

Sermon Luke 17 11 19 Last Sunday of the Church Year

Sermon: The last Sunday of the Church Year

Text: Luke 17:11-19 – The Ten Healed of Leprosy

Theme: Thank you, LORD!

Goal: To recognize God's blessings during the year that ends today and to thank Him.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Today is the Last Sunday of the Church Year. As many of you will not be around at the very end of the year, let us celebrate today and review our lives, achievements and relationships during this past year and let us see what our reactions are about what happened, based on the Gospel of the Ten Healed of Leprosy.

I – Our relationships

As mentioned several times, Jews and Samaritans didn't have a good relationship. Historical and religious differences had caused a big enmity between them. The African Bible Commentary says: *“yet in this group a common sickness had broken down the racial and religious barriers. In the common tragedy of their leprosy they had remembered only that they were sick people who were in need. The need for social, cultural, religious and racial segregation was gone. Together they shouted with one voice, Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”* (ABC 1238).

What is still dividing us? How many walls do we build around us to isolate ourselves from others? Are we better than others? Are they worse than we are? What historical, religious or racial walls are still there?

The lepers were excluded from the society. They were not allowed to enter the villages, they were forbidden to live with their families, they were condemned to live outside, and they depended on the charity of some people to give them food, until they died. Therefore “they stood at a

distance and called out in a loud voice, “ Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”
And Jesus listened to their cry and offered a solution for them. He didn't ignore them in their distress. - It was a double segregation for the Samaritan: his background and his leprosy.

Leprosy is always compared to sin: There was no cure for this disease in the time of Jesus. The lepers were condemned to die alone. This is the picture that unites all humankind: We all are condemned to die because of our sin! This throws all of us down to the same level, in spite of our social, cultural and racial differences. And the only solution to that problem is to appeal to Jesus: Lord, have mercy on us! And He does! We have experienced this in our lives! We are healed, forgiven, alive, and we are in fellowship again with God and with His people! Only Jesus can do it, because He reconciled us with the Father by His blood and His resurrection! - and He reconciled us with each other!

Soon it will have been one year that I am serving in this congregation. Our relationship is excellent and I have a good relationship with our neighbors as well. But I'm always concerned about the needy people: What are we doing? Are we ignoring them? Is there a way to help them? Where they are?... They are not around our church or the parsonage... As we are planning for the next years, help St. Thomas to built better relationships among the needy, bringing Jesus to them and giving them some relief in their distress. We do have a Leprosy Mission close to our church. May this be one of the open doors that God challenges us with?

II – Our achievements

It is worth noting that Jesus didn't heal the Ten Lepers immediately with one word, as He used to do. He sent them to the priest, to be examined by him. This was the Law: If someone was suspected to have leprosy, he had to go to the priest, who would give the verdict. And if someone was feeling better and the wounds had disappeared, he should go to the priest again, who would declare him cleanse and able to live with his family.

When Jesus sent them to show themselves to the priest, this was a test of faith. They could have argued: “Master, please, touch us, say a word and we will be cleansed...” But they believed and obeyed. And they were healed: “As they went, they were cleansed”, says the text.

God doesn't shower bread and blessings direct from heaven anymore, as He did with the Israelite in the wilderness in the time of Moses. He blesses our faith, our work and our obedience. If we don't plant, we don't harvest. If we don't work, we don't receive our salary. If we don't study, we don't pass the year. - How much has each of us achieved this year? Was it better than last year?

Usually people talk about their achievements as a result of their hard work and wisdom, or luck. Some like to tell advantage over others how smart they were in their business and how they have achieved this and that.

If God cuts our breath, we die. An accident, a sickness, a crash in the money market, puts all our dreams down. We know this, but we are not always aware of this.

Nine out of ten lepers didn't come back to say “Thank you, Lord!” They had faith to ask, but they didn't have faith to say thank you. In their need, they cried out to Jesus, asking for help. In their health, they follow their own ways. They didn't recognize that the blessing they had received was a gift of God.

Only one out of ten recognized it. “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.” He was not a member of the established church. He was not in fellowship with God's people. But he acknowledged the grace and power of God and gave thanks.

Jesus' reaction to this puts a question mark on our reaction to God's blessings. “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?"

Conclusion: The youth group of our church in Nairobi performed a drama about this story last year. The drama was written by a leader of our Social Team. The Bible doesn't tell what the nine healed lepers did or why they did not go back to Jesus; but the drama tried to show the various excuses people usually have for not coming back and say "Thank you". One confessed: I have to go to my family and show that I'm healed! Sorry... - The other said: I have to enjoy the happiness I lost during my years of sickness! Sorry... Another called all his friends and offered them a big party to celebrate his reintegration in the society... One of them just wanted to forget about all his misery and not mention it any more... Another one wanted to support his family again so he was extremely busy and did not have time... Another planned to travel and to enjoy the beauty of the nature... the other felt it just obvious that Jesus healed him; and so on...

Jesus is still on the way and people can reach Him. He is not far and His mercy is available to all. People have different needs: spiritual needs, physical needs, material needs, dreams, plans, desires, anguish, and distress. In our private prayers and in the church liturgy we say and sing several times: Lord, have mercy on us. He is always willing to help us according to His will and we have experienced blessings over blessings as His children. As we are almost finishing another year and beginning a new year, may God be with us in His grace, love and power, preserving us in the true faith and giving us what we need for our daily life. We say thanks to the Lord with the Psalmist (103:2-5,22): "Praise the Lord, o my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who forgives all your sins, and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. Praise the Lord, o my soul!"
Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle
Cape Town, 20 November 2011