

Sermon Luke 17 11 19 21st S af Pent Series C (13 October 2013)

Sermon: 21st Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Luke 17:11-19 – Ten healed from leprosy

Them: “Give praise to God!”

Goal: To improve our gratitude toward God in words and deeds for what Jesus has done for us.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Difficult relationships among people because of issues like race, religion and cultural traditions are not just a “privilege” of South Africa. When we go through the News, every day we see clashes happening all around the world because of differences between peoples. It seems that some people don’t accept that others think differently or live in a different way. *The perfect pattern is myself, my opinion, my way of life...* Isn’t it so? Even sometimes inside our own family?

But sometimes common issues bring enemies together, like the common good of the country, the fight against HIV/AIDS, a disaster, fighting against a common enemy, searching for better conditions of life, trying to solve common problems like hunger, clean water and other issues.

“The Jews had no dealings with their closest neighbors, the Samaritans, and yet in this group (mentioned in our text) 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.” (ABC 1238). The sickness had gathered them together in the same fate. And they came all together to Jesus asking for help: LORD, have mercy on us!

I – God helps everyone

In a general sense, God helps everyone, without discrimination. Jesus said: “He (God) causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt 5:45).

Martin Luther, when he comments on the Fourth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer: Give us today our daily bread, he writes:
God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.

What is meant by daily bread?

Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.

When the ten lepers went to Jesus asking for help, He didn’t ask them if they were Jews, Samaritans or what their background was. They stood at a distance because they knew the rule from the Law of Moses (Lev 13:46) that they were not allowed to approach anyone; they were considered impure because of their illness. But Jesus heard their cry and gave them a direction: “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” This was also a regulation in Moses’ Law: The priest was the one who should examine the lepers and declare if they were cleansed or not. So they obeyed Jesus and went to the priests. “As they went, they were cleansed!”

All of them received the same grace of healing. But only one came back to say “Thank you, Lord!” and to worship Jesus. Only one showed his gratitude and thanksgiving to Jesus. And he was a foreigner, a Samaritan. “Where are the other nine?” The Bible doesn’t tell us about them. Maybe some ran to their families to tell

them that they were cured... maybe some went back to their business... others enjoyed their lives with a big party offered to the friends, and so on. Nine out of ten didn't take time to come back to Jesus and to say: Thank you, Lord!

II – How do we say Thanks?

Let me share with you the thoughts of an American pastor about “*How do we say Thanks*”:

The faith of the thankful leper has, however, given birth to worship, as true faith does. It receives the healing and then returns to the giver with praise. This is not simply a miracle story; it also teaches about gratitude and the nature of faith. Faith not only believes and latches onto the Word of Christ and acts on that promise but it also necessarily results in thanksgiving. Receiving a benefit but not returning to worship is not true faith; it is selfishness. Sinners cannot approach God simply to get something for themselves. Faith that saves, true faith, is not a selfish getting from God. True faith believes and is then connected and united to Christ in grateful worship. To be at Jesus' feet to worship is the true outcome of forgiveness.

Like the lepers, we as sinners, cannot approach our Lord. We need to cry for help from far. We come before our Lord, acknowledging our sin. We beg and cry out for mercy. The Divine Service is a weekly living example of this. What comes first in the liturgy? The Confession of our sins. We confess our unworthiness to be here. We acknowledge we are far away from our Lord. We confess our sin, asking God for forgiveness. And in the Kyrie, we sing the same words spoken by the lepers: Lord, have mercy on us, Christ, have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy on us. How many miss this very important encounter with Jesus when they don't come to the Service...

Jesus hears our cry and He answers us. *Jesus gives words of*

absolution: I forgive you all your sins. Sin doesn't push Jesus away; He comes and takes our sin, no matter how disgusting it is, no matter how disfigured it has made us. He takes it to bear it; He died for it. Sin does not push Him away; Jesus truly wants us to give Him our sin and cry out to Him in confession so that He may forgive us.

The story ends with the one leper returning in thanksgiving and falling at the feet of Jesus in worship. Some, like nine out of ten lepers, miss or ignore this invitation to be close to Jesus. That's what failing to give thanks is missing an invitation, because giving thanks is really about being close to Jesus. He has brought us close by healing and forgiving us by His death. Now we're free to grab Him, hold Him, to spend every moment being close to the One who gives such good gifts. What a shame when instead we go on with our business: Forgetting to worship; mumbling through our prayers; not returning to Him what belongs to Him: our goods, our money. Still, we, too, get close to Jesus when our sins are forgiven—even these sins. The distance between us and Jesus is indeed removed by His cross and His words of forgiveness. We still do have that invitation to come to Him in praise and thanksgiving and worship, with no boundaries separating us. We can be absolutely confident and joyful that He is with us always; that nothing can separate us from his love.

Conclusion: *The story about the ten lepers is our story. The one leper who returns is, by the grace of God, who we are called to be. This service, this liturgy we take part in, is a liturgy of thanksgiving and praise for our Lord's healing words spoken to us that remove the leprosy of sin. We are clean, forgiven, holy, and free! We are free to come to our Lord and praise him, to thank him that He is with us, that He and we are one. We are close to Jesus now and always. Thanks be to God!" (CPH 2010) Amen.*

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle – Cape Town, 13 October 2013 (Adapted)