

Sermon Trinity 14 2021

September 5, 2021

Luke 17:11-19

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read. Amen.

When we hear the readings for each week, one thing we should look for is the unifying thread of those readings. I think I've mentioned that before, but this is a great week to make that point. You might be wondering why this week, but before you do, try to make the connection. First, think about the Gospel reading. You've got this familiar story where Jesus heals the Ten Lepers. And why is it so familiar? Because we use it on Thanksgiving Day every year. And why do we do that? Because there's this contrast between the nine lepers who didn't say thank you to Jesus and the one who did. And of course, that fits, right? That's an appropriate reading and theme for that day. But here in the regular part of the Church year, what do we do with it? On that day, we're focused on our call to give God thanks. Here, we're just in the middle of the season where we have Jesus in His regular ministry, these readings that tell us about life as His people between His ascension into heaven and when He'll come back to bring about the resurrection of the dead, the judgment, and the New Heavens and the New Earth. So, what does the theme fit with today?

Well, let's consider the other readings. First, we had the excerpt from Psalm 119. If you don't know Psalm 119, read it. It is a great homage to the Word of God. If you watch the devotions, you saw the explanation that it is an acrostic. Each section begins its lines with a different letter of the Hebrew Alphabet, kind of like if we would make each line in a poem start with A, then the next section each line with start with a word beginning with B, then C, and D, and so on. That's Psalm 119, and every single line but a handful of the 176 verses laud the wonderful nature of God's Word. So, that's the Psalm, it's about God's Word. And in this section, there's even this great exhortation to "store up that word in [our] hearts." And why? **"That I might not sin against you."** The beauty of God's Word, know that Word, know it and store it up in your heart. Memorize it and make it a part of you and it would give you wisdom in your life in Christ.

And that's the theme of the Old Testament lesson, **"Hear, my son, and accept my words... I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness... Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life."** These two readings have this theme of the teaching, of knowing the Word, don't they? But then there's a shift, isn't there? Then you get the shift to the Epistle lesson, the second reading. And what does that say?

Well, it doesn't speak as directly about the Word, or it doesn't speak as directly about the Lord's instruction, *per se*. But if you look at it, you can definitely make a connection. In fact, if you think about how the Epistle lessons over the past couple of weeks have been from Galatians as well, you can make the connection even more directly in pondering what they said in comparison with what is being said here. Those did talk about the promises of God in His Word, but today's, then, speaks in light of those promises and in light of what the Word instructs for life. But here is a different way of saying it. Instead of directly referencing the Word, here Paul talks about walking by the Spirit, and not walking according to the flesh.

Now to make the connection that much clearer, how do we walk by the Spirit? In the past of Christianity, and even still today, you would have many who would say that as a Christian, you follow your heart. You pray to God for guidance and the Spirit will lead you. In our day, though, we see the consequence of that. "My heart tells me that it's not that bad for me to leave my wife." Well, did that come from the Spirit or the flesh? Clearly it came from the flesh. But how do you know? How as a Christian can you finally know whether instruction is from the Spirit or the flesh? By the Scripture, right? If the instruction comes from the Word, if it comes from the Commandments, then you know it fits with God's will. If it doesn't then you have to figure out if it actually does fit in the instruction of the Word altogether. For example, again speaking of the devotions, this week, within those, I made the point that the ways that Paul describes living according to the flesh, that those descriptions all fit in breaking at least one of the Ten Commandments each. You know, "enmity, fits of anger," those break the Fifth Commandment not to murder. And so there is the theme still of the Word.

However, there is this strong distinction here, like I said, of walking by the Spirit over and against the flesh. And to look at that quickly, what is Paul saying? He's saying that as Christ makes us anew in His Spirit, then we don't still do the things that we used to do before we were Christian. We don't still do the things that gratify our sinful nature. We don't still participate in sexual immorality, we don't worship false gods, we don't have enmity with each other, nor do we divide because those divisions lead to judgment, self-righteousness, anger, hatred. No, we live by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against these things, there is no law, there is no command. The Word doesn't restrict them, instead they are encouraged.

And there is where the connection comes to the Gospel. When we see the Gospel lesson, what's there? What happens? You have these ten lepers, and they're shouting out to Jesus, and what do they ask Him? They ask Him for mercy, right? And like I said last week, when you come to Jesus asking what you need to do, He tells you just what. But when you come to Jesus for mercy, what does He do? He gives you that mercy. And that's

what these men get. They don't get the admonition to go show others mercy, instead they receive it. And they get it as Jesus tells them all to go show themselves to the priests.

