

Paul M. Mroczenski
Thanksgiving Sermon
Luke 17:11-19
(11/23/2023)

At the heart of our Gospel text today is a contrast. A contrast between one Samaritan and nine Jews. All ten of them are lepers, or at least they were. They all came to Jesus in great need crying **“Jesus, master, have mercy on us.”** Jesus tells them all to go show themselves to the priest. They all went, or at least they all started to go, and **“as they went, they were cleansed.”** All ten of them were healed, restored, their flesh made whole and pure. Nine of them presumably continue on to the priest, doing as Jesus’ commanded. But, **“One of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan.”** Jesus expresses disappointment at the absence of the nine, **“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”**

What is going on here? Jesus commanded them to show themselves to the priest. Indeed, in the Old Testament (Lev 14), if one was healed of leprosy he went to the priest to have the healing confirmed. He still had to be physically cleansed by a washing and spiritually cleansed by a guilt offering, an atonement sacrifice. Thus, he truly became holy inside and out and was once again part of God’s holy people. Why then does the Samaritan not do what Jesus commands, what the Law expects? And why does Jesus praise him for it? The Samaritan does what he does because he has experienced the Gospel first-hand and he has been enlightened by the Holy Spirit to understand who this Jesus really is. By faith, this Samaritan understands that:

JESUS IS THE SACRIFICE THAT MAKES US HOLY

Jesus not only has the power to heal but the power and authority to cleanse. That is why the Samaritan does not continue on to the temple and the priest. At the temple, the holy God

meets a sinful people. We know that in Christ **“the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily”** (Col 2:9). In Christ God meets his people in the flesh. The Samaritan comes to understand this. Therefore, he goes not to the place of God for cleansing, but to God himself. For Jesus clearly identifies himself as the one true God when he says, **“Was no one found to return and give praise to God.”** By falling at the feet of Jesus the Samaritan is confessing who Jesus is, and he is thanking him not only for physical healing but spiritual healing as well. For this Jesus is God, the God who heals and who is also **faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness** (1 John 1:9). Indeed, Christ not only heals this Samaritan, he absolves him saying, **“Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”**

To whom do you direct your petitions, your cries for mercy, your thanks and your praise on this Thanksgiving Day? To God, through his Son Jesus Christ. You, like the ten lepers, know you have a malady and Jesus is the cure. But do you come to him only for physical blessings? Do you think if he only healed your cancer, your loved one’s dementia, or answered every prayer that everything would be alright? It would not, because our malady is a leprosy deeper than the flesh; it infects our entire person. Because of our sin, and our failure to fulfill God’s Law we are utterly unclean inside and out, deserving only to be put out of the camp, barred from God’s presence, cast into hell. But God, in Christ Jesus, forgives you your sins.

Indeed, every physical blessing is meant to demonstrate God’s love for us and point us to the highest blessing of Christ Jesus and the forgiveness of sins. Our clothing and shoes, food, house, home, wife, children and all that we have is only significant and meaningful because Jesus has forgiven us our sins so that we can live without fear of eternal punishment. Jesus has come that we may have life and have it to the full (John 10:10). He heals the lepers because he loves them. He gives us good things because he loves us. But we must not forget that when Jesus

heals these lepers he is on his way to Jerusalem, he is journeying to the cross. He wants them to seek from him not only physical blessing, but eternal cleansing, the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus can cleanse us from all unrighteousness and make us holy because he is the atoning sacrifice. Blood must be shed for one to be cleansed and forgiven; the law demands it. The sins of the ten lepers must be atoned for. Indeed, Christ has not come to bypass the Law, but to fulfill it. Jesus Christ is the lamb which purifies lepers. He atones not only for these lepers, but for the sins of the whole world. When he meets these lepers he is already offering up himself to God's will. He is living obediently under the law. He is fulfilling all righteousness. This perfect lamb of God is being fattened not with choice grain but with mistreatments and slander, persecution and rejection, our sins and ailments. He is touching lepers, gentiles, a woman with a discharge of blood. He is eating with tax collectors and prostitutes. He is serving his disciples and washing their filthy feet. He is on his way to Jerusalem where he brings it all to bear where in his perfect flesh and spirit he bears the full punishment for our sins. Truly the lepers are cleansed, they are atoned for. And so are you.

