

Trinity XIII, 2006
Text: Luke 17:11-19
Trinity Lutheran, Worden, IL & Zion Lutheran, Carpenter, IL
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✠Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ ✠

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

What does it profit a man to gain the whole world if he loses his soul? What does it profit nine lepers to gain their health, but not to know Him Who healed them? What shall all the riches and blessings in the world profit you if you fail to acknowledge, love, and know the Lord who gives them?

For is it not the case that you so often seek the blessings of God without really caring whether or not you have God himself? There is one sure way to tell – when do you find yourself more active in prayer and all things religious: when things are going along just fine, or when things go badly? Is it not the case that when tragedy strikes – when the finances get especially tight or the health of a family member compromised – that then you fall to your knees and seek God's help. And when the threat is past, financial security regained, the health resolved in either healing or falling asleep in Christ, that when things are restored your fervent prayers to God which in the midst of crisis flowed like Niagra falls are now back to their trickle of “Come Lord Jesus” before supper and the odd Our Father or so.

Why? God is still there. Why should your prayers be so fervent at one time when you seek a blessing and so few and far between when things are hunky dory? It is because you are a habitual breaker of the First Commandment: you love the things God can give you, but you are unsure that you really want God himself. Like teenagers in puppy love who enjoy the feelings of romance but want nothing to do with the stuff of real love: babies, bills, and building a life together – you seek the peace of mind having a God can give, without actually having to have a God who demands fear, love, and trust in Him above all things.

Dear friends in Christ, repent. Turn away from this unbelief in God. For that is the problem, the same as these nine lepers have in today's Gospel reading. Ten lepers are healed, but only one returns to Jesus to praise him. Why? It is sometimes said that the other nine were unthankful. But that can hardly be the case. No human being could be thankless after having been freed from such a heinous disease as

leprosy. And indeed, Jesus sends them running to the priests. That is, they go to the Temple in Jerusalem and praise and thank God there. But Jesus finds this insufficient. He says to the one leper who returns, “Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” Jesus is saying that he is God – that was the point of his miracle and yet the nine missed it, they did not return to give thanks to him, the true God in the flesh, because they did not believe in him. The nine lepers are not unthankful, they are unbelieving. Jesus says that giving thanks at the Temple in Jerusalem isn’t good enough anymore: he is the true Temple of God, God the Son incarnate. There is no coming to the Father except through this Jesus.

To know this Jesus, to have him, is Life. The gifts he gives us – spouse, children, work, health, financial security and so forth are all fine and good, but the greatest gift he gives is Himself. And without possessing this greatest of gifts, those other gifts mean nothing. It profits the nine lepers not at all that they were healed from their leprosy – for what good is a life free from disease if when you die you end up in hell for unbelief in Christ? So likewise, that man with the most toys, the most earthly blessings when he dies, does not win. For all the things of this world shall pass away and only God remains to bring us into joy with him forever, or to cast us out.

So cling to the one Great Gift of Jesus: Himself. For Jesus is He Who loves you with an everlasting love. Though you have often mistaken the gift for the giver, though you have often desired what he could give you instead of desiring him, though your faith has wavered and your trust in him has been spotty at best, still Jesus loves you and wants to give you himself. Indeed, he poured out his Life for you on the cross – sacrificing himself for your sin, taking your place of punishment and dying there so that you would not have to. For the lepers he suffered the ultimate punishment of leprosy: he was cut off from the people of God and cast out of the Holy City to die a lonely, cruel death. For you he was cut off from the love God – for as St. Paul says, “God made [Jesus] who knew no sin to become sin for us, that we might become in him the righteousness of God.” This is the gift Jesus wants you to have: himself and the forgiveness he won for you.

And he takes no chances with this. He comes to you and applies himself to you directly. So he baptized you – applying the Name of God directly to you, calling you by name. And today, Jesus is here to feed his Christians who are well-prepared to receive him with his own self, his very Body and Blood in the Lord's Supper. For the greatest gift he has to give is Himself – and this gift brings life and salvation and every blessing along with it. For if you have Jesus you have all the

blessings God can give – whether in this life or the next – and if you have not Jesus, nothing you have can replace him: for He is Life, the Life poured out on the cross for your sins, the Life rising up again on the third day for your salvation, the Life filling his Body and Blood given and shed and offered to you for the forgiveness of your sins.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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