

Trinity 14, 2021

Luke 17:11-19

Part I

We have become familiar with the term “quarantine.” Most of us know someone who has been quarantined or we have been quarantined ourselves. We have come to know by experience then, that to be quarantined is to be cut off from community. You are confined to your home; you cannot leave, cannot go to the grocery store; you cannot receive visitors, cannot have face to face contact. You are isolated from human contact.

That is not how God made us. God made us to be social people. Even if we are not particularly social, we have a need to be around people - to know that we are part of a community.

So we can identify **somewhat** with the lepers in today’s text.

“Then as [Jesus] entered a certain village, there met him ten men who were lepers, **who stood afar off**. And they lifted up their voices and said, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.’”

Leprosy was a dreaded communicable disease; a type of flesh eating disease. It disfigured the body, gave off a putrid stench, and was considered a “death sentence.”

Those who had it were **quarantined** in leper colonies. The leper colonies were **cut off from** the local community. If anyone came near them, they had to warn them by calling out, “Unclean!”

That is why these ten lepers “stood afar off.” Coming to Jesus for help they stood **at a distance**. They did, but their voices were weak and raspy from leprosy. So they had **to join** their voices to be heard. With **one voice**, then, they cried out to Jesus, “Have mercy on us!”

To be sure, these ten men had a very serious disease. It reminds us of another even **more serious** disease. It is the leprosy of sin. It was passed down from Adam to us. It has made our person sick with sin. It is what our Galatian lesson calls the “flesh.”

Like leprosy disfigures the body, the leprosy of sin disfigures our person and gives off a sick stench. Paul identified that stench and disfigurement when he wrote,

“The works of the flesh are [plain to see]. Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness --- sorcery, hatred, contention, jealousies, outbursts of wrath --- selfish ambition, dissension, heresies, envy, --- murders, drunkenness and the like.”

While not every disfigurement of our person; not every sick stench in that list may be plain to see in your or my life, there are **some** that are on occasion. That is to say, we can **find ourselves** in that list.

This disfigurement, this stench, is the stench of death. That is why Paul concludes,

“Those who **practice** such things **will not** inherit the kingdom of God.”

That is to say, to think that these” works of the flesh” are harmless - that they are an acceptable way of life - as the culture about us does - is to have our heads in the sand - to be blind to the fact that they **cut the sinner off from** the Kingdom of God; they **quarantine** from God forever.

So, when we have been led to despair of our leprous condition, there is only **one** thing to do. It is to do what the ten lepers did. That is why the church teaches us to take their on our lips,

“Lord, have mercy on us; Christ, have mercy on us; Lord, have mercy on us.”

Part II

Jesus does have mercy. He did have mercy on the ten lepers.

“When [Jesus] saw them, he said to them, ‘Go, show yourselves to the priests.’ And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed.”

When Jesus sent them to the priests, it was - in a way - like what you and I do to get tested for covid. You go to Kaiser or Go Health to get tested. They swab your nose and test the swab. If the test is negative, you are told that you are well. You can be in or return to the community. In Jesus’ time you would go to the priest to get tested for leprosy. They examined the skin. A negative test meant you were well. You could return to the community.

So the ten lepers went ... and here is the **amazing** thing about that. They went **even though** their bodies were still disfigured and they had the stench of sickness. They went **trusting** Jesus’

word. They acted **in faith on** Jesus' word. And **as they went**, they were made well. Disfigured hands were made whole, raspy voices were restored.

Jesus has also shown you mercy. In mercy, he became disfigured with the sin of the world; became the stench of death for all; was cut off from God, the Father; quarantined for all sinners; delivered to death for all. And the Father accepted his Son's work, raising him from the dead, bringing him back into his presence.

Because Jesus did that for all, he does the work all the Old Testament priests pointed to. He gave you a negative test result, as it were, in your baptism. He declared you well, forgiven of your sin. Declared well, you are no longer cut off from God. Instead God draws near to you in his Word; he welcomes you in his community, the Kingdom of God, the church.

This is yours by faith. It is, because you do not see the reality of being declared well. You and I **still struggle** with the disfigurement of sin; with its stench. Yet, we walk by faith not by sight. We walk trusting **in** Jesus' word - trusting that one day the disfigurement of sin and its stench will **no longer** cling to us; that one we will be made **completely** well. We will in the resurrection of the dead.

