

The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity – Pr. Faugstad sermon  
St. Luke 17:11-19: “We Give Thanks for the Lord’s Mercy.”  
September 4/5, 2021 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

**In Nomine Iesu**

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Dear heavenly Father, who daily cares for us and is an ever-present help in every need, we pray that You awaken our hearts that we may be truly thankful for all Your blessings. Let us not grow apathetic about Your temporal and eternal benefits, but, knowing that Your goodness has provided for all our needs all the days of our life, let us remember in confidence that Your mercy is new every morning, that in perfect trust we may call upon You in every trouble and thank and praise You with a joyous heart. Amen. (*Meditations on the Gospels*, p. 577)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for today is taken from the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. We read selected verses in Jesus’ name:*

On the way to Jerusalem [Jesus] was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as He entered a village, He was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” / When He saw them He said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went they were cleansed. / Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving Him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. / Then Jesus answered, “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” And He said to him, “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.” (ESV)

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*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, who came to bring mercy and salvation to the afflicted and the hurting, for which He deserves eternal thanksgiving, dear fellow redeemed:

When you are too busy to get something done, there are different ways you can address the problem. You can prioritize, and let the things drop that are less important. You can delegate the responsibility to someone else. Or you can hire somebody else to do the job. We do this when we hire lawnmowers and housecleaners, or when we go out for a meal at a restaurant.

What if you hired someone to do the spiritual things that you know you should do, but you just can’t seem to find the time for? You could hire someone to have devotions with your kids. You could hire someone to pray. You could hire someone to give thanks to God for your blessings. If you hired someone to be thankful on your behalf, what would that look like? As you start to think about the blessings God has given you personally, in your family, at home, at church, at work, in your community, you realize that giving thanks is hardly part-time work. It is ongoing, constant, something that should happen daily.

Even the world recognizes the importance of thankfulness. We hear people talk about how we should have an “attitude of gratitude” every day and not just once a year in November. But there should be more to our thankfulness than an attitude or a habit. An atheist can be thankful. A Muslim can be thankful. Our thankfulness as Christians is much different than theirs.

We see the difference in today’s Gospel reading. Ten men had leprosy. They had a skin disease that forced them to quarantine from others. They had to live outside the town in their own community. They could not continue in the jobs they had. They could not go near their families and friends. It was something like the stay-at-home orders of March 2020 but with no promise of things getting better. There was nothing for lepers except the constant presence of disease, the slow deterioration of their health, and the company of other sick and heartbroken people.

But at some point, they heard about a man named Jesus who had the power to heal. And then they learned that He was entering a village nearby. They stood at a distance and cried out to Him, “*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!*” Those are serious words. We don’t cry out for mercy when we miss a turn or run out of milk or butter. We cry out for mercy when we face something difficult that we don’t have the power to fix.

You may have cried out for mercy when a new virus made its way around the world, or when you were seriously ill at home. You may have cried out for mercy when someone you love was diagnosed with heart failure or cancer, or when someone close to you died. You may have cried out for mercy when things were not going well at home, at work, or at school.

Jesus hears those cries, just as He heard the cry of those lepers. He knows the anguish behind the cry, and He also sees the faith. No one looks to Him for mercy if they don’t believe He is merciful. No one looks to Him for mercy if they don’t believe He has the power and the desire to help. He is merciful, and He does want to help.

The ten lepers believed this—at least at that time. And when Jesus told them to show themselves to the priests, they went. As they were going, they realized that a miracle had happened. They had no more leprosy—their skin was healed! You heard what happened next. Only one of the ten came back to thank Jesus; the rest were too busy, too focused on their own plans. The one who came back would have seemed the least likely to return. He was a Samaritan, and the Samaritans and Jews generally avoided each other. But this Samaritan fell at Jesus’ feet and gave thanks to Him.

