

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost – October 13, 2019
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Luke 17:11-18 (NIV)

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. (12) As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance (13) and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" (14) When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. (15) **One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.** (16) He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him--and he was a Samaritan. (17) Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? (18) Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" (19) Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well." (NIV®)

Theme: Jesus' Mercy Never Fails

1. He hears our cries
2. He offers his help
3. He is worthy of our praise

Dear friends in Christ,

If the Samaritan Leper had been invited to be our guest speaker shortly after he had been by Jesus he might have addressed us with the following words.

Greetings in the name of the Lord Jesus whose mercy never fails.

It's hard for me to get used to the idea that I can be here with you to worship the Lord. It wasn't all that long ago that I was unable to appear in public because I had leprosy. I don't think that I'll ever forget the feeling I had when I discovered that awful disease on my skin. At first I wasn't sure whether or not I would be regarded as ceremonially unclean but according to the commands the Lord gave to Moses I was required to show that infection to the priest. He would determine whether or not I had an infectious skin disease that would make me ceremonial unclean. Ceremonially unclean – if that described my situation I'd unable to enter the Lord's house, anyone who touched me would also become unclean for a time. The priest's words linger in my memory. "Here's what the Lord says in Leviticus 13:45-46 '**Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!'** (46) **As long as they have the disease they remain unclean. They must live alone; they must live outside the camp.**' And unfortunately you have such a disease."

I tore my clothes in anger and frustration. I've heard it said that misery loves company and I guess it helped somewhat when I discovered 9 others who had also been declared lepers by the priest. It didn't matter to me that I was a Samaritan and at least some of them were Jews. The symptoms of leprosy varied --ranging from white patches on the skin to running sores to the loss of digits on the fingers and toes.

We all lived outside a village along the border between Judea and Samaria. We'd heard rumors about lepers being cured by a man named Jesus – a rabbi (a religious teacher) but what were the chances he'd pass by our way? And if he did would he have time for us? Would he hear us? Would he take pity on us and offer his help. We'd be so thankful if only we could meet Jesus.

And then it happened. The time to celebrate the Passover was drawing near. It didn't matter much to us since we couldn't participate anyhow. But the number of travelers on the roads had increased as faithful worshippers headed to Jerusalem. As often happened when Jesus traveled somewhere crowds of people had

been listening to him – we’d hear the rumors – and it wasn’t that difficult for us to figure out who was approaching the near the area of our camp outside the village. All ten of us went out to meet Jesus. And instead of crying out – unclean, unclean – as we approached from afar, we cried out, Jesus, Master, have pity on us.

All of us joined our weak voices together as we called out hoping he’d hear us. We were confident he had the power to help us but there’s no way we felt worthy to demand his assistance – we only wanted his mercy and compassion. After all in addition to being outcasts of society who were regarded as unworthy to worship the Lord our God, we were all sinners – it’s not that we had done anything terrible. When we were healthy we maybe wouldn’t even have given our sins a second thought. But when you’re sick – your conscience becomes a bit more tender. You think a bit more about things. You realize that sin infects us all -- That all of us by nature are unclean and unworthy to enter God’s presence. That’s why the priests were always making sacrifices as a part of our worship life.

Oh, we knew that we didn’t deserve anything from Jesus but we knew that he had shown his love and compassion to others and so we came to him wondering if he might be the Messiah promised of old – sent by the Lord, the gracious and compassionate one – who promised love and forgiveness to those who feared him and called upon his name.

And just as we called upon him – so can you. He invites all those who are weary and burdened to come to him and he promises them rest. I’d heard that about Jesus but it wasn’t until after he heard my cries for mercy that I really began to understand the full extent of the rest he promised. If you search the Scriptures for yourself you’ll discover that this Jesus really is the Son of God who came to this earth in fulfillment of divine prophecy. He came to do what all those sacrifices offered by the High Priest couldn’t do. He came to set us free from sin – to provide the cure – by offering himself as our perfect sacrifice. He was delivered over to death for our sins and raised again so we might be sure of our justification before God. Why right now he’s in heaven pleading for us. He said, “Whoever comes to me I will never drive away.” The Scriptures tell us that he has the power to forgive sins and the desire to help us with all of our troubles and that he’ll always work everything out for the good of those who believe in him. I sure wish we would have known all that before we cried out to Jesus – it would have made it so much easier to approach him with confidence.

