

The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity – Pr. Faugstad sermon  
St. Luke 17:11-19: “Where Do You Belong?”  
September 9/10, 2023 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

**In Nomine Iesu**

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Lord God, heavenly Father, by Your blessed Word and Your holy Baptism You have mercifully cleansed all who believe from the fearful leprosy of sin, and You daily grant us Your gracious help in all our need: We beseech You so to enlighten our hearts by Your Holy Spirit, that we may never forget these Your blessings, but ever live in Your fear, and, trusting fully in Your grace, with thankful hearts continually praise and glorify You; through Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, p. 161)

*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 heals the sick and rescues the dying, so they might be His own and live under Him in His kingdom, dear fellow redeemed:

It started with little sores that stuck around, reddish spots, and some skin numbness. He wished it would go away, he wanted to ignore it, but he couldn't. He went to the priest to have it examined, and the priest confirmed his greatest fear—it was leprosy. He had to leave his job, leave his home, leave his family. The Book of Leviticus describes the protocol for lepers: “*The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean.’ He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp*” (13:45-46).

It was a hard reality, but there was no known cure. A person with leprosy had to stay away for the good of others. But he wasn't completely alone. Lepers often formed their own communities. We see that in today's reading, when ten lepers called to Jesus outside a village between Samaria and Galilee. We learn something else about this group of men. It was a

mixture of both Jews and Samaritans. That probably wouldn't have happened if this terrible disease hadn't drawn them together.

In general, the Jews and the Samaritans interacted with each other as little as possible. They had long lists of reasons why the other group was inferior and not worth their time and attention. But "misery loves company," and these men were miserable. They set aside the animosity they may have felt toward one another and stuck together. But they were still of course on the outside. They were not where they wanted to be. They were part of a community of death, a community of the dying.

And that's exactly what the world is apart from Christ. It is full of people afflicted by the disease of sin, surrounded by death and facing death themselves. Leprosy is a helpful picture for thinking about how sin works in us. In the *Large Catechism*, Martin Luther quotes Romans 7:18, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh." Then he says, "If St. Paul may speak this way about his flesh, we cannot assume to be better or more holy than him. But the fact that we do not feel our weakness just makes things worse. It is a sign that there is a leprous flesh in us that can't feel anything. And yet, the leprosy rages and keeps spreading" (Part V, paras. 76-77).

Because of nerve damage, a leprosy person does not always notice when he cuts himself or gets burned or injured. And we do not always notice when we are getting injured or burned by sin. The more we participate in what is unclean, the less we perceive the damage that is being done to us. We think that we can stay in control of the sin. We won't let it overcome us. But when we can't stop consuming what is destroying us, can't stop doing what we should not do, we are not in control of sin; sin is in control of us.

If one of the lepers in today's reading denied that he had leprosy, it wouldn't have changed the fact. And "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1Jo. 1:8). It is important that we see ourselves among those lepers. By nature, we are sinful and unclean (ELH, pp. 41, 61). We are the outsiders. We are the ones standing at a distance, away from all that is good. We cannot change our situation; we cannot save ourselves.

But One has drawn near to our community of death, even coming to live among us, One who has the power to heal us of our sin and save us from death. This One is very different; His reputation precedes Him. He has not been overcome by sin, and when death tried to take Him down, He took down death! "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" we cry.

And why should He have mercy? He isn't the reason for our troubles. He is not responsible for the state we are in, for the messes we have made in our sin. But He does have mercy. He had mercy upon Naaman, an Old Testament Gentile who was afflicted by leprosy, by having him wash seven times in the waters of the Jordan River until he was clean (2Ki. 5). And our Lord had mercy upon us by bringing us to the cleansing waters of Baptism, where He applied the healing medicine of His holy blood to each one of us.

St. Paul explains this beautifully in Ephesians 2. He writes, "Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh... remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in

*the world*" (vv. 11,12). We were on the outside, and we couldn't get in. We were stuck in our sin and death. Paul continues, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (v. 13). We were far off from salvation, but Jesus has brought us close to Him.

He accomplished this by perfectly keeping the Law of God, not just for the Israelite people but for all people. And then He went to the cross carrying the whole world's sin and shed His holy blood to wash it all away. He poured His perfect righteousness and His cleansing blood over you through the waters of Baptism. That is how He transferred you from the community of death in the world to His holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints. That is how He healed and cleansed you from the disease of sin that was killing you.

But many of the people He has done this for, whom He has joined to Himself in the waters of Baptism, continue on their way and forget what He has done. Like the nine lepers who were healed, they get caught up in "*the cares and riches and pleasures of life*" (Luk. 8:14). They don't continue to listen to His healing Word. They don't remember to give Him thanks. So even though Jesus freed them from the community of death, they have returned to it again. They might feel like they are alive. They might think they are doing important things. But none of it can save them, and none of it will last apart from Christ.

This is what the devil tempts all of us to do. He wants us to walk away from the life we have in Jesus, to give all of that up so we can fit in with the world. We might even feel ashamed sometimes of our membership in the Christian Church. We don't tell anyone about it. We carefully keep it hidden, so we can fit in with the people who seem to matter. We don't want them to think we are strange. We don't want to be left on the outside. We don't want to be singled out and left all by ourselves.

These are natural thoughts to have. It is difficult to be a follower of Jesus in a hostile world. But even though you may feel like you have to face these difficulties alone, you are not alone. The Samaritan went against the majority and turned back to give thanks to Jesus. He didn't have the company of his former friends anymore, but He wasn't alone. Jesus was with him, and Jesus blessed him. "*Rise and go your way,*" He said; "*your faith has made you well.*" Or as the Greek word literally reads, "*your faith has saved you.*"

You are saved by faith in Jesus who conquered your sin and death, and shares with you His life. And you are not the only one who has received this life. Going back to Ephesians 2: "*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord*" (vv. 19-21).

Look at how large your community is! You are a fellow citizen with all the saints, all the believers who have gone before you. You are a member of the household of God. You stand on the foundation built by the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus Himself is the cornerstone. You are part of an immense structure, a beautiful building, a holy temple in the Lord. You are most certainly not alone.

You are a member of the body of Christ. It is with Him that you belong. You will always find friendship, acceptance, and purpose in Him. He will not leave you by yourself. He visits you with His mercy in good times and bad, whether you are happy or sad, restful or anxious. He comes right to you through His Word and His Sacraments to cleanse you again with His holy blood and bless you with His promises.

Each time you receive these blessings, you praise Him and give thanks to Him, bowing down at His feet. And He looks upon you with love, and He says, *“Rise and go your way; your faith has saved you.”*

*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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