, will live with Jesus. The rest would prefer never to have been raised than to have to acknowledge that Jesus truly is Lord, the eternal Son of God who died and rose to save them from their sins, and also to live eternally apart from Him and His goodness.

3 Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Not just your sin or the sins of all believers, or the sins of this Samaritan leper. All sins. Thinking that your sins just might be too big for God to forgive is arrogance. The death of God on the cross is bigger than any sin because Jesus died for all sins. God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us. Every sin was paid for by the death of Jesus. Sin, rebellion against God, no longer damns. Unbelief is what damns. Un-faith damns.

4 You may not hear in that an excuse for sin. What shall we say then, shall we go on sinning so that grace may abound? By no means. How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (Rom 6:1-2) Nor may you hear in that a false definition of faith. The faith that saves is the faith the leper has received, the faith God delivers through the hearing of His Word. Such faith lives at the feet of Jesus. Faith receives from Jesus what He desires to give. “I believe in Jesus, but that doesn’t mean I need to receive His gifts on Sunday morning” is not faith. It’s a delusion. Faith receives. “True worship is not primarily about gratitude. True worship of God is faith in God, trusting in His mercy, taking Him at His Word, relying on His sacramental gifts. ‘True worship of God takes place when your heart directs all its trust and confidence only toward God and does not let itself be torn away from Him’ (Large Catechism).” As the reformers put it, “The highest worship in the Gospel is the desire to receive forgiveness of sins, grace, and righteousness” (Ap. AC IV).

5 More than healing, Jesus wants to deliver Himself. He alone rendered perfect worship to God. He alone kept the Third Commandment perfectly, or any commandment perfectly. He alone can answer the prayer for mercy, because He alone delivers humanity from the decay of sin. He was unblemished by sin, the only one not cast out by the leprosy of the heart that infected all of Adam’s descendents. For the sake of the leper, the outcast, the one dying because of sin, the one unable to keep even one commandment, God took human flesh in the person of Jesus and died to buy you back from your sin.

6 “Faith alone” is one of the battle cries of the Reformation. Lutherans know it well. But that’s not the end. Faith alone justifies, saves. But faith is never alone. Faith is always accompanied by works. Works do not shape your faith. Quite the opposite, in fact: faith shapes your works. So the faith of the once-leper compels him to return to Jesus to give thanks, to worship. So also the faith of those once-sinners compels them to return to the One who by His death on the cross. To say “faith alone” is not to say that faith is alone, but that faith alone can and does receive the gifts God freely bestows. Faith alone receives God’s grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Faith alone can please God with works of love done for the neighbor. Faith alone is credited to you as perfect righteousness.

7 Faith is purely a gift, which God delivers in the hearing of His Word. As Samuel heard the Gospel before his baptism today, as he heard the Gospel in baptism, as he heard God call him by name and give

him a new name, His own Triune Name, Samuel received God's gift of faith. These are Samuel's best days, before he has feet that stray and a mind that wanders. Before he learns to speak words that he can use to talk back to his parents or tattle on his brother, he can and has received God's gift of faith. It's little wonder then that Jesus exalts helpless infants as model Christians. Unless you receive the kingdom of God like a helpless baby, you will never enter it. Babies can receive God's gift of faith, there's no doubt about that; it's only as we get older that retaining God's gift of faith becomes more difficult.

8 What God has given, He preserves. And, what Jesus told the healed leper is what He says to you forgiven sinner: Your faith has saved you. The faith He has delivered to you in the waters of Holy Baptism and in the hearing of His Word saves you, and He preserves that faith in the same way He delivered it. There's a beauty to this preservation. God gives you faith. Faith draws you back to Jesus where He is giving gifts of forgiveness and salvation, where He is preaching His word to you, forgiving your sins in Holy Absolution, feeding you with His own Body and Blood. And these gifts that faith returns to receive are exactly what strengthen and preserve God's gift of faith in the first place.

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

Soli Deo Gloria

Pastor Jeff Hemmer