

14th Sunday after Trinity: September 10, 2023**“Faith Wants To Be With Jesus”**

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

*“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.”*¹ They were required by the purity laws and for fear of passing a communicable disease to stand some distance from others, all the while shouting their condition so that others would know to stay away. There was no real subtlety. They were not quarantined with some quiet visual device that would signal others to stay away. They were to add to their own isolation and loneliness by broadcasting to all who might walk by with shouts, “Unclean! Unclean!”

The lepers in our text did yell, but judging by Jesus’ response, they might have yelled more than “Unclean!” If they didn’t shout it with words, Jesus certainly heard their faith. If there wasn’t at least a bit of faith, they would not have listened to Him in the first place.

At any rate, the ten lepers are standing some distance from Jesus but they are close enough that He can hear them cry out and they can hear Him say *“Go. Show yourselves to the priests.”*² Luke doesn’t tell us that they went anywhere or how they responded when Jesus gave the command. He simply says that they were cleansed as they were departing.

I have usually imagined that all ten of them were headed to Jerusalem and that after they were some distance away from where they encountered Jesus all ten discovered that they were healed. Then nine of them kept on in obedience to Jesus’ command, but without faith or gratitude, and that one turned back and then had to find Jesus.

That scenario fits with the text but the text doesn’t actually supply any of those details. It is just as likely that Luke’s arrangement implies that the cleansing happened more or less immediately. It very well could be they were healed while they were still well within earshot of Jesus.

When they were healed, they could still see Him. It happened immediately, and the Samaritan realized it, even before they had taken a single step, just as they are turning away from Jesus to go.

¹ Luke 17:11-12

² Luke 17:14

Knowing people, this fits more better. God's Word is not often well received by people, and it makes more sense here to keep that pattern. Jesus' word, His command, "Go. Show yourselves to the priests," was not well-received by the nine. Here is what I mean. I have people call me quite often asking me for money for various kinds of assistance. There are some things I am able to do, and others that I am not. For some of the needs, I have to refer them to MICA, which puts them into contact with various other resources. Some are grateful, others get angry. Some get rather hostile and demand that I prove my Christianity, "If you really were a Christian, you would not worry about vouchers. You can use your own money, and if you don't have any money to give me, then you have to give me a ride when I need it at 4:00 in the morning."

There are many who are hurting and they are angry at their situations. It is easy to take it out on those who are supposed to have a listening ear. When I have to refer others away to different agencies, they already know all about those services. That isn't what they want. They want immediate assistance. If I don't give it immediately, then I must not be a Christian.

This is what is going on in our text from Luke. When Jesus says "Go. Show yourselves to the priests" it is like a father saying to his child's request for a cookie, "Go. Ask your mother." The child says, "I already did. She sent me to you." "Go. Ask your mother" is a disappointing answer to the child.

These lepers already know about the priests. They know there is no place for them in the Temple. They are unclean. The rabbis at the time of Jesus largely taught that leprosy was a manifestation of inner uncleanness. It didn't just happen to people but was a Divine judgment against them. Sickness was something they "deserved." This is not hard to imagine, because many of us have the same thoughts when sickness rears its ugly head. Sudden illness, or an unwanted diagnosis, leads us to ask, "What did I do to deserve this? Is God getting even with me? How bad must I be? Why is God picking on me?" Instead of thinking with Jesus, "These things are so that God's power and mercy may be made manifest in Your life," our thoughts default to one like Adam, to an angry God who is getting even, "You did this. It's your fault."

So the lepers might have heard something really horrific in Our Lord's statement, even if He didn't mean it. They might have heard, "Why should I have mercy on you if you are unclean. Go. Show yourselves to the priests. If they declare you clean, then I will help." It almost sounds like Jesus telling the Syro-phonician woman that He wasn't sent for Gentiles.

The lepers asked for mercy and Jesus, in effect, said "no." So they are disappointed and their refusal to rejoice is perfectly reasonable, if judged in the way of men. A child will not rejoice if mom tells him to go ask Dad and Dad tells him to go ask Mom. Those seeking help will not rejoice at being told to call MICA. A leper does not rejoice at being sent to the Temple and being sent away empty-handed.

