**Saving Faith in the Christ of God**

Based on [Luke 17:11-19](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk17.11-19)

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Thanksgiving Sunday

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Today’s Gospel lesson is an account of Jesus healing ten lepers, but only one returning to him to thank him. **This gospel teaches first that Jesus is merciful, eager to bless and heal those who ask him, and he has authority over all sickness and even over the law itself.** It teaches that salvation is found by those who recognize Jesus as Christ and God. And finally, only those who seek salvation will recognize Jesus as the Christ; and conversely, those who are complacent in their salvation lack faith and are blind to the work of Christ among them.

The first teaching of our text is that Jesus is merciful; eager to heal and to cleanse. Whenever someone asked Jesus for help or mercy or healing, and he always gave it. From the time his ministry begins in the Jordan and ends at the cross, he never fails to heal, and to help, and to give to anyone asking for mercy. Jesus Christ shows us the heart of God is love.

And so, when ten Lepers ask him for mercy, and he simply gives it. **He sends them away to go and show themselves to the priest. And along the way they were both healed and cleansed.** They were healed because they no longer had leprosy…the same way you might be cured of cancer or heart disease. The actual illness, the physical infirmity is gone. But Jesus had mercy--not only in healing them--but in **making them clean** before God and men.

Under the Old Covenant, Leprosy made you unclean before the holiness of God and amongst his holy people (Lev. 13). Unclean people could not worship at the temple; they could not participate in the religious life of God’s people, or even live among them. And so Jesus, when he healed their leprosy, that also made them clean, and restored them to God and to their own people.

Now that he is ascended into heaven, his earthly ministry is over. But Jesus has not changed. He still shows mercy, only the purpose for miraculous healings has passed. This is for two reasons. First, physical disease cannot make you unclean, because by baptism you have been sanctified, the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon you. Just as god has declared all food clean that once was unclean; so in baptism he declares all his people holy. **Works of the flesh can make you unclean: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outburst of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division (Gal. 5:19-20).** Works of the flesh drive out the Holy Spirit and--though there is a perfect remedy in the repentance and forgiveness of Christ--we should avoid works of the flesh. But external things like food, Sabbaths, disease and death they can no longer cause you shame and reproach. Therefore we can suffer all things, bear our infirmities, deal with our diseases; because they no longer separate us from God.

Second, Jesus no longer needs to heal because; in his death and resurrection he has conquered every illness, virus, disease, and blight so that they can never do you any real harm. He has conquered death itself. **These diseases can cause you suffering and struggle in this life, but your body is dying anyway.** Jesus once healed to show that he had authority over death and the law. But now, because of the resurrection, we know that death will not have the last say. It’s just a sleep you’ll wake up from. “**O death where is your victory; O death where is your sting**.” Gone, because Jesus disabled it, and he has nothing left to prove.

Jesus is eager to help all people regardless of their faith; but salvation comes only to those who recognize Jesus as Christ and God. The lepers cry out for Jesus to have mercy on them; and he responds by telling them: “**Go and show yourselves to the priests**.” In other words, go and have them verify that you have been cleansed. They obeyed Jesus command to go to the priest *before* he healed them. This shows that they all had some faith in Jesus as a healer. But only one of them proved to have saving faith, because only one of them recognized Jesus for who he really was. On their way to the priest, all ten lepers were cleansed, but only one of them returned to Jesus fall at his feet to worship him (cf: Rev. 19:10).

Only the one leper returned to worship Jesus as Christ and God. He fell at his feet to give thanks. And Jesus says, “**Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?**” Jesus says that this leper, falling at his feet and giving thanks to Jesus, is praising God. In the book of Revelation, St. John falls at the feet an angel, and the angel rebuked him saying, “**You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God**” (Rev 19:10). When this leper worships Jesus he does not get rebuked; rather Jesus commends him for it. Because in worshipping Jesus the leper worships God.

One of purposes of Jesus ministry on earth was to find faith. He did not go around telling everybody that he is God or the Christ. As he was being the Christ amongst them, he gave faith the opportunity to recognize him. So he says to his disciples. “**Who do the crowds say that I am?” And they answered, “John the Baptist, But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen.” Then he said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered, “The Christ of God**” (Luke 9:18-21). The messiah. “**And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one**…because true faith should be able to recognize the messiah by his works.

