

Eucharistic, Christocentric Journeying

“Where are the other nine?” Talk about a **great** text for one of the busiest travel/vacation weekends of the entire year! *“Where are the other nine? Where is everyone else?”* All kidding aside, it is actually very fitting that this text falls on a day in which many people are **traveling**. I say this because all too often this Gospel text is only considered with the focus on giving thanks. Don’t get me wrong: Giving thanks is a **major** focus of the lesson. It should come as no surprise that this is the Gospel text appointed for the holiday that is “Thanksgiving.” But... as we listen to the Old Testament and Epistle lessons, we hear nothing of giving thanks, do we? Instead, the theme that runs throughout those two lessons isn’t a theme focused on thanksgiving, but **on travel; on journeying and walking in the way of the Lord**. (Like I said, it’s very fitting that these texts are appointed for this busy travel holiday weekend.) We hear of walking in the wisdom of faith and not going down the paths of sin and darkness. We hear of walking by the Spirit and not gratifying the desires of the flesh. **The travel theme is hard to miss/avoid.**

But what about the Gospel lesson? At first glance, it just seems so disconnected and separate from the other two lessons, doesn’t it? Well... not quite. You see, St. Luke tells us with the very first verse that Jesus was *poruomai* (journeying) to Jerusalem. This is important. This specific word lets us know that Jesus isn’t simply “on His way” to somewhere else. He is traveling with intent. He’s **purposefully journeying** to Jerusalem. In fact, this is the *third* time that Luke tells us that Jesus has set His face to Jerusalem and is journeying there for the express purpose of laying down His life as the all-atoning sacrifice for sin. Luke understands that his readers already know how the story ends, which is why he uses this word as a way of telling us that the crucifixion of Christ wasn’t some tragic, terrible accident that just happened. ***Jesus wasn’t caught off-guard! Rather, the cross was the plan/destination all along.*** From chapter 9:51 on, Jesus is purposefully journeying towards Jerusalem to die for the sins of the world.

It is during the course of this journeying that He meets with the ten lepers, and they [understandably] cry out to Him for **mercy**. Notice: They don’t ask Him to *heal* them. They ask Him to be merciful. So what does Jesus do? He commands them to *poruomai* (journey) to Jerusalem (the Temple) and show themselves to the priest. Contrary to popular opinion, Jesus isn’t putting these guys to the test. *“Let’s see who turns back and gives thanks. Let’s see who obeys and who doesn’t obey.”* It’s not like that. Jesus would **never** set a trap for somebody to fall into sin. Rather, what Jesus is doing with this command is fulfilling the Levitical Law (Lev 14), which states that if a person is healed of some skin disease (like leprosy), they are to show themselves to the priests for examination, and they are to render the appropriate sacrifice, restoring them to

fellowship with their brothers and sisters, and more importantly, restoring them to public worship within God's holy house. Jesus is sending these guys to the priests to show that He did not come to abolish God's Word, **but to fulfill it**. Jesus is sending these guys to the priests as **living, breathing, purified proof** of who He is and what He's all about.

So, in this way, we can't really fault the nine guys for doing what Jesus tells them to do. They were obedient (and no doubt thankful). **And yet...the Samaritan is the one who gets all the praise (and rightly so)**. In fact, Jesus makes a point of saying that the Samaritan's faith has *sozo'd* him; that is, his faith has **saved** him. Jesus is pointing way beyond the simple skin-deep healing that all ten men experienced. **All were healed/made well (katharzo'd)...but not all were sozo'd (saved)**. All men had faith in Jesus' words. They all obeyed and went to show themselves to the priest. Remember: They weren't healed **until** they were on their way. They didn't know **when—or even if**—any sort of healing would take place, but Jesus told them to journey, so they did. That's certainly commendable.

It was in the course of this journeying to show themselves to the priests that they were healed. **But...only the Samaritan had a saving faith**. The other nine were only made well “skin-deep,” but the Samaritan's soul was healed and made well. His faith in Jesus as God's Messiah in the flesh—God Himself in the flesh—made him **well and whole and complete unto salvation**. And it's at this point that Jesus tells him to arise (remember: he was prostrated before Jesus in thanksgiving) and *poruomai* (journey). Now, it is very important to point out what Jesus **doesn't** say here. Jesus doesn't say “go your own way,” nor does He say, “get on your way.” Jesus simply commands, “*paruomai* - journey.”

