

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Pentecost 21 – October 14th and 17th, 2010

Luke 17:11-19

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

Dear Children of God,

"Love and marriage, love and marriage, go together like horse and carriage." The song comes to mind when I think about the meaning of the account in our Gospel this morning. This song links together two familiar things – namely love and marriage which is like a horse and carriage which are always associated together. Of course, one could find a number of things in the Gospel that might be linked: leprosy and pleading, for example, or, Jesus and compassion, or, Jesus and healing. The one that our text points to and tries to teach something about, however, is the thing which is our sermon theme today is based on:

Theme: Faith and Thanksgiving

- 1. Faith holds on to God's promises**
- 2. Faith leads us to say thanks**

Faith and thanksgiving are absolutely linked, and we need to remember that we cannot ever separate the two. You might ask why? If a person does not have faith, it is easy to see that thanksgiving is not always directly linked to what happens in a person's life. People without faith might not look at things in the same way and may not be thankful at all. These ten leprosy men, for example, all recognized that they had been "cleansed." That was a fact for all ten of the men, but only one of them turned back to give thanks to Jesus or give glory to God for what he had received. Just because all ten were healed did not automatically produce thanksgiving, for all ten were cleansed, but only one turned back – the one who had faith.

Why did the other nine not turn back? We can imagine a number of reasons, but the Bible just doesn't say. Why did the one turn back? Jesus gives us the answer when He tells the man that his faith had made him well - or, literally, his faith had saved him. The really interesting question is, what happened to the other nine?

Jesus healed them - cleansed them all. The healing itself did not happen because of their faith. Their healing required being sick, and desperate, and having heard that Jesus could do that sort of thing. Besides, the comment Jesus made about faith was not in response to the cleansing of the men, but in response to the thanksgiving of the man, and his giving glory to God.

No, the nine were all cleansed, but they took their religion like a lot of people take theirs today, as a vehicle for something personally beneficial. People want their religion to solve their problems, or make them happier, or feel good, or tell them how to live life to get the most out of it. That is where the Christian publishing industry comes up with the how-to books about Christian weight-loss programs, or Christian investment plans. That isn't the purpose of the Christian faith. The Christian faith is about our rescue from sin and death and hell. Being a Christian – or believing in God – is not a defining characteristic of wealth, or success in the world, or health, or unmitigated and un-interruptible happiness in this world. Faith in the Gospel and believing in Jesus Christ is the way of life eternal, for it receives the blessings which Jesus procured for us by His life and death in our place, and His resurrection to new and everlasting life.

Christians still have to deal with this world, and ordinary life in it, troubles and all. We just get to have the advantage of knowing how the story ends – or that it does not end, to be more precise. Some of us believers will be wealthy, and some of us will be poor. Some of us will be giddy with happiness most of the time, and others will wrestle with troubles and sorrows, and even depression, most of the time. Some of us will be so healthy that when we die it will be of nothing serious, and others will fight bad health for decades before we pass on. And some of us will not have long lives at all, at least on this side of the grave.

But every single believer has the forgiveness of sins. Each one of us, without fail, will rise from our graves and join with the family of God in paradise, to sing God's praises throughout eternity. And while we live here and now, we know that God loves us, and that we can call on Him for help, for rescue, for strength, for comfort in our troubles. Every single believer will hear the same message, if not the same words, as the one in ten who returned to give thanks, "Your faith has saved you." Meanwhile, we are called on to rise, and go our way, whatever that way may be.

Of course, when I speak of believers, I am not talking about everyone who calls themselves a believer. Each of the lepers were believers in something. They all called on Jesus to heal them. They all followed His instructions and headed off to show the priests their healing, even before they were cleansed. They believed. The only issue is what they believed. Did they believe that their obedience was accomplishing their healing, and so they did not dare to turn around? That is a typical precept of many faiths today. People often believe that their good works and their personal righteousness is what sets them in good standing before the Lord. But they are wrong, just as the lepers were wrong, if that was why they did not turn around. Jesus praised the one who returned to give thanks.

Perhaps they believed that they had already received all that they could expect, or all that they wanted. Many Christians seem to be looking for something that will help them overcome all obstacles in this world. But the Gospel never makes that promise. God does help us in times of need, but not always in the way we start out with hoping He will. Sometimes He has something better in mind. Sometimes He teaches us patience and humility. Now and then, He even shares with our hearts the secret that winning or losing in this world is not truly significant. Standing faithfully, however, is. The Samaritan Leper discovered something wonderful about faith. **It saves.**

If we believe that we have nothing to worry about, but that the grave is but a door to fuller

and richer and happier life, and all of that is true because of Jesus, and that God loves us with a deep and powerful and everlasting love, then we just have to rejoice and give thanks! Today is the day that the Lord has made – and given to us as a gift. It cannot hurt us, for He is our Shield and Protector. Let us rejoice and give thanks! Faith and thanksgiving go together. That is how the Lord discerned the faith of the one leper. He came back, thanking Jesus and praising God. He knew that He had come under the love and care of the Creator of heaven and earth, and that this Jesus in front of Him was the One through whom God had spoken and acted and rescued Him.

As a result, he also got salvation. The others got cleansed of leprosy of the flesh, but they all had to die one day, for the leprosy of sin still clung to them. The Samaritan Leper was saved, cleansed of both the leprosy of his body and the leprosy of his soul. His body died one day, but he had been saved for eternal life.

My point today is that the faith and the thanksgiving were linked. If you believe God is concerned about you, and watching over you, and that He has saved you, you will be brought to give thanks. You will want to give thanks. No matter what happens, God is with you to keep you. Doesn't that sound wonderful? When everyone says that it is all over with you, it will just be beginning, for God has given you eternal life because of Jesus Christ. Doesn't that make you feel good? Sickness can only do so much, and then it must let go. Only so much can go wrong, and then you will be standing with the Lord. Even when it looks like you are beaten, you win, because Jesus has already won and given you the victory. All that is left for you to do is give thanks!

But you can only honestly do that if you sincerely believe it. If it isn't real to you, then there will be nothing particularly worthy of genuine thanksgiving. If church, for example, is just to help you feel good, then feeling good is all that you should expect. But if you know the truth, you should be comforted even when you don't feel so hot. And you should know the love of God – the love which He has for you – which gives us not just comfort, but hope even in difficult situations!

When trouble cannot do any real damage, you just got to give thanks! When danger cannot really hurt you, you just got to give thanks! When sickness can no longer really frighten you, you just got to give thanks! When you believe that the world is stacked to your advantage by the great love of God, you got to give thanks. Faith and thanksgiving go together naturally. It is the work of the Spirit, and the clear will of God - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; "Rejoice always! Pray without ceasing! In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus."

Like love and marriage, faith and thanksgiving just naturally go together!