In the scriptures, the messiah was promised to be many things: **born of a woman** (Genesis 3:15) **a virgin** (Isaiah 7:14), **he would be greater than king David** (Psalm 110:1-4), **he would be a light to the nations of the world** (Isaiah 42:1-6), **and he would bring a new covenant** (Jeremiah 31:31). **The OT says the messiah would suffer for his righteousness** (Psalm 69, Isaiah 52:13-53:12) **and be rejected** (Psalm 118:22-24), **that he would be resurrected** (Psalm 16:8-11), **ascend to heaven** (Psalm 68:18, Eph: 4:8-10) **and take up his throne and reign forever** (1 Chr 22:10, Dan 7:14, Ezek 37:25).

Even in Jesus day--before the New Testament was written--someone could have composed the parts of the apostles creed dealing with Jesus from a careful reading of the OT alone—(minus the proper names of course, Jesus Christ and Pontus Pilate). A good Jew who knew his scripture would have a rough outline of what the messiah would look and act like when he appeared, and what would happen to him.

So too, when Ten Lepers saw Jesus passing along between Samaria and Galilee, they had every reason to recognize him as the messiah; one of the signs of the coming messiah would be the restoration of health (Isaiah 35:5-6). **But they didn’t. They call him master, but they don’t call him messiah; and more importantly they don’t worship him.** And even after their cleansing, only one returns to worship him. And Jesus says to him, “Rise and Go your way; *sou he pistis sesoken se*, literally “your *faith* has *saved* you.”

In the next chapter of Luke, Jesus famously says, “**And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”** (Luke 18:7-8). The son of man did come, and ten lepers cried out to him. He did find faith, though the odds weren’t good. Only one in ten lepers recognized him for whom he is. Even so that one leper has more than physical healing, he has eternal salvation because he knows God and the one whom God sends (John 17:3).

This one leper had saving faith. He recognized Jesus not as a means to an end, not only as a healer that once he fixes the immediate problem is no longer needed. Nine of them treat Jesus this way, as a means to an end, but the one recognizes Jesus as the end, the goal, the culmination of all the messianic promises of God. In Jesus, he like Peter, recognized the Christ of God come to save and usher in the kingdom of God. And you too have salvation in your faith that Jesus, who came in humility to die for your sins and rise for your justification, is the one worthy of all glory, honour, praise and thanks. Just like the one leper, your search for the messiah is over; you have found salvation in Jesus Christ.

A final teaching of this gospel is that, only those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied; and they are the ones who find no righteousness in themselves. The one leper who returned to Jesus was a Samaritan; the other nine were Jews. In his ministry John the Baptist and Jesus are constantly warning the Jews because they believe that salvation is their birthright because they are sons of Abraham. They believe that, because they are Jews, they don’t need saving. This is contrasted with the numerous instances where Jesus commends the saving faith of non-Jews, eager to say, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.” And John recognizes that Jesus “Came to his own, but his own did not receive him.”

The Samaritan is not a Jew. He was regarded as outside the kingdom of God, and therefore salvation was not his birthright. Those outside the covenant are more prepared to appreciate having Jesus; while those within fail to appreciate the immeasurable treasure they have been given. So too we are the children of God, and by baptism have been given His Holy Spirit. This can make you haughty to think, I’m a Christian, I’m a Lutheran…I’m saved because I was born from a Christian family and salvation is my birthright.

It *is* your baptismal birthright; but the scriptures also recognize that there are prodigal sons who sell their birthright for a pittance. And so the scriptures warn you, the church today who has salvation in Christ, “**Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling**” (Phil 2:12), and “**He who thinks he stand, take heed lest he fall**” (1 Cor 10:12). You are not under the law, the old covenant, but you are under the new one. When the son of man comes again in glory, will he find faith on the earth? He will, though few are the chosen. He will find faith again as he found it once before, in you who hunger and thirst for salvation; you will be satisfied; you are the ones who today fall at Jesus feet worship him and give thanks for the great salvation he gives daily, by the forgiveness of sins that sustains us in a world of darkness until he comes again to save.

So remember (1) Jesus is merciful, eager to bless and heal those who ask him, and he has authority over all sickness and even over the law itself. So ask him for mercy, daily, and he will answer (2) Remember that salvation is found by those who by faith recognize Jesus as Christ and God. (3) And remember those who consider their salvation a right fail to see Jesus and lack saving faith. While you who truly seek salvation will receive it from Jesus, recognize him and his work, fall at his feet and give him thanks.