

All Holy; All Thankful

Luke 17:11-19

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

*Why* do these lepers stand at a distance from Jesus? For one, it was commanded of them in the law for lepers. They're to be social pariahs. Not necessarily because the disease was contagious, but because leprosy was unclean. Unholy. It was seen as less of a health disease to be healed and more of a religious defect that's not to infect the holiness of Zion. Not only could they, like the Jewish morticians, not participate in the worship life of the tabernacle until they underwent the purity ritual, but lepers were also excluded from society altogether until they were cleansed. And note the difference. They were *cleansed*, Luke says. Not healed.

But why did these 10 stand at such a distance if they really knew who Jesus was? Seems like they've heard a bit. "Jesus, master, have mercy on us." And yet, their sickness kept them away. Even with the glimmer of hope, their fear kept them detached.

Such is the depravity of sin. It isolates us. Sin divides us. Sin makes us hardened. It separates us from God and one another. It makes us lonely, this ever-clinging disease of original sin.

But Jesus heals the sick, takes on their afflictions, bears their sorrows with them, and for them.

And here lies the difference between the one leper and the nine others. It isn't merely that the one gave thanks. The others were certainly grateful at having been healed. But the one knew the *source* of his sickness (that is, sin), and the *source* of his healing (that is, Christ), and sought to be ever-nearer to He who bore his affliction with him, when all others remained distant. For the man's sake, Jesus, who knew no sin became sick, so that in Jesus, the man would be healed.

This account takes a bit more imagination work on our parts. For one, it's hard to know exactly when the healing itself took place. So get the scene back in your minds. The 10 are far away. They cry to Jesus for help (who knows what kind of help they were expecting. Maybe even just a little bread would've done for some of them). And *some* help Jesus provides initially. He tells them to go away! To the temple, yes, he says "show yourselves to the priests," which was the step you took as a leper *after* the leprosy has gone away. In order to confirm you can re-enter society, the establishment needed to judge you as clean, as God Himself commanded in Leviticus. So Jesus is saying to do what lepers would do *after* they noticed their leprosy had gone away. But their leprosy *had not* gone away. Nevertheless, Jesus commands them to go.

**"As they went,"** the text says, **"they were cleansed."** Some imagine this cleansing taking place upon the first step towards the temple. But it could've well been miles before the healing actually happened. It also could've been progressive, healing little by little, step by step. Perhaps they walked for miles and miles and nothing happened, and they wondered together why they're going to the temple if they were still leprous. Miles and miles of thinking this Jesus guy is just a fraud and that I'm going to go to the temple just to be turned away because, well, I'm still leprous. Then... when the healing does happen, the temptation would be strong to forget that it was, in fact, Jesus as the one who provided such healing. Maybe they thought being cleansed at that time was just a coincidence. Or *perhaps*...maybe they thought of Jesus as a prophet, but that it's *their* own obedience to his command that saved them. Surely not a simple act of grace from He who created all things and delights to save.

But the Samaritan leper knew that the core problem to his leprosy wasn't mere sickness. That's the symptom. Sin is the true underlying disease. In all of its villainy. In all of *our* villainy. In all of *my* villainy. Contrast this to the 9 others. On the one hand, they're all a bit humbled by

their condition. Leprosy would do that to you. Their expression, “have mercy on us” shows they recognize they’ve been reduced to begging. But that doesn’t imply a confession of sins, that they believe themselves deserving temporal and eternal punishment. There are plenty of sick folk or beggars who would blame God Himself. “*You* did this to me, God, so *you* do something about it. I’m the innocent victim here.” Thus, their cry for mercy is more like a cry of “uncle” than a cry of faith.

But true saving faith does not rely on one’s self, but instead looks to the Giver, and gives thanks for however He, the Giver, gives such grace and mercy. And that way is this, the leprosy didn’t just go away. Sin doesn’t just vanish. It must be *transferred*. Somebody *does* have to pay for what’s been done. The wages of sin is death, and the bill is due. Disease leads to death, and any cure must come from one willing to go into death. So the Samaritan recognized that his leprosy didn’t just simply vanish. It was taken. Into Jesus, his uncleanness was taken. And to the Samaritan, all cleansing from the God-man...given. Into Jesus was taken all the man’s sins. Into the man – and into you – was given complete perfection. Into Jesus was taken all his guilt. Into the man, into mankind, was given all innocence. Into Jesus was taken all alienation from God. Into the man – into the baptized -- is given a life of fellowship, adoption into the family of God, a family of all ethnicities.

The Samaritan received all of this by faith, as Jesus commends him by saying “your faith has saved you.” He wasn’t healed because of his faith. Rather, his faith received the greatest gift from Jesus: reconciliation with God. It’s not because he gave thanks that he was saved. We don’t receive the forgiveness of sins through works or in making good decisions or by seizing an opportunity. Good works such as patience and thanksgiving *follow* the forgiveness of sins, but they do not *cause* or *merit* forgiveness. By definition, forgiveness is an act of mercy. Nothing

except boundless love can *cause* one to be forgiven. Forgiveness is undeserved and comes not from the worthiness of the recipient, but from the goodness of the Giver. The penitent simply believes it and that belief delivers the benefits of the gift.

Together, the saved and thankful of God, his Baptized people, are knit together into the body of Christ. You in your baptism were washed clean, cleaner than any leper could ever be. You are no longer at a distance, looking and wondering if God will receive you as His own. He does. He has. He will.

The Lord cares for you. He cares about you when you're holed up as a patient (or as a not-so-patient patient) in the hospital. The Lord hears your cry for deliverance and desires to give you the strength to withstand the evil day and to give you relief at the time that best serves you and your salvation. Like the Samaritan, self-diagnose your sin. Make it clear. Make it plain. I have done this, so Lord, forgive me of this. And being forgiven, believe then that the Lord does *not* look at your sin at all, and especially when you pray. He does not scorn your prayers because of your sin. So like the Samaritan, expect good to come when you cry out to the Lord for mercy. But when his cleansing healing deliverance delays, when you're asked to walk even more miles with your own version of leprosy affliction, don't forget that the Lord *has* promised your deliverance. It is sure. It is certain. It will come. His will is to save you. Period. He might take you on a journey, but He is always with you along the way. He feeds you along the way.

Draw near to the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, for Jesus has drawn near to you. Take the place where God has brought you to. Our Lord has paid for it with his own blood. You belong in this place, at this altar, at this home. Kneel, and give thanks, for only He can give you the true gifts you need: forgiveness, life, and salvation. You don't need to stand at a distance

to your Savior. He has assured you that all things shall work together for good for those who love Him, those who were loved first by Him. In the name of Jesus. Amen.