And where does this atonement take place? Jerusalem. Yes, in Jerusalem, but more specifically at the cross. The cross is the altar where Christ offers himself up for us, suffering in our place, shedding the blood which washes our sins away. This is why Luke tells us that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, that we might look to the cross and see it as the ultimate healing. Jesus also points to his own cross with his final words to the Samaritan. The ESV translates, "**Rise, go your way.**" And that is often how we want it. We want to thank God for our thanksgiving meal, our healing, the physical blessings and then we want to go back to *our* lives and enjoy them, pursuing guiltless pleasure and aimless leisure. But what Jesus really says here is, "**Rise,**

journey.” The same word which is used of the lepers “journeying” to the priest, the same word which describes Jesus’ “journeying” to Jerusalem at the beginning of this Gospel lesson.

Jesus words are an invitation and command to join him on his journey, to follow him to the cross. He is saying to the Samaritan, “Come; see why I healed you. Come; see what I will do for you. Come; see the cross where I will shed my blood for you. Come; see why I can declare your sins forgiven and cleanse you spiritually, make you holy, and make you whole.” Jesus has the same invitation and command for us today. He says to you today, “Come to the cross. Come have your spiritual malady cured, your sins forgiven. Come to the divine service where I will meet you in word and sacrament. Hear in your ears what I did for you in my life, and in my death, and in my resurrection, the eternal life I won for you. Come receive the forgiveness of sins. Come to the table and receive my very body and blood given and shed for you.”

Journeying to the cross also involves taking up our own and dying with Christ. You are cleansed, pure and holy, blameless before God. God’s kingdom has been ushered in through Christ and the kingdom is yours. You are Christ’s own child and heir through your baptism, buried with him into his death, washed clean by his blood. But the final perfect kingdom has not yet come. While we live between the cross and the grave, we still suffer. Our flesh is afflicted by all manner of physical and mental illness. Our spirits are harassed by the devil and his minions. The world oppresses us and tempts us, telling us to not to seek cleansing in the blood of the lamb but in the waves of the woke culture. Your life is your own they say, “make of it what you will.”

But we wait for the lamb of God who alone truly purifies. We cry with all the saints, “Come, Lord Jesus, Come!” We endure these crosses and trials by the grace of Christ’s cross. Your earthly flesh may fail, you may suffer affliction, persecution, and temptation now, but your salvation is certain. Christ has suffered once for all. He rose from the dead as the assurance of

your future redemption. On the last day, you will not only be made holy, you will be made whole. All will be made right. All will be perfect. Bodies healed and restored, sins forgiven. All bowing down before the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. In the meantime, we find peace at the cross. We meet Jesus there, and he gives us a foretaste of the feast to come in the Gospel proclamation and the holy supper. We pray boldly, trusting that the God who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all will certainly provide for our every need.

On this Thanksgiving Day, that is why gather at the Lord's house. We thank him not only for food and health and family; we thank him for Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We thank him for the cross. And we take up our own in faith. You are no longer a slave to sin, death, and the devil. Christ has redeemed your life; he has purchased and won you with his own blood. You are free from the fear of death and eternal punishment. You are free to live for God and your neighbor, trusting by faith that he who has begun a good work in you will bring it to completion in the day of Christ Jesus (Phil 1:6). And his work is certain; it is done. Jesus Christ is the one, final sacrifice that makes you holy. Go forth and serve the Lord with gladness. Like the Samaritan, use your body, and soul, mind and strength, all that you have, all the gifts which God has given you, to glorify him and serve you neighbor. Go forth in peace and joy and thanksgiving. **“Rise, go your way; your faith has made you well.”**