

The Ten Healed of Leprosy

14th Sunday Trinity - Luke 17:11-17

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."

Lord, you are worthy of receiving praise and honor and worship and thanks from all creatures, for you have created all things. Through your will we are created and have life. Alas Lord we, your creatures, have fallen from you. Our heart is dark by nature and it does not know your glory and goodness. Our tongue is bound so that it does not praise you. Therefore we pray, enlighten our dark heart. Loosen the string of our tongues that we become capable of thanking and praising you. Hear us, Oh God, for the sake of your eternal love. Amen.

Leprosy, as it appeared during the time of Christ, was a dreadful disease. It was very painful, very dangerous and very contagious. Those who were taken sick with leprosy therefore had to leave their homes, their fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, husbands, wives, and children. Those afflicted with Leprosy had to leave all those who were near and dear to them and live with other lepers in some far away deserted leper colony. Little by little the sickness would cover their entire body, so that it became one dreadful, foul smelling mass of flesh. They became an abomination to the rest of mankind, both because of their dreadfully loathing appearance, and because of the odor that issued from their body, mouth and nose.

What a striking picture of sinful people in their natural state! Natural people can be painted with the same brush as these poor unfortunates. A Leper with their stinking mass of decaying flesh was an abomination to all people. So are we in our natural state, we are a stinking abomination in God's sight. God must therefore thrust us away from his sight for we are not fit to be with him, the holy God and his holy angels. In Isaiah 1:6 we find a description of a natural person, there we read: **From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness – only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil.**

Those who are not cleansed by the blood of Christ while here on earth must for all of eternity be separated far from God and those in heaven. No unclean thing will enter heaven, but will instead be cast into hell. And between heaven and hell there is a great gulf fixed. Those who have not been washed clean by the blood of the Lamb (that is the unbelievers) – are an abomination unto the Lord. But this condition does not appear before men on their bodies, rather it is a condition that will show itself on the Day of Judgment. Our true condition will become apparent as we are told in Daniel 12:2 **Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.** And in Isaiah 66:24 we read: **And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.** The word abhorring literally means to be a stinking abomination to all who see the condition. On the other hand, those who through faith in Christ are cleansed by the blood of the Lamb will arise with most beautiful bodies, glorious bodies, like Christ's glorious body. Those in rebellion to Christ will arise with dreadful, stinking, and abhorring bodies.

Oh friends, how necessary it is to become cleansed from the leprosy of sins and to remain clean and pure unto the end.

Christ healed the 10 lepers of our text, oh what a blessing. Only one of the former lepers returned to Christ to give thanks and glory to God, and he was a Samaritan.

Christ was concerned about this and asked: **“Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?”** Yes, where are the nine. They were cleansed from a most dreadful disease. Did they so soon forget the one who made them whole? Did they use their regained health to satisfy the sinful desires of the flesh? Did they use the wonderful gift of health to sin against God?

Dear friend, you have received great and wonderful gifts from God. Do you return to give God glory, or do you use the gifts in the service of sin. Do you thank God, really thank him? Do you really have anything to thank for? People so easily find things to grumble about and to be unthankful. They act and talk as if there was not a thing to be thankful for, as if God had given them a raw deal. God says in Ephesians 5:20 that we should: . . . **always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.** These are the words of God, the great God, the almighty creator of heaven and earth. He says that we should always give thanks to God for ALL things, for ALL THINGS. Would that great God tell us to thank him for all things unless we have the greatest reason to do so?

Jesus says in James 1:17: **Every Good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.** God has given you your body and soul, eyes, ears and all your members. Would you sell your reason, your eyes, ears, tongue, your hands and feet? Is there enough money on earth to buy them? Surely they are valuable. Do you thank God?

God gave you every single breath of air you inhale, every drop of water you drink, every morsel of food that you eat. Would you sell the air, water, or food if you could? Would you be without these blessings at any price? Do you thank God for them? Every single second you live is a gift from God. For if God took his protecting hand away you would immediately perish. Who can begin to enumerate all the good gifts you receive in one single hour, Acts 17:28 states: **For in him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'** Do you thank him? Or do you use these gifts for instruments of sin against the giver of these gifts?