I imagine the other men were thankful too. How could they not be? They were thankful to be cleansed. They were thankful that they would be able to see their families again, thankful to return to normal life. But here is where we see the difference between the thankfulness of believers and the thankfulness of everyone else. The thankfulness of the nine men was a thankfulness for. The thankfulness of the one was especially a thankfulness to.

The nine were thankful for healing and for all the good things they were about to enjoy. The Samaritan was thankful for those things also, but most of all he was thankful to the merciful Lord. Jesus Himself made the distinction. He said, “*Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?*” All ten were thankful, but only one was thankful to God.

You can see how mere thankfulness is not acceptable before God. God is the one who has mercy. He is the Giver. So we should give thanks to Him. The Samaritan did this. He had cried out for mercy, and Jesus had answered. The man had not healed himself—Jesus had. Here was the evidence of the man's faith. He was not too busy to give thanks. He didn't have something more important to do. He gave all praise and glory to the Lord for his miraculous healing. And Jesus said, *"Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well"*—or as it can also be translated, *"your faith has saved you."*

We want to learn to be thankful like this Samaritan, thankful to the Lord at all times. The apostle Paul often talks about the practice of Christian thankfulness. Paul had a lot of things to complain about. His was not a carefree life. But in his letter to the Thessalonians he wrote, *"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"* (1Th. 5:16-18). And in his letter to the Ephesians he said, *"[give] thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (5:20).

Both passages tell us why we can be thankful always, no matter what we are experiencing. We are thankful because of what Jesus has done for us. Jesus, the perfect Son of God, willingly came into this world of trouble and death. He did not shrink back from sinners, like people would from a group of lepers. He took our sins to Himself and provided His holy blood as the antidote for our spiritual disease. His blood cleanses us from every sin (1Jo. 1:7). There is nothing that now keeps us from the eternal gifts God has stored up for us in heaven.

But maybe your back hurts. You don't have the energy you used to. You wish you could lose a few pounds. You are not as secure financially as you want to be. You don't get the support at work or at home that you need. We can always identify things we are not thankful for. It is very easy to make that list. But there is far more good in our lives than evil. The Lord is merciful toward us.

He has mercy upon us even when we don't respond to it like we should. Jesus knew that nine of the lepers would not return to give thanks, and He still healed them. In the same way, He knows that we will get distracted by the things of this life. We will think we are too busy to hear His Word, pray to Him, and thank Him for His gifts. And yet His mercy endures.

In church each week, we cry out for this mercy. We acknowledge our sins and weaknesses. We admit that we are unable to fix all the wrongs we have done and save ourselves. From our own leper colony, from this congregation of sinners, we cry, *"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"* And He does. He comes to us through His Word and Sacraments. He returns us to the cleansing waters of Baptism through His absolution. He brings healing to our body and soul through His holy body and blood. And then He sends us home with His blessing, saying to us as He did to the Samaritan, *"Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well"*—*"your faith has saved you."*

Faith trusts what Jesus promises in His Word even when we are experiencing great problems and troubles. Was Jesus merciful the day before the lepers cried out to Him? Yes, He was merciful even while they remained in their leprosy. Our pains and difficulties in this life are not signs of God's disinterest or His lack of mercy toward us. He often uses these things for our good, to draw us closer to Him.

Think about your own life. When is it that you are the most thankful? Probably when you no longer have what you used to take for granted. You are not so thankful for good health until you are sick. You are not so thankful for a job until you are let go. You are not so thankful for your possessions until they are taken from you.

We give thanks in good times and bad because we see how our merciful Lord keeps bringing us blessings. We learn that His mercy toward us is constant. His love toward us does not change. He is always ready to help and strengthen us. He is always ready to forgive us even though we have failed so many times to be thankful.

His mercy does not depend on our thankfulness. But it does make Him glad when we, like the Samaritan, bring our thanks to Him for all the wonderful works He does in our lives. And so we join the psalmist in saying, *"Oh give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever!"* (Psa. 106:1).

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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