

“Christ Died for the Sake of the One”

Luke 17:11-19

It kind of feels like Thanksgiving. Our Gospel lesson this morning is also the appointed lesson for our National Day of Thanksgiving. The story of the 10 lepers is read each year in November, and we focus in on the one, the Samaritan, who returned to give thanks.

But this account of the 10 lepers is much more than just an example of how people should be thankful for the blessings God has granted as we live in this bountiful world.

The account of Jesus’ interaction with the ten lepers is really a microcosm of our story. We were the diseased, outcast people whose only hope was in a miraculous healing performed by Christ Himself. In those days, anyone with leprosy was banned from the temple, they had no contact with God’s House, and they could not interact with anyone else. They had to announce themselves as “unclean”, so that everyone would stay away. They had no life.

But, for us, rather than merely being afflicted with an infectious skin disease, we were born with a fatal illness called sin. Our original sin made us “unclean”. We had no right to enter God’s House (to stand in His

presence without feeling the full weight of His righteous judgment upon us), there was no sacrifice we could offer for our sins, and we could not bear to stand in the presence of God. We had no life.

And just as Christ healed all 10 of the lepers, God has also shown mercy and grace to all people. Christ died on the cross to pay the ransom price for all sin. And just as only one of the lepers returned to give thanks to the Lord, so also, as God's faithful people, we continue to find ourselves to be a minority in this world.

God our Father has been very slow to anger, and this is something for which all the world should be very thankful. We deserved to be condemned immediately the first time and every time that we have sinned. But God has given the people of this world whom He loves the opportunity not only to live out our lives and have "x" number of years here on earth – which we don't deserve.

But like the one leper who returned, we have received the greater healing. Not only was he healed of his disease, as were the other nine, but he received the greater healing. Christ says, "Your faith has made you well." The healing of that man went way beyond his skin disease. Faith brings so much more. The forgiveness of sins is the greater healing.

Like the leper, not only have we been blessed with the mercy and compassion that all of mankind has received by being allowed to live and not fall under immediate and final judgment, but we have received that greater healing – that is the forgiveness of sins; eternal life; salvation.

And for this we return today and give thanks to our Lord. We are no longer unclean. We are welcome in God's House. We can stand before our Lord, as Luther says in the catechism, in "everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness."

We look at the life we have with God in His Church on earth and the promises of future glory, and we know that none of this is our doing. In response to this, we can really do nothing other than to follow the example of both the leper and Christ.

Like the leper we throw ourselves at Christ's feet and thank Him. But think also of the example Christ set. Christ heals ten lepers, and He knew that only one would be grateful. When we reach out and share the Gospel, as Martin Luther says in today's bulletin insert, "this will also be our lot, and we should not on this account give up our eagerness to confer benefits on others." Maybe one in ten will hear the Word of God, receive the message in faith, and throw themselves at Christ's feet in thankfulness. But for the sake of the one, we keep sharing.

Any fan of the Star Trek series knows the proverb, "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few or the one." It is logical. Do what is best for the most people.

Within the Kingdom of God, we spend our time concerned about the one. The one person struggling for life in the hospital; the one unborn child; the one sinner who repents for whom the angels in heaven rejoice.

As a student at the Seminary, I met a woman who was working on a

master's degree in Biblical languages. She was a Bible translator in the jungles of South America. She learned the language of the primitive indigenous people, translated Scripture, and spent seven years sharing her faith in word and action. One person came to faith in those seven years.

She gave thanks to God for the opportunity to be an instrument of the Holy Spirit. She did not think of it as time wasted or a vain exercise. For the sake of the one, she would do it over again. And in fact, she was heading back there to continue her work. That is a common experience for foreign missionaries. It very often takes many years to see the fruits of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit rarely works on a time schedule that suites our liking.

Today is a day for you to give thanks to God that He is concerned for the one. You were that one. Christ died for the sake of one person – you. He sent someone into your life to share the Word of God, bring you to the baptismal font, wash you of your sins, so that you are no longer unclean, and so that angels rejoice over you.

And as we return and give thanks here this day that we have the opportunity hear our Savior's voice, to hear that Good News of salvation once again, we share the joy of Christ with other "ones" for whom angels have rejoiced. And we will depart in joy having heard the words of our Lord: "Rise and go your way. . . your faith has made you well." Amen.