

Did Only One Have Faith? **Luke 17:11-19**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

There was a day I went in to visit someone in the hospital. As I neared the room, I heard the cries, "O, God, take away the pain." As I walked into the room, and caught the patients' attention, their look at me was a grimaced mask of pain. I took a hand and held it gently as the story unraveled – what excruciating pain this poor person was suffering from their surgery.

Thankfully, healing from the surgery and the loss of pain came rather quickly. It was even bearable until it abated with the proper pain relief medication.

I have a new appreciation for post-operative pain, the recovery from surgery, and the pros and cons of prescribe pain medicine. I'd had surgery when I was younger, but that was much different from my most recent surgery.

And that ties us to our text for today. Ten lepers cried out for God's mercy, somewhat like that parishioner I went to visit in the hospital. They all realized that only God could bring healing, and so they begged Jesus for mercy.

But, we always hear about the fact that only one came back to say thanks. And, I am guessing you have heard a number of sermons or commentaries state how there was only one who had enough faith to return and give thanks to Jesus.

What exactly took place in our text? Well, after they asked for mercy, Jesus gave them the medicinal instructions based upon God's Law to prove they were healed, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." The priests declared someone clean or not. And it was cleanness they wanted. To be unclean meant they were not a part of the community – they could not be with family, they could not be with friends, they could not mingle with anybody, they could not come into the temple, for they were unclean. It is why they stood at a distance and hollered to Jesus, for they could get no closer.

After Jesus proclaimed that they should go and show themselves to the priests, they immediately did as they were told. Why? Because they had faith! God enfleshed had spoken to them, instructing lepers – those who were unclean – to go prove they were clean. It wasn't until after they were already on the way that their leprosy was healed and they were cleansed. When Jesus told them what to do, they did it. That dear friends is an act of faith!

No, nine of them did not come back to give thanks to God, only one did.

That woman in the bed whom I visited cried out to God for His mercy, that God would take her pain away. I know that she was pain free within a few weeks, her prayer was answered. I prayed that God would heal my spinal problems which affect my hand and other things. Surgery a bit over two weeks ago is done. I am much better, but the jury is still out as to whether it accomplished what I was hoping it would accomplish.

How many of you have asked God to help you with some physical ailment, anything from kidney stones, torn MCL, hernia, or maybe something just as simple as a headache?
And how often have you looked for healing and relief by going to a doctor, a surgeon, or by taking something as simple as an aspirin?

Now, who did you thank when the pain was gone, the surgery healed, the medical issue taken care of? Was it God? What did you say about your amazing healing?

Dr. Herpolsheimer was an astounding surgeon... Punksatawny Medical Center is such an incredible place... Tylenol works so well... that I stand before you today 150% better than I was before.

You know what, if it were not for God's work, you would still be having problems. All healing came from God, whether He did it directly like in our text, or whether He used the means of the hands of a skilled surgeon or a medicine. For if God determined that you would not be healed, you would still be suffering.

So, are you one of the nine who did not thank God? Or are you the one that did?

If you are like I am, too often we are like the nine. We beg God to do something, take an aspirin, and call the doctor in the morning – and then, when healing comes we extol the product that we think brought about the miraculous change.

Dear friends, do you have faith? What do you believe?

All ten of the lepers took Jesus at His word and went to the priests, they all had faith. But not all returned to thank God. In the Samaritan's return to Jesus He made a specific confession of what he believed. His return to fall on his face before Jesus' feet showed he wanted fellowship with God. And that is so much different than the other nine, they believed they were healed, but they wanted fellowship with a religious community. They wanted to be able to join their friends and family again.

We hear many people today proclaim that they are religious, many are highly religious. People want to gather with others and have a shared experience, something that makes them feel good, something that moves them. Some do this in temples, mosques, synagogues. Personally, there is a place many around here go to have a "religious" experience on some Sunday. It is a place where people gather with others who are like-minded, and feel good about themselves. They gather to chant the same things, sing the same songs, – it is approximately 43 miles east, southeast of here. But, none of those things are Christian.

What makes Christian worship so unique is its source. We gather together because we know that although God has given us all things, we are not always thankful. We gather together, not just to say religious things or even get our feelings stroked, or to feel religious. When we do glorify God together, we are giving thanks and praise to the One from whom we receive forgiveness for our lack of appreciation of all His gifts to us.

Dear friends, Christian worship is always a response to what God has given, and is giving to us in Christ Jesus. The Samaritan returned to glorify God because he was healed. And Jesus literally, "Your faith has saved you." He was saved from the leprosy of his body, and saved that which causes diseases of body and soul – he was saved, cleansed of sin.

Ten lepers were sent to the priests. Ten were cleansed. Who cleansed them? Nine did not care. They were clean, and that was all that mattered. More importantly, though, it was Jesus who cleansed them, and only one out of ten cared about that.

Jesus healing their leprosy showed that He was the true High Priest, the One who would shed His blood to forgive sinners their sins. The Samaritan understood what true worship was, He returned to give praise to God in Christ for showing mercy. That dear friend is true worship! True worship comes to Christ as God for mercy, and rejoices, by giving thanks to Him alone for the mercy we receive from God through Him.

Jesus said, "Your faith has saved you." Did you hear that? Not just any faith, but *your* faith. Faith is not generic. Faith is not one size fits all. Faith is specific faith. Faith is specific because it belongs solely to you and trusts only in one thing – Jesus. Faith trusts that God, for the sake of His only begotten Son Jesus Christ, is, and always will be merciful.

We know this because He is the High Priest who offered Himself as the sacrifice for us. He has taken our sins into Himself, even as we confess our sinfulness – even our unthankfulness for all He has given us. And He Himself cleanses us, His called servants declare us cleansed of all sin – the absolution spoken into our ears.

We cry out to Christ for His mercy continuously in the service, and Christ's mercy flows from the blood He shed for us all. Christ is merciful, therefore He cannot and does not ever refuse.

That dear friends is why the primary service in Christ's church is not primarily a worship service, but the Divine Service. It is true that we gather to praise God, give thanks, to God, and confess our faith in Him. But we can do that in many places - at home, at work, on the golf course, the favorite fishing hole, at Lambeau field, and even with the neighbor.

As we gather in the Divine Service, we come to find our High Priest who will have mercy upon us and plead our cause before His Father in heaven. Here is where we gather to receive the gifts of mercy and grace Christ purchased with His suffering and death. We gather to hear the Gospel, eat Christ's body, and drink of His precious blood. These are divine gifts which serve us in our need. They build us up in the most holy faith. Here we receive forgiveness, life, and salvation.

This is what we receive every time we gather together and ask for His mercy because it is what our Savior desires to give us. He does not leave sick, impure, stained by sin. He cleanses us, making us holy. Here Christ, God enfleshed serves us and chooses to accept our thanksgiving. He who has begun this good work in you, will bring it to completion on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.