

Twenty First Sunday after Pentecost – October 13, 2013
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Luke 17:11-18 (NIV 84)

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) Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

Theme: Jesus Master Have Pity On Us

- 1. Hear our cry**
- 2. Offer your help**
- 3. Accept our thanks**

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

Today I'd like to invite you to put yourself in the place of one of the ten men mentioned in our text. Your life has been going along fairly normally but then you notice a sore on your skin that won't go away. You get a bit of a sinking feeling as you wonder whether or not in might be regarded as an infectious skin disease. According to the commands the Lord gave to Moses you are required to show that infection to the priest. He would determine whether or not you had an infectious skin disease that would make you ceremonial unclean. Ceremonially unclean – if that described your situation you'd be unable to enter the Lord's house, anyone who touched you would also become unclean for a time. The priest's words linger in your memory. Here's what the Lord says in Leviticus 13:45-46 **"The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!' As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp.** And unfortunately you have such an infectious disease.

You tore your clothes in anger and frustration. You've heard it said that misery loves company and it helped somewhat when you discovered 9 others who had also been declared lepers by the priest. It doesn't matter any more that you are a Samaritan and they 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.

You live with your 9 friends outside a village along the border between Judea and Samaria. You've heard some rumors about lepers being cured by a man named Jesus – a rabbi (a religious teacher) but what were the chances he'd pass by your way? And if he did would he have time for you? Would he hear your plea for help? Would he take pity on you and offer his help. You'd be so thankful if only you could meet Jesus.

And then it happened. The time to celebrate the Passover was drawing near. It didn't matter much to you since you couldn't participate anyhow. But the number of travelers on the roads had increased as faithful worshippers headed to Jerusalem and that meant that you had to be a bit more careful as you wandered around. As often happened when Jesus traveled somewhere crowds of people had been listening to him – you had heard the rumors – and it wasn't that difficult for you to figure out who was approaching near the area of your camp outside the village when you heard the clamor of the people on the path. You and your friends decided to take chance and went out to meet Jesus. And instead of crying out – unclean, unclean – as you approached from afar, you cried out, Jesus, Master, have pity on us. All of you joined your weak voices together hoping he'd

hear you. You were confident he had the power to help but there's no way you feel worthy to demand his assistance. All you can hope for is his mercy and compassion. After all in addition to being outcasts of society who were regarded as unworthy to worship the Lord our God, you are a sinner – it's not that you have done anything terrible. When you were healthy maybe you wouldn't even have given your 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. You know that you don't deserve anything from Jesus but you know that he has shown his love and compassion to others and so you come to him thinking 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.

We don't have to walk in someone else's place to call upon the Lord. He invites all who are weary and burdened to come to him and he promises them rest. And so you and I can cry out Lord have mercy on us. And when he hears our cries for help we will begin 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. If the lepers had known all of that before they cried out to Jesus – it would have made it so much easier for them to approach him with confidence.

Put yourself back in their place once again. As you are standing a ways back crying out as loud as you could, "Jesus, Master have pity on us," you notice Jesus looking your way. What would he say? Would he send you away and ignore you as others had because you are unclean? You are a sorry sight with your torn cloths your unwashed hair – people could see all of that from a distance. Your faith is a bit weak to say the least. You watch and wait for what seemed like an eternity and then Jesus you hear Jesus say, "Go, show yourselves to the priests."

You can hardly believe your ears. You and your friends look at each other as you try to make sense of what Jesus said. Then it dawns on you there could only be one reason to go to the priest and that would be so he could begin the process of proclaiming that you were no longer unclean – that your leprosy had been cured.

Your infection didn't seem to look any different as you head off to the priest. But you took Jesus at his word confident that his ears had heard your cries for mercy and that he was offering his help.

It really did take faith for the lepers to simply take Jesus at his word – but then they'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. Maybe the faith of the lepers wasn't as strong as that faith of the centurion but it didn't matter how strong faith their faith was – what mattered was that Jesus spoke and that they followed his words. Soon they discovered what Jesus meant when he said, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

As they went they were cleansed! Let's walk in their shoes some more. You can hardly believe your eyes. Your thoughts are all a jumble. It's hard to know what to do first. There's so much you have to do. According to the Law of Moses there were sacrifices to be made and there would be a waiting period before you would be pronounced clean.

Here's how it would work according to Leviticus 14: The priest would meet you and your friends outside the village. When he would see that you 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 you. He'd order one of the birds to be killed over a clay pot filled with water. And then he'd 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 you with blood before pronouncing you to be clean. And then he'd release the live bird back to the fields.

Then you'd have to wash your clothes, bath yourself and shave all of your hair. You would be regarded as clean but you were not supposed to enter into your home until after the seventh day. Then you were to bath again, shave again even shaving your eyebrows and all the rest of your hair. And then on the eighth day you 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 some on the lobe of your right ear, on the thumb of your right hand and on your big toe on your 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 your head. And after all of this he'd offer your sin offerings and then finally you'd be allowed to return to our regular lives but only after you'd come before the Lord with our offerings.

As you can see there was lot's to think about and I didn't even mention how eager you would be to see your family again. Maybe that's why your nine friends didn't join you as you head back to thank Jesus. But you have to praise God with your own loud voice. You throw yourself at Jesus feet and thank him. You don't have to stand off at a distance any longer.

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

Jesus' mercy never fails. His ears were open to your cries for help. His hands are strong to help us and his acts deserve our gratitude. That's the way the Samaritan leper saw it anyway. After he had the chance to give my praise and thanks to Jesus, Jesus said to him, **"Rise and go; your faith has made you well."** The Samaritan leper left confident that not only had Jesus healed his leprosy but he had also cleansed him from his sins. With a grateful heart and praise on my lips he rushed off to the priest.

None of us has ever been healed of leprosy – but the Lord's mercies are evident in our 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. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.**" (Lam3:22-23)

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.** (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. And when we bring him our praise he gladly accepts it. Amen.