Now, if you've been paying attention, you find that this text is **book-ended** with “journeying.” We begin with Jesus' purposeful journey to Jerusalem (and we know what that's all about), and we end with Jesus commanding this guy to **also** journey to Jerusalem; a journey he will make with saving faith, unlike the other nine. I want you to think about this. Jesus isn't merely reasserting that this guy should get on his way and get into Jerusalem with the other nine. No. Jesus, as God's Messiah in the flesh, is calling this guy to **journey in saving faith with Him on His purposeful journey to Jerusalem**. Jesus is calling this man to **journey to the cross**; to bear witness to Christ as He, the heavenly High Priest Himself, presents Himself to His God and Father as the all-atoning sacrifice for all sin for all time. “*Journey with Me and bear witness and render thanksgiving and give glory to God as you are made pure in My sacrifice. Give glory and thanks to God as I declare ‘It is finished!’*”

This Samaritan was now walking in the way of faithful wisdom. He was walking in the way of the Spirit, who works and sustains saving faith. He had left the nine-man majority, who were journeying to fulfill the law (which could not

save them) and satisfy the workers of the law. ***These nine men were journeying to an empty Temple.*** Remember: God's glory/Spirit had never returned to the rebuilt Temple after the Babylonian Captivity. God's glory would not return to the Temple until Christ Himself—God in the flesh—would return (a return which caused Simeon to sing praise to God). Remember, too, that the Holy Spirit physically and publicly descended upon Jesus at His baptism. To walk with/in the way of Christ is to walk with/in the way of the Spirit, who proceeds from both Father and Son. To journey with Christ to the cross, to the resurrection, and out into the world to make disciples of all nations by teaching His Word and baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ***is to journey in the way of true, faithful, life-saving, Christ-centered wisdom.***

To be sure, there is a whole lot more we could say on this. What "Way" do we walk in? (*"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."*) Are we on the path of God's Wisdom? ***Daily or only on Sunday mornings?*** Do we walk by faith in God's gift of grace, or do we get wrapped up in trying to fulfill the Law and do good deeds in an attempt to merit God's grace and favor? What if the rest of the world deems us foolish? ***What if the path of God's Wisdom doesn't gratify our desires of the flesh?*** To be a faithful Christian isn't exactly easy or popular in this day and age. Walking the narrow Way of Christ can be pretty lonely at times. What if we're not seeing the results we want to see? We journey with Christ, and yet we still suffer. ***We journey with Christ, and all we have to show for it is a lousy cross!*** How easy and tempting it is to veer from the path of cruciform wisdom! How easy and tempting it is to stray from the lonely, narrow path of Christ and His cross and instead merge onto the freeway of instant gratification and ease of life and the glory/well-being of "Me!"

Look to this font. Look to this rail. Here is Christ! Here is the glory of God! Here is the One who has made you pure and presented you to His God and Father as righteous and redeemed and holy. Here is where He Himself calls us and gathers us in order to feed us and nourish us with His own life-giving Word and Sacrament. And yet...do we come before Him in reverence and humility, praising Him for His undeserved gifts of mercy and grace, or are we too busy pursuing personal glories and gratifying the desires of our flesh? Do we come before Him at all, or are we too busy worshiping ourselves or worshiping only the parts we like, while dismissing the parts we don't like, fooling ourselves into thinking that we're worshiping God in our own special way? The Word of God does comfort the afflicted, but it also afflicts those who are comfortable in their sin. Many a "good Christian" won't venture down a path if it means discomfort and affliction.

As I said, there is whole lot more we could say on all this, but it really isn't necessary, is it? Besides, what will keep you on God's path of wisdom and life; what will keep you journeying with Christ in the Way of the Spirit will not be law-heavy brow-beating and shaming, ***but the Good News of Christ crucified for you.***

He has baptized you and washed you and made you clean in the water and blood that flowed forth from His riven side. No one and nothing can ever steal this away from you. God Himself has justified you and declared you ***“holy and righteous in His sight”*** all because of the all-atoning work and person of your High Priest and life-giving sacrifice, the Lamb of God Himself—Jesus Christ.

With all this in mind, how can you ***not*** want to run to Him and fall on your face in thanks and praise and give glory to God? My fellow lepers and corpses who have been washed clean and made alive in Christ: Here He is! Here is Almighty God, in your presence, for you and your salvation. Here is your Savior—the One who *sozo* 's you and makes you well unto eternal life!

May this cruciform Good News comfort you and give you joy and peace in believing as you continue to bear your crosses as you journey through this veil of tears in the humility of saving faith. May the Good News of Christ crucified for you guard you and keep you in the path of righteousness and the Way of Wisdom, now and into all eternity.

In His holy name and to His glory...**AMEN.**