Why should the lepers praise the very God who afflicted them with leprosy in the first place? Why should they rejoice in this brutal complicated uncertain system of priests and Law? The nine even see the Samaritan's rejoicing, and what a clown. The Samaritan's rejoicing seems foolish in the eyes of the world.

Here is the real problem with the nine: they do not expect God to be good to them. They didn't call Jesus Lord. They called Him Master. They were desperate and needy, but they were not hopeful. They weren't Job, persevering in his difficulties with faith. They were bitter and self-righteous. When they were healed at the Word of Christ they were not thankful because they thought it was owed to them. They did not turn back to Christ because they did not trust Him and were afraid of what He might say. I am not at all sure that when they were healed they actually headed to Jerusalem. Luke doesn't say. They might have just turned away in self-righteous anger and self-pity, throwing up their hands in frustration.

Wherever they were headed, they discovered that they were healed. The Samaritan draws attention to it with his praising of God. They should have then gone to Jesus, not the Temple. But if they go to Jesus, He might insist all the more that they go to the priests. Or He might punish them for their sins or give them another disease. They do not trust God to be good.

The Samaritan was markedly different. He had faith. And it is a most unlikely faith. For if the Temple and priests were hard on Jews, they were harder on Gentiles. At that time there wasn't even a place for the Gentiles to pray in the Temple due to the money changers.

But by the Holy Spirit the Samaritan believes that Jesus is good and has good things for him. He recognizes in Jesus the Temple not built with hands and a High Priest who is no son of Aaron, but is of the order of Melchizedek, that is a High Priest even for Gentiles.

The Samaritan received the Word of Jesus with joy. He expected something good even when the answer seemed disappointing. Thus when he was healed, he recognized not only what had happened but also how and by whom it had happened. He received it as gift. Of course, he was thankful. He knows that Jesus did it by grace. He can't help but praise God in Christ and turns back to Him.

There is more to this story that must be brought out. If this all took place immediately, then the nine are standing right there while the Samaritan is praising God. This would make the failure of the nine even more outrageous. They would have heard the rebuke of Jesus when He said: "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?"

When He says, "Was no one found to turn back and give praise to God except this foreigner?" He wasn't asking the Samaritan about the nine, rather he was rebuking the nine directly.

He was saying: “Are you nine going to just ignore what I have done? You have been healed. I have given more than the mercy you asked and if you can receive it, I have more. I have salvation, forgiveness. Are you too proud to receive it, if it does not come on your own terms and in your own time, and if you must share it with Samaritans? Are you, my countrymen, people of the Word, going to walk away and pretend that you healed yourselves? You do not have faith. You trust in yourselves. Go. Show yourselves to the priests, if you dare, for all the good it will do you. You are healed of leprosy, but not of sin...But you, Samaritan, I give you new direction. Don't go to the priests. Rise and go wherever you want. You are free of the Law, free to worship in Spirit and Truth at the Temple made without hands.”

Jesus doesn't give the Samaritan any direction. In Greek it just says “Rise and go.” The implication is that the Samaritan can go wherever he wants. He worships God in Spirit and Truth. He doesn't need to go to the Temple or the priests in Jerusalem. He is not merely cleansed of leprosy, but is also saved. His soul is clean. He is reconciled to God. There is no one to accuse him.

This text is a great one to show us the character of faith. Faith expects goodness from God. It expects God to keep His promises. It expects Him to look upon us with favor, to love us, to keep us, to bring us to Himself in the end, to be our God.

He has said that we are holy and belong to Him, so we are holy and we belong to Him. Jesus did not die in vain. It was not a tragic mistake. It was His, and our, glorification. He means what He says.

Through His own Word, He has joined His promise to water and has placed His own Name upon you. He has said that He has paid for all your sins and declared you righteous. Who are we to argue or to listen to the friends of Job and the devil? We will trust what God says. We will wait upon His promises.