Not all people are in possession of these blessings. Some are sick and suffering as the lepers of our text. Some have lost their eyes, hearing, hands, and feet. Some have even lost their reason. Some have other great trials and tribulations so that there is really nothing in this world they can enjoy. Surely these

have nothing to be thankful for. Yes, they have. For God says we will thank God for ALL THINGS, also sickness and sorrow. The sick, the halt, the blind, and poor also have much to thank God for, just as much as the healthy and prosperous.

Why? - Because we live, not for this life but for eternity. We were created for eternal salvation. All of God's dealings with us here on earth have the one great purpose to save us from the dreadful leprosy of sin. God wishes to save us from the dreadful fate of spending eternity clothed in a horrible stinking body, to exist in the unspeakable pain and agony of the damned in hell. God's one great purpose with all his dealings with us is to give us eternal happiness, joy and glory. His glory is so great that it cannot be described in human words. If it is necessary that you should suffer in order that God's object may be gained, would you not be willing to bear it? And have you not reason to thank God for the suffering? And don't you see that the words of God are true as it is written in Hebrews 12:6: **My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.**

We live for eternity and all of God's dealings with us have the one great object in view to save us from eternal suffering. God wants to give us eternal joy and so the greatest gifts that

God has given us here on earth are his Word and Sacraments. Through these means of grace he gives us life, air, food, water, health, and sickness so that we may hear the Word and use the Sacraments and through them receive the salvation which is in Christ.

And still how many people neglect these means. Through Baptism you were cleansed from the leprosy of sin. You become clean before God and became his child. In baptism you have put on Christ.

But, oh, how many baptized men and women who once were cleansed instead of thanking God, are most shamefully unthankful. Instead of thanking God with all their hearts that God has given them a church and a pastor to preach this word and administer these sacraments – they are ungrateful and disobedient. Through these means heaven is open for them and hell is closed. Baptism means that they not only may be cleansed but also kept clean by use of God's Word.

People often grumble because they have to support a church instead of coming to church with joy and thanksgiving. Instead of accepting the wonderful gifts of salvation offered, they often stay away and consider it rather a burden. Oh, what shameful unthankfulness. Surely the Lord asks: **“Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?”** Where are the 9 who were

cleansed in Baptism? Have they all turned to the sinful ways of the world again? Have they again fallen back to the leprosy of sin? Must they all during all eternity suffer the dreadful consequences of the leprosy of sin? Will God's intent with all his dealings with his people be annulled because of their shameful unthankfulness?

Only one leper returned to give glory to God, and likewise only a few will remain in their baptismal covenant. The true earnest, sincere believers will come back and fall on their face before the Lord to thank him. They are cleansed through the blood of Christ. They are made clean, perfectly clean, so that they are saved from sin and hell. They will be made heirs to all the glories of heaven. They will offer up themselves (*their bodies and souls, their health and their strength*) in the service of the Lord.

Now a Christian will live not unto themselves, but unto Christ. And their greatest grief and sorrow is that they cannot thank him as they should, that they cannot serve him as they ought. The unthankfulness of the true Christian is a state which is often recognized as a daily battle. Since a Christian has faith - unthankfulness is not imputed and for Christ's sake instead is daily forgiven. A Christian hates the unthankful heart and he or she longingly looks forward to heaven. As David writes in Psalm

63:5: My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.

Here our flesh still drags us to the earth. Some day, when we are in heaven we will escape the chains of the earth and ascended into the temple of heaven. Then we will perfectly praise our Lord and God from everlasting to everlasting along with the choirs of the elect.

It is written in Psalm 126:3: **The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.** It is possible that with practice we can offer praise and learn to thank God even for tribulation. St. Paul took pride in his weakness, troubles and persecutions and that is written in the Bible as an example of long-suffering. Lay your cold heart daily at the feet of Jesus and pray him for new grace to offer warm praises.

But when the battle will have been finally won, then no strings will tie our tongue, no sobs will interrupt our psalms of thanks. Free and unhampered we will join the heavenly white robed choir upon that glorious day.

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