**Have Mercy On Us**

**Luke 17:11-19**

14th Sunday after Trinity

09.05.2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Ten lepers see Jesus and lift up their voices to Him, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." What is it that they want from Jesus? Do they want healing from Him? Is it possible that they want something else? Or, do they want healing AND something else?

Many people fail to understand something that was very basic to the thinking of those who were of the faith before the incarnation of Christ – indeed something that was a core understanding for most of human history. Illness and death are a consequence of sinfulness. Do you remember the disciples asking Jesus about the man born blind in John’s Gospel (John 9:2), “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” We should also know this simple Scriptural truth, “The wages of sin is death.” (Rom. 6:23)

Be careful how you hear this. This is not to say that we have a direct link, that sin ‘X’ leads to illness ‘Y’. That is not it at all. There are times we might be able to see the link, for example committing adultery may lead to venereal disease. But that is not the usual case. Simply put, if there were no sin, there would be no death – and the things that lead to death. Illness and death are consequences of the fall into sin. Illness is outward evidence that we are all sinful and unclean.

Leprosy was a disease which was held in great terror. It earned a special place because of the fact that it was so highly contagious without a cure and could bring a long, slow, lingering death. Those with leprosy were considered unclean, and Torah required that if anybody touched such a person, they too would be unclean and would need to abide by the requirements in lifestyle accordingly.

These requirements not only spoke to the contagious nature of the disease but, were also pointing to the unclean nature of sin, and how contagious sin is. The leprosy of sin is slowly killing each and every one of us, rotting us away from the inside out.

Lepers lived alone or with other lepers. They did not live with their families because leprosy made them unclean, and because it was so contagious. They were outcasts from their community and from their loved ones because of the contagious, walking, death they carried in their bodies. Leprosy kept them out of the synagogue and temple, their uncleanness translated into the fact that before God there were unholy.

We probably hear this as harsh. People complain when the same sort of thing is done today. People get angry when those in some manifest impenitence are not allowed to commune. It is sad! What people fail to fully understand is the dire consequences of sin. Sin is unholiness, and if undealt with, those unholy will spend eternity apart from God.

That is why unholiness is not allowed in the synagogue and temple, why they were excluded from the congregation. You see, that which is contagious spreads. Open and manifest impenitence over sinfulness that is publicly known, if allowed to continue, is contagious, and others will begin to think that such behavior is acceptable to God.

If we consider the uncleanness rules regarding leprosy, they sound very familiar to our ears today. COVID has people quarantined – staying only with their family, or in certain hospital wards, until they are “cleared” for public consumption again. In fear of the contagious nature, and the possibility that it can be fatal, extreme measures are taken to keep that fate away. In fact, because some may be asymptomatic but contagious, many take measures to keep them safe from everyone.

While COVID, and leprosy can bring physical suffering and possibly an end of life in this present mortal existence, do we have the same concern about our eternal well-being? What about the eternal well-being of others? Do we take the same precautions to make sure that those things which might lead to eternal death – separation from God in eternal suffering – are avoided? Do we listen to, and abide by God’s Word on those things with the same concern, as we heed the words of the “experts” on matters in regard to COVID?

Unfortunately, most do not, and I pray for their eternal well-being!

These ten lepers see Jesus and holler at Him, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” Their cry is two-fold, “Please grant us forgiveness and healing!” They want forgiveness and healing so they can return to the fellowship of believers – so they can return to church and join in that fellowship of the saints. And they want to return to be with their families.

Jesus understands their need and says, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” “Go to the priests who can declare you clean and whole. Go to the priests who can pronounce you again in a right relationship with God. Go to the priests whose approval of your restoration will allow you to again join your families and communities.

With the evidence of their leprosy still clinging to them, their flesh still covered with open sores and the stench of gangrene assaulting their nostrils, they immediately head off to the priests. How do we know that is what happened? How do we know that they left before there was physical evidence of healing on their bodies? Our text says so, Listen to a portion again. Jesus said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went they were cleansed.

They left without knowing the outcome of their plea. They left in faith!

They had cried out to Jesus, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” To this, Jesus had responded, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” They knew what that meant. The Holy Spirit worked faith in the Word of Christ, they believed that Jesus was having mercy on them. Their cry for mercy had been heard and answered in the affirmative.

Dear friends in Christ, each week you cry out the same words, “Lord, have mercy.” Following the Introit and the Gloria Patri, you repeat the Kyrie – Lord, have mercy – three times. You do this in expectation of hearing the Word of God, for you know in that Word, Christ comes to you with forgiveness, to heal your spiritual leprosy.

You also sing the Kyrie – Lord, have mercy – three more times in the Agnus Dei. O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy on us. This is your song after the Words of Institution have been spoken. It is your song just before you come to the table to receive Christ’s body and blood for the forgiveness of sins.

“Lord, have mercy on us,” is the cry of the Christian. It is not the cry of those without faith. They do not believe in God or trust God. They believe that life just is. They may believe that it is whatever they make of it, but God is not involved.

“Lord, have mercy on us,” is the cry of those who know of their place before God, who know of their sinfulness and their need for God’s grace to make them whole.

Believers believe they are sinful and unclean, and confess their sins, begging for the healing cleansing of forgiveness. We know that spiritually, we could illustrate sinfulness as a leprosy that makes us outcasts from God. Our sinfulness breaks relationships. Our sinfulness has, on occasion, alienated us from family, neighbors, friends, and others in our community.

This is why we gather together in this place. We can hang out with nobody else but those who share our spiritual leprosy and beg for God’s mercy. Even though we may not always recognize it, we know of our sinfulness – it is after all, what you just confessed a few moments ago?

Christ, in His mercy, commands that mercy be given and dispensed.

In sending the lepers to go to the priests, Christ was showing His power over that which brings illness and death – sin. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem for a purpose – to show mercy. He was going to Jerusalem to give His life to uncleanness in order to grant holiness. Christ was going to the cross – to become cursed, to become unclean, so that in Him all might be made holy.

Today, the forgiveness He purchased He commands to be spoken and delivered. He is the priest who pronounces lepers healed and sinners forgiven. He does it as He did it then, by the mouth of His servants – in that day priests – today pastors.

You beg for mercy, and Christ sends you to the Great High Priest – He sends you to Himself. He has already made the required sacrifice, and you eat of the fruits of His labors – His body and blood are given to you for the forgiveness of sins. Christ comes to you and fills you of Himself and you are cleansed and made new.

His mercy is bestowed upon you, filling your ears and your mouth with Christ.

We cry out, “Lord, have mercy upon us!”

Jesus says, “Come to my table, all is prepared. Here is My mercy to you. Gather together with all those who bear my name – gather together also with all those who gather together in heaven, angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven. At My table eat and drink of My forgiveness. I give to you that which makes you whole in body and spirit. This food grants healing and gives life. It is the medicine of immortality in the forgiveness of sin. Eat and be filled! Drink and be satisfied!”

Thanks be to God that in Christ Jesus, God has mercy upon us. Amen.