Part III

When Jesus made the ten lepers well, one of them had something to say.

“One of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned. And with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks. And he was a Samaritan.”

It was not expected that a Samaritan would do this. Samaritans were foreigners; people of a different race; people outside of

the Kingdom of God. Yet, it was the Samaritan who gave Jesus thanks.

He did it - not with a raspy leprous voice, but with a loud - fully restored - voice. He fell down **on** his face **at** Jesus' feet and gave God the glory. He fell at whose feet? Jesus' feet. He gave glory to whom? God.

That is to say that the Samaritan realized Jesus is God in the flesh; God come to heal us of a disease even greater than leprosy; come to heal us of the leprosy of sin. So he gave God - Jesus - thanks.

The Samaritan's thanks was what our Galatians reading identifies as a "fruit of the Spirit."

"Fruits of the Spirit" stand in contrast to the "works of the flesh." The works of the flesh are what our leprous sinful nature does. Baptized into Jesus, we no longer want to do works of the

flesh that end in death. We do not, because the Spirit has grafted you and me into Jesus. Grafted into Jesus by faith you are alive. Alive you are saved.

Luther once said, “Faith alone saves, but faith is never alone.” That is to say, alive in Jesus by faith, the Spirit feeds your faith with the Word. As the Spirit does, **the Word** bears fruit. So the apostle wrote,

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, --- longsuffering, kindness, goodness, --- faithfulness, gentlesmess, self control”

and

“such things” ... such things as thanksgiving. So we give God thanks -

- For giving us his Son to save us
- For giving us food, clothing and home
- For giving us wages or retirement, doctors and therapists.

- For giving us all that we need for this body and life

Part IV

At the end of our text there is a sad note followed by a glad note. First the sad note.

“So Jesus answered and said, ‘Were not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?’”

The sad note is that Jesus is grieved. I don't know how else you can say it. Ten lepers had asked him for mercy. They got what they wanted. As long as they got what they wanted - their health - they forgot Jesus. The works of the flesh got the best of them. They did and they fell away.

It is like this was written for our time. People receive good things from God - the comforts and the entertainment of the 21st century. These “good things” - not wrong in themselves -

do, however, have a way of distracting from Jesus - and distracted to forget Jesus - and to forget to abandon him.

So, it is easy in our day and time to forfeit the gift Jesus gives - eternal life - eternal life paid for by Jesus - paid for by him for all. That is the sad reality of today. Nine out of ten, you could say, forget Jesus and forsake him.

It reminds me of the time Jesus fed the 5000. After he did, the people wanted to make him a king. They wanted him to give them creature comforts. When he told them he did not come to do that, they left him. When they left him, Jesus said to the Twelve,

“Do also you want to go away?”

That is a temptation for us. Many are leaving the church. Why not me, too? Why go against the flow? Why not be a part of the masses?

..though that is a temptation, Peter replied,

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

Jesus gives you and me what lasts forever. Not all the creature comforts, not all the entertainment, not all the world can give what lasts forever. Jesus does. Jesus gives that to you; gives you faith to take hold of it; gives it to you to give out to others - to keep on trying.

A brother pastor put it like this. He was watching his child's soccer team. The opponents took 4 shots on goal and scored 1. His child's team took 28 shots on goal and scored 4. They won 4 to 1. True, it took them **more shots per goal**. It took them 7 shots to their opponents 4 shots to score 1 goal. **While it took them more shots, they kept on trying**. Eventually, they scored.

His point was this: Keep on trying to give Jesus to others in today's world. To be sure, there are so many layers of defense to penetrate. Though there are, Jesus is what they need even as we need him.

... and that brings us to the good note at the end of our text. Jesus told the Samaritan,

“Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well.”

“Your faith has made you well” can also be translated, “Your faith has saved you.” Both were true for the Samaritan. Both are true for you. Faith alone saves. It saves because of its object, Jesus. Jesus makes you well in God's eyes, healed of sin. That is yours by faith; it will be yours by sight in the resurrection. Go, then, your faith has made you well. Amen!