This view of faith, and the Word, also teaches how to endure suffering. The rabbinic idea that leprosy was just and those who had it deserved it, is horrific to us because we are disciples of Jesus. We rightly take His words about the man born blind and apply them to all sorts of situations. The sin of man has corrupted the world so that it is hostile to human beings. Suffering is often inflicted upon the innocent. Consider the sad cases of babies born with disease or born addicted to heroin and the like. Karma and reincarnation all condemn those people. They teach that they deserve it. They are being punished for what they did in a previous life, or even in this life.

Buddhism, and Stoicism, and much of Eastern philosophy says that it is their fault for noticing. Not us. We believe in Jesus. We know that while Job was not innocent, he was loved by God, and that God did those things to Job in mercy to keep him in the faith and to teach him to know that his Redeemer lives. **“The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord.”**³ is a picture of the Samaritan’s faith, of thanksgiving even in sorrow. Often we are left with more questions than answers.

Often we are left to ask why to specific things, and some of you have asked me. I don’t the specifics, or the many whys, I do not have the mind of God. I can only speak to what I know and what God has said. Like Paul, **“¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God....²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”**⁴

This can make for difficult times, but by faith, we identify with the Syro-Phoenician woman, with this leper, with the woman at the well, with the tax collector in the Temple, with Zacchaeus in the sycamore tree, with Peter in the court of Caiaphas, with Paul on the road to Damascus. Those are our people. We take their rebukes, as our rebukes, and their suffering as proof that suffering is not rejection by God or punishment, because their Gospel is our Gospel; their Lord is our Lord, because, **“⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”**⁵

Our sufferings are not trivial, but neither are they eternal. We wait on God, more than watchmen for the morning. We trust His Word. We praise Him even in our sorrow because He has bought us with His Blood and He will never leave us, nor will He forsake us. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh. Blessed be the Name of the Lord.

³ Job 1:21

⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:18–25

⁵ Ephesians 4:4–6

This is where faith goes. This is what faith does. Faith wants to be with Jesus. “⁷ *For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.* ⁸ *For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.*”⁶

Whatever might come, day by day, we pray:

Let me depart this life
 Confiding in my Savior;
By grace receive my soul
 That it may live forever;
And let my body have
 A quiet resting place
Within a Christian grave;
 And let it sleep in peace.

And on that final day
 When all the dead are waking,
Stretch out Your mighty hand,
 My deathly slumber breaking.
Then let me hear Your voice,
 Redeem this earthly frame,
And bid me to rejoice
 With those who love Your name.⁷ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

⁶ Romans 14:7–8

⁷ O God, My Faithful God LSB 696:5-6

**Prayer of the Church
Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity
10 September 2023**

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Great Physician, You will that the pains and ills of this life should draw us to the feet of Your Son. Strengthen and focus our faith in every trial and trouble, that they would redound to faithful worship in Jesus' name. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of hosts, You have prepared the Church of Christ to be a lovely court in the midst of a troubled world. Form our hearts to long for the place where Your glory dwells, that we may find healing and peace at His feet. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Father of all, hear us on behalf of the fathers in Your Church. Impart to them the boldness of Solomon to exhort their sons in wisdom and justice, that they would persist in the way of salvation. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, grant Your protection upon our land and people. Deliver us from violence and discord. Grant safety to all who work to bring peace to our land, including those in law enforcement and members in the armed forces. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Dianna* celebrates her birthday, and *Richard* celebrate his baptismal anniversary. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of life, You open Your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. The lepers came to Your Son for mercy. Send Your merciful hand upon the sick and needy *Esther, Marvin, Ruth, Zoey, Betty, David, Jeri, Denise, Jillian, Pastor Small, Debbie, and those we name in our hearts.* Grant that their sicknesses would be turned to health and their troubles to joy. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You gave Your Son once upon the cross, and You give to us His life-giving body in His Holy Supper. Teach us and strengthen us by this Sacrament to crucify our own flesh daily, that we may walk always according to His Holy Spirit. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things and whatever else you know that we need, grant to us Father out of Your goodness and mercy, according to Your gracious will, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**