As we were standing a ways back crying out as loud as could, Jesus, Master have pity on us. We noticed Jesus looking our way. What would he say? Would he send us away and ignore us as others had because we were unclean? We were a sorry sight with our torn cloths our unwashed hair – you could see all of that from a distance. We had faith but it was a bit weak. We watched and we waited for what seemed like an eternity and then Jesus said, **“Go, show yourselves to the priests.”**

We could hardly believe our ears. We looked at one another as we tried to make sense of it. There could only be one reason for us to go to the priest and that would be so he could begin the process of proclaiming that we were no longer unclean – that our leprosy had been cured.

We looked at ourselves and we didn’t look any different as we headed off to the priest. But we took Jesus at his word confident that his ears had heard our cries for mercy and that he was offering his help. As I look back I realize it really did take faith to simply take Jesus at his word – but then we’re not the only ones who did that. Think of the Centurion who came to Jesus – seeking his aid for his dying servant. When Jesus offered to come to his house – the centurion simply proclaimed his unworthiness and asked Jesus to speak the word – confident that his powerful word would be strong enough to cure his servant. Now I’m not saying my faith was as strong as that faith of the centurion but it didn’t matter how strong our faith was – what mattered

was that Jesus spoke and so we followed his words. And we soon discovered what Jesus meant when he said, **“Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”**

As we went we were cleansed! We could hardly believe our eyes. You can't begin to imagine the thoughts that ran through our minds. There was so much we would have to do. According to the Law of Moses there were sacrifices to be made and there would be a waiting period before we would be pronounced clean.

Here's how it would work according to Leviticus 14: The priest would meet us outside the village. When he would see that we were healed. He'd make arrangements for two clean birds, some cedar wood, some hyssop and some scarlet yarn to be brought for each of us. He'd order one of the birds to be killed over a clay pot filled with water. And then he would dip the live bird, the cedar wood, the scarlet yarn and the hyssop into the blood of the bird that had been killed. Seven times he'd sprinkle us with blood before pronouncing us to be clean. And then he'd send the live bird back to the fields.

Then we'd have to wash our clothes, bath ourselves, shave all of our hair. We were regarded as clean but were not supposed to enter into our homes until after the seventh day. Then we were to bath again, shave again even shaving our eyebrows and all the rest of our hair. And then on the eighth day we were required to bring a sacrifice – an animal sacrifice as a guilt offering and another for a burnt offering and grain for the wave offering.

As a part of the ceremony the priest would take blood from the lamb and place on the lobe of our right ears, on the thumb of our right hand and on our big toe on our right foot. He'd do the same with oil after he placed it in the palm of his hand and sprinkled it before the Lord 7 times. And finally he'd put the rest of the oil on our heads. And after all of this he'd offer our sin offerings and then we'd be allowed to return to our regular lives after we'd come before the Lord with our offerings.

As you can see there was a lot for us to think about and I didn't even mention how eager we were to see our families again. Maybe that's why my nine friends didn't join me as I headed back to thank Jesus. I had to praise God with my own loud voice. I threw myself at Jesus feet and thanked him. I didn't have to stand off at a distance any longer.

I'm sure Jesus was disappointed because only one of those he had healed returned to give thanks. I could hear it in his voice and in his comments: **Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? (18) Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?"**

Jesus' mercy never fails. His ears were open to our cries for help. His hands were strong to help us and his acts deserved our gratitude. That's the way I saw it anyway. After I had the chance to give my praise and thanks to Jesus, he said to me, **“Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”** I left confident that not only had Jesus healed my leprosy but that he could do so much more including cleansing me from my sins. With a grateful heart and praise on my lips I rushed off to the priest once again.

I don't suppose any of you has even been healed of leprosy – but the Lord's mercies are evident in your lives too. Perhaps he's granted you relief and healing for some other disease. He's the one who provides daily bread to each of us. The fact that we are here today is evidence of the Lord's mercy to us: really he owes us nothing but punishment for our sins. The OT prophet was right when he proclaimed: **Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. (23) They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.** (Lamentations 3:22-23 NIV)

There's no place where we can see the Lord's faithfulness more than when we look at what Jesus has done for us. **He not only heals our diseases but he forgives all our sins and redeems our life and crowns us with love and compassion as the Psalmist said.** (cf. Psalm 103:3-4) What Jesus has done for us affects not just our lives here on earth but his blessings extend to the joys of eternal life with him in heaven.

Jesus' mercy never fails. He hears our cries for mercy. He comes to our aid with his help and forgiveness. Truly Jesus is worthy of our praise. Amen.