

14th Sunday after Trinity, September 18, 2022

Readings: *Proverbs 4: 10-23, Galatians 5: 16-24, Luke 17: 11-19*

The Cry of Faith: Lord, Have Mercy

The ten lepers cried out from a distance, *"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"* (Luke 17:11–19). Their condition cut them off from God and others. So also do the works of the flesh cut us off from God and others. *"Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God"* (Gal. 5:16–24). Thus, we cry out with the lepers, *"Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy,"* eagerly seeking His good gifts. Jesus said to the lepers, *"Go and show yourselves to the priests."* And as they went, they were cleansed. So too, we walk by faith and not by sight, being confident of Jesus' help before we see any evidence of it, trusting that Jesus' cleansing words of forgiveness will restore us to wholeness in the resurrection. Let us be as the one leper who returned to the true High Priest to give Him thanks and glory. For Jesus bore our infirmities in His sacrifice at Calvary. His words are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh (Prov. 4:10–23).

Sermon Transcript:

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Okay, so we have here Luke's story of Jesus doing something fairly familiar, healing some people, but also, a bunch of people not quite figuring out what's going on and misinterpreting the events. So Jesus is walking back to Jerusalem between Samaria and Galilee. Samaria, we learned again last week, remember, was the capital of the city of the Northern tribe that split away. And they had ceased to follow God properly, worshiping at the temple, and they had mixed in the false gods of other nations, intermarried and confused everything. So they had a thought that they were God's people, but they were all mixed up. And they were considered the lowest of the lowest. They were like the pariahs of society, as far as the Jewish people were concerned.

And then we have lepers on top of that. Now lepers, they have some skin condition. We still have leprosy today. It's still in existence. Sometimes people get cured, but most of the time, it's a lifelong thing. Now in their day, they had to separate. Leprosy meant that you were unclean. Anything, any blemish on your body or anything like that made you unclean. Leprosy was the ultimate uncleanliness of your skin, and so they had to live separated from everybody else. Their friends and family couldn't even come visit them. At best, they could drop off food and other things that were needed near the village where the lepers lived. But the lepers couldn't be there. They had to stand far off. In fact, whenever they traveled anywhere, any time they came close to anybody, they had to yell out, "Leper, leper." So everybody had to steer clear.

So these 10 lepers see Jesus, and they cried from a long distance, "Have mercy on us Master." And Jesus said, "Go show yourself to the priest," which is what you had to do in order to be brought back into the community of God, into the family of God, into your own personal family. You had to go to the temple and be approved by the priest to be clean. So they had to give you a physical examination and declare you to be clean, before you could join in, back into society.

So they all go and while they're going, they're cleansed miraculously, but only one guy shows up and goes back and praises Jesus. And Jesus says, "What? Nobody can come back but this foreigner?" Foreigner is really a

loaded term in that day. There were the Jewish people and then it was everybody else. We are "The Chosen", and then there's the foreigners, those guys... There's a sharp line. So this foreigner returns, and He is emphasizing that fact. The Chosen people, the people of God, the Jewish people who had leprosy, "They didn't come back to me. It was only the pariah, the foreigner." Even though he's healed, he's still a pariah of society, because he's a Samaritan. But he's the one that comes, and gives glory to God and he praises God. And so Jesus says, "Go rise, your faith has made you well."

Now this is a really big question for a lot of people. Was it the faith of the Samaritan that caused him to be healed of the leprosy? No, it wasn't. Does it mean that this man was healed of leprosy, but the others were not because they didn't come back and give to praise Jesus? Does that mean that they lost their healing and that they were no longer cleansed of their leprosy? No, it does not. They were able to show themselves to the priest as cleaned. They were cleansed.

Jesus doesn't then take back His healing. "Sorry you didn't fully understand it, so I'm not going to give it to you." Thank God, because if that were case, none of us would have any of God's grace, because none of us fully understand it. But when Jesus is talking to the Samaritan and says "Your faith has made you well", He's talking about more than just the physical healing, because the Samaritan understood that what was going on was more than physical. He understood that he was being restored, not just to the people of God here on earth, but he was being restored in spirit as well. He was cleansed, body and soul. The other nine were cleansed of their body, we don't know what happened to their souls. But this one, this one understood that the place where God dwells was no longer in the temple, but it was there in this man, Jesus. This is where God connects with humanity. It's through Jesus Christ.

And so he went back to worship God and be restored into the community of God. He went to the source, Jesus Christ, and therefore he was healed of body, and more importantly, he was healed in soul. And we are called also not to gratify the desires of our flesh and to look to the flesh. We tend to be focused on the flesh and earthly things, our daily life, our daily grind, the money that we have, the food that we eat, the places that we go, jobs that we have, we think on the level of the terms of this world. And so we are called, not to gratify that, that's what he means by "flesh", the things of this world, the sinful things of this world. We're not called to gratify those desires, but we're called to submit the desire of the flesh against the spirit. The spirit is where we are to reside and focus upon, not the things of this world.