Now, I'm guessing you remember to some extent the effects of leprosy. Sadly, it's a disease that affects the limbs of the individual, and eventually causes the limbs to die and fall off. It's very sad. In light of that, lepers were required to stay at a distance from people. And this was actually a requirement of the Old Testament Law. The lepers were not allowed to be close to anyone. They couldn't be close to family, to loved ones, and they couldn't go in the temple and be in the presence of the Lord there. So, when these lepers were healed, they were allowed to go back to their lives. I'm guessing you can imagine the joy that would bring. Think about that. You have this disease which is eventually going to kill you. On top of that you can't be cared for by your loved ones. You can't touch them, they can't touch you and treat your disease. You're cut off. And you can't go to church. But, then you're healed. Now you get to go back to all of it. Imagine your joy! Imagine the excitement you would have!

And in this case, who is your thankfulness to be directed at? Jesus, right? And so you can see the contrast between the nine who go away unthankful, and the one who comes back. But how does this connect to what we've been talking about with the theme of the other readings? How does it connect to this theme of the Word, and life by the Spirit according to that Word? You can see it in the response that Jesus speaks to the leper who returns. What does He finally tell that leper? **"Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."**

If you would look at this verse in the King James Bible, you would find it to say, "Thy faith has made thee whole." Or in the Greek you would see a word that literally translates to saves. "Rise and go your way, your faith has saved you." Now, that language of "made thee whole" fits well here. That faith has made the leper whole. He is whole in His body again from the leprosy, but by faith he is now whole in his soul by the faith which has cleansed his sin. And there's the link to the theme. This leper has been saved not just from a bodily disease, but in the faith that brought him to return to Jesus and give thanks, he shows a trust in this Lord and redeemer. He shows a newness of life by the Word of Jesus. He shows a newness of life that walks not by the flesh, but by the Spirit. Those other lepers, were elated to return to their lives, but this leper was elated to return to the Lord who healed him.

As I say that, I want you to ask yourself what you would do. I often make that point that it's easy to look at the actions of the disciples and how they don't get it and shake our heads. I remember growing up doing that with them all the time, or possibly even

hearing this parable and thinking, “what’s wrong with them? Why didn’t they go back to Jesus? Of course you go back to Jesus!” But do we? Do you?

Look at where we are with the pandemic. Many of you are likely like me. We can’t wait for this to just return to normal. But will normal be a return to our Lord? Or will it be a return to many things that distract us. Or as we’re seeing a return to normal, is that a return to the Lord for you, or a return to other things? And as I say a return to the Lord, what I mean is repentance. It’s always easy to look at the world and wonder what God is doing, but understand that in every circumstance, there is a call from Him for us to repent. Repent of our sin, repent of our clinging to earthly things, repent of our self-righteousness in contrast to a world that has fallen way from the Lord. Repent.

And in that repentance there is life in the Spirit. In that repentance and faith you are saved. This is because this Jesus who spoke the word of healing to the lepers, speaks the word of healing to the leprosy of your sin. Just as the lepers weren’t allowed in the temple because of their leprosy, this disease of your sin should restrict you from the presence of the Lord. And yet He has taken that disease upon His own body and redeemed you. He has died the death it should bring to you. But He has been raised so that you would have life in Him. That’s the life in the Spirit. That’s the true life, that’s the life that comes by the faith that saves and makes you whole. And this is the life that He gives you still by this Word here where He meets you, where you come and partake of His Eucharist, His meal of thanksgiving.

And as I say all that, one other thing is worth noting. The healing the ten lepers received was a blessing for all of them. The return to their lives was a valid reason to be ecstatic. We all would be. We all would rightly be. We want to make sure that the eternal reality and importance of our faith doesn’t negate the reality of what’s happening now. But that reality now should help us to realize just how important that faith that saves is. It does give eternal life. And in that eternal life, there will be life in the Spirit not only in our souls, but even in our bodies as the Lord promises to raise us whole on that last day. That’s why we live in the Spirit in the meantime, why we walk in the word. But that’s why we also heed that call to faith in Jesus and not the things of this world, because that’s what will last eternally: the joy of Jesus who says to you, “rise and come to my eternal kingdom, your faith has saved you.” Amen.