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Pentecost XVIII & Proper 23
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Text: Luke 17:11 – 19
Title:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. In a world that is so full of tragedy and loss, there are a lot of things that you hate to hear about. Some things are simply news events that directly affect someone you don't even know, like hearing about the devastating effects of a powerful storm like a hurricane or a tornado someplace in the country, or an earthquake like the ones that occurred in the Philippines this past week. No one wants to learn that several lives were suddenly ended by such a tragedy.

Bad news isn't limited to events that are far away though. How often do we hear of tragic news closer to our location such as a housefire that leaves people with nothing because of the extensive damage? There may be parts of such news that aren't as tragic, such as the people who live there managed to get out safely, but the loss of a home and memories is no less terrible for the people who have to endure it.

Then there is the kind of tragic news that hits someone more personally, like sitting in a doctor's office and hearing that dreaded word, "cancer." It takes your breath away. It sends you into a world of uncertainty and confusion that can leave you in shock. And while there is much more hope for those diagnosed with cancer in today's world than there was just 30 years ago, hearing that kind of news for yourself or for someone that you care about is almost always devastating.

Hearing a diagnosis of cancer today is just about the equivalent of hearing a diagnosis of leprosy back in the time of Jesus, and this Sunday's Gospel lesson presents us with ten men who were living with that dreadful disease themselves. St. Luke doesn't give us too many details

about them at first except to tell us that they had leprosy, and they were close to a town somewhere along the border between Samaria and Galilee. He doesn't even tell us the name of the town or how long these men had been there, but Luke does tell us that Jesus passed by them as He was on His way to Jerusalem.

Those who were infected with leprosy were cut off from everyone because they were unclean. It was part of the Old Testament law described in Leviticus 13 – 14, and the only way to keep the infection from spreading to more people was a strict quarantine imposed on anyone with that skin disease. Because a leper could no longer be around their friends or family it was a common practice for them to live together as best as they could in colonies with other lepers. They would try to stay on the outskirts of a town so that they could arrange for supplies, but they were strictly forbidden to have any direct contact with others to avoid infecting them. To avoid accidental contact with leper colonies, there was also a law in place that whenever travelers came too close to where they were, the group was required to make noise and shout out a warning that the group was "Unclean!"

This is what was likely happening when Jesus made first contact with these 10 lepers. They would have been trying to warn Him and His disciples that the group was "Unclean!" But the news about Jesus had been spreading everywhere, and it had also reached this group of lepers because as soon as they realized who was coming near to them the shouts changed from "Unclean! Unclean!" to "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" They don't call out for help or for healing from Jesus, but they call out to Him for mercy which will deliver them from their hopeless situation. They call to Jesus for salvation.

And salvation is exactly what they will receive from the Son of God. He doesn't need to examine them. He doesn't need to touch them. Jesus only needs to see them, and speak His

Word to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests," He says. This was the prescription for lepers to be able to return to their home after being infected. The law in Leviticus 13 instructed that a priest had to examine the skin of the leper to see if they were once again clean and able to rejoin their family and home. If they were found to be clean, then special sacrifices were offered according to Leviticus 14, and the healed person could finally return to their home. They would be saved from their disease and their quarantine if the requirements of the law were met.

The requirements of the Law must be met for any of us to receive the salvation that we need. The Law must be kept, and payment must be made when the Law is broken. And it has been broken by each and every one of us more times than any of us can possibly count and more times than we even really know. That's the reason that we stand together on Sunday mornings and confess to the Lord that we "...have sinned against You by thought, word, and deed. By what I have done, and by what I have left undone." Yes, the exact words might vary a bit depending on which Order of Service we happen to use, but the message is still the same. You and I are sinners.

You are infected by the disease of sin in your soul just as a disease like leprosy infects the body. Sin eats away at you, and it breaks you down in ways that no medical expert can even begin to understand. Sin infects and corrupts everything that you say, everything that you do, and everything that you think. Sin convinces you to live your life contrary to God's Law, and to place your own corrupted will in place of God's Holy Will for you. Sin leaves you lost, broken, and completely unclean before your Holy God. And just like the ten lepers had to live separated from their homes and families because of the infection that they had, your unclean, infection of sin separates you from being with your Heavenly Father. Left on your own, your situation is completely hopeless because of it.

But just as Jesus arrived on the scene for the 10 lepers in today's Gospel, He arrives on the scene for you and me, also! He comes here each and every week to hear our cry of "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" Jesus knows your condition, and He knows your need for salvation. He knows what has to be done to satisfy the demands of the Law, and He knows that you and I can't do it. So, He satisfies the demands of the Law for you, and He does it perfectly.

Instead of telling you to go and show yourself to the priests, Jesus goes to Jerusalem, and He lets Himself be arrested by the priests. Instead of letting you suffer for your sins, Jesus is nailed to the cross so that He can suffer for your sins. Instead of having you offer up a sacrifice to cleanse you, Jesus offers Himself up as the final sacrifice to cleanse us all! By His Holy, precious, and innocent blood, all of us who are unclean because of sin are washed clean in His blood because of His sacrifice on the cross!

As the 10 lepers do what Jesus tells them to do, they are cleansed from the disease that they have been suffering from. They don't even make it to the priests in the temple, but are healed as they travel! They followed the Word of Jesus, and they were cleansed! Only one returns to where Jesus is, what the other nine did we don't really know. But the one who returned did so to give thanks to Jesus for what He did for him, and the thankful man was, ironically, a Samaritan who Jesus refers to as, "this foreigner."

The Samaritan returns with loud praises to God, and he falls on his face before Jesus to give Him thanks for what has happened to him. The man knew that he was doomed with the leprosy that he suffered from. He knows now that he has his life back. He knows that he has been saved, and that he has Jesus to thank for it! His plea for mercy was answered beyond his wildest expectations, and now he has his life back when he was as good as dead before. His joy and enthusiasm are obvious as he gives thanks and worships Jesus for His mercy!

“This foreigner” who returns to worship and thank Jesus is one of the first non-Jewish believers in the Son of God who opened the door for each of us foreigners to know our Savior as well. His call to Jesus for mercy was answered, and Jesus has answered your call for mercy too! He has seen your need for salvation, and He has given it to you in His Word and in His Sacraments, precious gifts to provide you with what you need most, to be cleansed from your disease so that you are no longer separated from Him by sin.

That sacrifice that Jesus made was for you, and for all who suffer from the disease of sin, which is everyone. He told the Samaritan to rise and go because the faith that he had healed him, and Jesus has the same words for you and me today. Your faith has healed you. Rise and go, and as you go share what Jesus has done for you. Share the sinful disease that you suffered from, and that He healed. Help others to see their own condition, and their need for a merciful Savior. Let others know that you have been made clean by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Tell about His great mercy for you, and the mercy that He has for all people. Give thanks as the Samaritan did with great praise and joy to God for all that He has done for you! Receive the continuous gifts what He has to offer you each and every week at this altar. Finally, look forward to the time that Jesus will come again to those whose faith has made them well! Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.