

# Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity

St. Luke 17.11-19

September 13, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

You cannot hear the Gospel today without the coronavirus infecting your mind. The disease has changed how we view the world, interact with our neighbors, even our friends, and dear family members.

The new school year that began at Immanuel this past week was not exempt from this current reality. Parents joyfully dropped off their children (their ILS Lions) at school, but not without distance. Offices and employment of all types have undergone transformations to meet new safety guidelines and policies that often mandate separation, change even the most minute tasks of our day. Yet, one of the most significant changes for man is found not only in our physical separation but also in our internal demeanor towards our neighbors. What once was a common reaction when a person had a sniffle or sneezed to offer a Kleenex or a gentle, *“God bless you,”* is now met with a silent exclamation within the heart and conscience toward the perpetrator, *“unclean, unclean! Depart and keep your distance.”*

These words are also the words of a leper. The leper would need to call out to those around them, *“Unclean, unclean!”* Not to bring judgment upon their neighbor, but to declare their own status among men. The disease of leprosy would ravage the skin of the person who possessed the contagion, rendering them separate and isolated from their community.

Today, the signs of daily life say, *“Stop the Spread - stay 6 feet apart.”* Life isn't that different from the life of a leper right now, is it? We live a life of isolation and distance for the time. Will we return to normal? Will, we one day give hugs and embraces, shake hands as we depart each Sunday after the Divine Service, or give high-fives to students after another successful week of classes? Maybe, I hope so. Our current lot in life serves to remind not only the Christian, but the world that we are all dying. Since the fall in the Garden, all mankind fell with Adam and Eve, they are separated from the Father, inclined to sin. We already have the most deadly virus we can never rid ourselves of in this life.

Yet, in today's Gospel, the lepers' cries to Jesus begin to demonstrate the way of faith. They have heard about Jesus and believe that if anyone can heal them, it is this man. They bring their ardent pleas to the ears of Jesus saying, *“Master, have mercy on us!”* Mercy is the act of forgiving or showing compassion, often associated with loving-kindness or actively helping those who are miserable due to the circumstances beyond their control (Erdmans Dictionary). As we heard last week, we are all in the ditch; we need the Good Samaritan to give us aid and compassion. This is why when Jesus

hears the pleas for mercy, He instructs the lepers to go and show themselves to the priests because He had compassion on them.

However, it is not until the men are on their way to the temple that they realize they have been healed. Which is odd in a sense, isn't it? Wouldn't you desire some sort of visible healing before starting off toward the temple? Access into the temple would be a little more severe than no shirt, no shoes, no service, especially for this scaly group. But they departed Jesus with faith that their ailment would be healed. Going to the temple would not only demonstrate their restoration of health to the priests, offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving as the law demanded, but also bear witness to the hope and faith they had in Jesus. Yet, only one turned around and went back the way he came; only one returned to Jesus. He returned after becoming aware he had been healed along the way, and now his faith grew more certain, trusting that when he bowed at the feet of Jesus, he was at the feet of the son of God.

In the beginning, there were ten, but only one returns. All possessed some degree of faith, but not all were equal. It is often easier to have trust and faith when difficulties present themselves. It is another matter to continue growing deeper roots of faith as the stresses and tribulations of life dissipate. The nine that went onto the temple received the word of Jesus, but like the rocky ground, the Word did not take root but gave way to turning away from the faith. This is a form of apostasy, the turning away or renouncing of faith. However, the one who returns to Jesus is a Samaritan, a half-Jew, and he not only hears the Word of Jesus, but he cherishes this word, holds fast to the word as a seed planted in the purest soil so that it would one day lay deep roots capable of ensuring any hardship of life. Here is the challenge for us, to guard against faith that withers and fades, faith that ceases once the uncertainty of life subsides, once pandemics fade into the background of life and simply become another corruption of who we are.

In the letter to the Hebrews, we hear, ***“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”*** (Hebrews 11:1) Faith is both trust in this present time and for what is to come. In the present, faith is confident of forgiveness and prays for the Holy Spirit to guard and keep your hearts and minds from every evil of body and soul. Faith is also for the things not seen; salvation, the heavenly inheritance, and the age to come. At the center of this faith is Jesus; this is what the Samaritan realizes when he returns to give thanks and praise.

The prayer at the beginning of the Gospel is also your faithful prayer. ***“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us”*** believes Jesus is both true God and true man. But the prayer also reveals confidence that you will receive every good and needful thing in this life from the Lord. This prayer is engrained throughout the Divine Service as we sing the Kyrie and the Agnus Dei and, in turn, forms the pattern of the Christian life. When you pray for mercy, you confess your sin and sickness, your inability to heal yourselves from the wants or worries of the pandemic, or whatever is causing tribulation and worry within your life. This prayer focuses your complete reliance upon Christ, your Lord, who hears your pleas and in loving kindness gives you His compassion.

For this reason, pastors are placed among you, to proclaim Words of comfort from the mouth of Jesus, to exercise the Office of the Keys by declaring forgiveness to the contrite and downcast, and administer the sacraments - the medicine of immortality. God has placed me here today for this very purpose, to point you to where Jesus is present for you – and I humbly ask for your prayers as I enter this office.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, while we all struggle in some manner or another in life at this time, whether it is due to the effects of the coronavirus or your own personal tribulation, do not lose sight of your Savior. He has taken upon Himself the sin of the world and in Him you have communion, you will receive life and salvation, both now and in eternity. So join the lepers and call out, “**Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!**” He will hear you and He will surely give it. +INJ+

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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