Now we have the Proverbs author saying, "I taught you the way of wisdom. I've led you in the paths of uprightness. When you walk, your step will not be hampered, and if you run, you will not stumble." So, wonderful. But is he talking about our physical life? If we become Christian, if we are Christians, does that mean that life just goes smoothly and we have no more bumps in the road of our life? We have no problems whatsoever, since it is smooth sailing, from here on out? I think most of you have enough life experience to realize that's not the case. So, what in the world does he mean that, when you walk, your step will not be hampered? I don't know. I look at my life and it's pretty hampered a lot of times, here in this world. If I run, you will not stumble? I don't know, I've stumbled quite a few times, in this world. So what does this mean? Does it mean that I don't have wisdom, that I have not been taught the Word of God? That I'm really not Christian if these things are happening to me? Again, we need to think along the lines of the leper, who was focused on the spirit, not the physical, no, not just the physical. See, even when we face the trials and tribulations of life, be they as a result of our own sin, or even whether they be the result of the corruption of this world, we face these things with the authority of the Word of God, and we recognize that we are healed,

not just in the body, but also in the spirit. That if our bodies are stumbling and falling, that we still, spiritually, are at peace, because God's Word resides in us. And therefore, when we face the trials of this world, when we face the temptations and the hardships of this world, we will not stumble and we will not fall, and our way will not be hampered, when we recognize that it is the Word of God that restores us and that keeps us in His loving care, that He is with us always, to the very end of the age. Then we have nothing to fear. Even death is not something to be feared, because Christ is with us and we have been buried in Christ in our baptism. So we've already died and we've been raised to new life in Christ. So even death is not something to be feared by us. Why? Because He has given us healing of the soul. Not only has He given us healing of the soul, but He has given us the fruit of the Spirit to nourish us and strengthen us for this walk of faith.

Notice when Paul talks about the fruit of the Spirit and I stumble on this, sometimes, I think the fruits, multiples. One fruit is love, one fruit is joy, peace, patience, kindness, so on and so forth. But when Paul talks about it, it's singular, the fruit of the Spirit. All of this is one thing, and it is a gift given to you by God and it is yours right now. You have the fruit of the Spirit, so you are filled with His love so that your way might be righteous and you may not stumble. You have the love of God. You have the joy of your salvation. You have the peace, which surpasses all understanding. You have the patience of Christ in you. You have His kindness and goodness.

Now, do you always feel joyful? Man, there are times in your life where you're just not feeling love and you're not feeling the joy. Now, are there times in your life when you're not patient? I mean, I'm always patient....Okay, maybe we might all struggle with patience every once in a while. Just a little bit. Goodness, I'd like to say that I'm a good person, but am I filled with goodness all the time? Faithfulness? Well, I try, but I'm a fickle human being, so that's a little off. Gentleness? Unless you irritate me. Self-control? Well, most of the time. So do I feel these things in my life all the time? Not really, not always. But do I have them as a gift from God? Absolutely. I just don't fully live up to them or fully understand how much they are in my life and how much they are mine. And so I constantly am striving to understand this gift that is mine, even when I don't feel it. Even when I look at my life and I see enmity and strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions and all of the others that go along with it.

You see, we live in this tension and the Spirit is given to us by Christ and we are free, and we are given the fullness of this fruit. But the flesh, my sinful nature still wants to rise up out of the grave, that has been drowned in in my baptism, wants to rise up and grab me and take me along with it. So how do I avoid that sin dragging me away from the comfort and peace and confidence of Christ? How do I live in this world where there are trials and tribulations and temptations galore? How do I live in the fruit of the Spirit? When I live by being steeped in His Word, by allowing the Word of God to dwell in me richly, by allowing the Word of God to transform my mind, by adhering to the Word, by studying the Word, by dwelling in the Word in daily devotion and prayer. Using tools like the Treasury of Daily Prayer and the Scriptures and the Small Catechism, the Book of Concord, all those things that we've already talked about and others, to allow God's work to be at the center and the focus of our existence. Because then, when trials and tribulations come our way, we recognize, "I don't feel very joyful right now, but I have joy, because I have Christ. I don't feel very patient right now, but I have the patience of God because He is with me, because His Word is declared. I don't feel very loving quite frankly, but my feelings are not the gauge of reality. The reality is Christ has given me all of these things and they are mine."

And He does not give them piecemeal. Like the 10 lepers, just because I don't fully understand the gift that I've been given, doesn't mean I don't have it. I just haven't fully realized the potential of what it is that I have. And the only way I fully understand that is my dwelling in the Word and allowing that Word to dwell in me, so that I might fully and more richly understand what it means to have love and joy, peace and patience, kindness and goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. What a blessing are all of these things. Does your heart not desire to have this in your life? You don't need to desire it. It is already yours. You already have it, this desire to grow it and learn about it so that it might inform every aspect of your life.

So even when you're not feeling it, you can still recognize it is yours, because of the gift of God given to you through His Word. Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life, because the Word of God is in you, and that is the spring of life. It is yours. He gives life. He is concerned about our body, don't give that up, just because of the works of our flesh, our evil, sinful nature, He still promises the restoration of that flesh, and we still believe in the resurrection of the body. So the body is still important, but it is informed and led by the Spirit. Just like our emotions don't lead the train, neither does our flesh, lead the train. It's the Spirit of God that dwells in us, that leads and guides our minds, our hearts, our souls and our strength. That we might love God and love our neighbor, with the fruit of the Spirit given to us, free through His Word.

May His grace, mercy and peace, be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.