

## The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity, A ✕ D 2009

**Luke 17:11-19** On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. <sup>12</sup> And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance <sup>13</sup> and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." <sup>14</sup> When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. <sup>15</sup> Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; <sup>16</sup> and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. <sup>17</sup> Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? <sup>18</sup> Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" <sup>19</sup> And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

*In the name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

1 Why did the leper return? Is it just that his mother taught him well that gifts are to be repaid with a thank-you note? It's not that he's received any more healing than the other nine, as the words of Jesus indicate. They've all heard the same all-powerful Word of Jesus, the Physician of both body and soul. But one leper, a foreigner, returns. And Jesus commends him then commands him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has saved you."

2 Why do people go to church? For that matter, why does church attendance spike after times of tragedy? Pews were packed after planes crashed into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. But those people have largely fallen back into their former routines. After a family death, many people venture back into churches, a new habit which rarely and unfortunately lasts beyond a few weeks. Tragedy has a way of pricking people's consciences, making them realize a need for God. The Law of God works in these times to illustrate that need. This reaction is the opposite of the healed leper's reaction, who returned to give thanks.

3 So why do you come here? Is it to give thanks, because your mother taught you to write thank you notes? Is it out of a sense of obligation, a debt you owe God for all

the good he's done for you? A bid to get Him to keep disaster at bay? Many assume that they come to render to God thanksgiving and praise for all the good He has done for them. While returning to give thanks is good, while feeling an obligation to render praise to God for His goodness is right, it's not the point, and it's not why you're here. When compared with all that God has done for you, your thanksgiving is never enough. When compared with God's blessings—everything you need to support this body and life—your praise is rather paltry. When compared with the Third Commandment, which calls you not to despise preaching and God's Word, but to hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it, your reasons for being here seem selfish and half-hearted. Compared with the Law at all, your works are only a thin veneer over your sinful interior. Repent.

4 Ten lepers received healing, but one received more. Every person alive receives daily bread from the Creator, but some receive far more. The leper returned, perhaps out of obligation, perhaps out of a duty to say "thank you." Whatever the reason, Jesus doesn't care; He's happy the man has returned. To return to Jesus is what faith does. And in faith, the man received far more than physical healing. He received eternal healing. Rise and go your way; your faith has saved you. Many come here to give thanks, to offer praise, out of duty or obligation, whatever the reason, Jesus doesn't care. He interrupted the leper's thanksgiving to deliver salvation. He does the same for you. Faith returns to Jesus, who has come for you.

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      Worship is not chiefly about giving God thanks. "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).

7      God is a gift-giving God. He gives those out right here, in your midst. Faith receives those gifts. Like the faith of the leper that drew him back to Jesus, faith returns to Jesus, always wanting more. Faith can never say no to God's gifts. Faith only says yes. Here is the forgiveness of sins you so desperately need, combined with ordinary water to make a washing of rebirth. Here is forgiveness, delivered through the Office of the Keys to your very ears. Here is the proclamation of the Gospel, the wellspring of new and eternal life for you. Here is the Body and Blood of Jesus, bestowing His very righteousness to you, delivering the forgiveness of sins.

8      It doesn't matter why you're here. God interrupts even the worst intentions to deliver His forgiveness. Even the worst motives get you here, where God is delivering His gifts. Did you come to give thanks? Then God gives you something for which to be thankful: salvation. Did you come to praise? Then God gives you forgiveness for which

you may praise Him. Did you come because you feel obligated by the Law? Then Jesus gives you Himself, who for your sake fulfilled the Law.

9 As He does with your worship, so the Lord does with your works, as well. Offered in weakness, done with false motives, nevertheless, God redeems them. Clothed in the righteousness of Jesus, all your good works are as perfect as His. Your good works are not offered as gifts of thanks to God but as gifts of service to your neighbor. Even offerings are not given to pay God back for what He has done for you. His mercy is freely given, with nothing to be paid back. To pay for a gift is to reject it. Like the rest of your good works, God doesn't need your offering. They aren't for His sake, but for your neighbor's. He permits you to be a part of His work of providing daily bread to those around you, and, with your offerings, He permits you to be a part of His work of spreading His Gospel to those around you.

10 Faith receives God's gifts. Even faith itself is a gift. And faith responds in love for the neighbor. Ten lepers were healed, but only one was saved. Innumerable people receive daily bread from the Lord, but only the elect receive the Bread of Life for forgiveness and salvation. Rise and go your way, to the altar where Jesus feeds you with Himself, your faith has saved you. Give thanks by receiving what the Lord offers freely.

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

*Soli Deo Gloria*  
Pastor Jeff Hemmer  
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