
✝ I preach in God's name for God's people. Let my words be from God and for God's people. **Amen**

Good morning.

TWO WEEKS AGO, we heard the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

Daily, the rich man was dressed like a king and feasted. And daily, “at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table.” Then both died; and the rich man went to a place of torment, and Lazarus went to the bosom of Abraham.

This parable warns of the dangers of wealth, of comfort, and of keeping such things to ourselves. This parable shows us that riches in this life may mean hell in the life to come. This warning, like the parable of the unjust steward, is meant to get under our skin and into our souls.

These parables, these warnings passages, are good for us to hear, because our culture loves money and possessions. It is part of the air we breathe. We need God to speak to us, through our poisoned air, to hear how differently we need to think and live and act with regard to money, to possessions, to our lives — to everything we have been given.

The rich man, like many of us, may think his gifts were his riches. But the real gift the rich man was given was laid at his gate, and the rich man never bothered to be a good steward of that gift — the poor man. The real gift, of course, was Lazarus, with whom he could have shared his riches, a seat at his table, clothes, and ointment for his sores. So hear this. The real riches is the one with whom we can share, lift up, or elevate through our use of money. The real gift is not the riches we have been given, but the person with whom we share our riches.

It is the same with our Lord Jesus. He gave up all of his riches — his whole creation — to become incarnate, to be born of the virgin Mary, to walk among us, to be lifted up in death on the cross. He gave up all things that he might win some of us — so that we have a share in his eternal riches. Let none of us squander the eternal life he has set aside for us by being fixated on our own comforts and possessions. Instead, let us offer back ourselves, our time, and our possessions back to Jesus, that he may do with them as he will.

LAST WEEK, we heard the disciples ask Jesus to increase their faith. We heard how Jesus responded: “if you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea’ and it would obey you.” The message is straightforward: the tiniest amount of faith is enough to follow him faithfully and to do what he asks of us.

The disciples in that moment, like us at times, believed: “If only we had enough faith! If only we had enough faith, then we could _____.” How often have we thought or believed the same? “We just need more faith.” Jesus, in return, tells the disciples — and us — in this passage: “You only need the tiniest amount of faith to do a miraculous thing.”

The disciples wanted more faith, not because they needed more faith, but because they found it too difficult to obey their Lord’s commands to forgive one another. Contrast the examples of the disciples with our Lord Jesus. Our Lord Jesus was humble and obeyed his father’s commands, and so he willingly suffered, died, was buried. He prayed for forgiveness for us from the cross. And on the third day, he rose, and forty days later, he ascended into heaven, taking his place at the right hand of God. Jesus did this in order to bring about repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus died and rose, that we might be reconciled to God and be raised to life eternal.

The disciples did not waste their tiny faith. The apostles, with their small, mustard seed amount of faith, proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus. They are how we know that Jesus was raised from the dead. It’s this message of the resurrection that has been passed down through the ages, faithfully, and that we have received.

Just a tiny amount of faith is incredibly powerful. Just a tiny amount of faith is enough to follow our Lord. Just a tiny amount of faith is all that is needed to forgive those who have sinned against us. Just a tiny amount of faith is enough to share the life-giving news of Christ's resurrection.

Whatever the Lord has called you to accomplish for him in this life, whatever suffering he has called you to for the sake of the gospel, the tiniest amount of faith is plenty.

THIS MORNING, we heard that Jesus healed ten lepers. One of then ten lepers, when he saw he was healed, praised God with a loud voice and returned to give thanks to Jesus. The nine lepers, who were also healed, did not return.

None of us, seventeen chapters into the Gospel of Luke, is surprised at Jesus' ability or power to heal. At this point, not only the twelve, but also the seventy, have been sent out with the power to heal and cast out demons. Anyone, at this point, who has heard of Jesus, has also heard of Jesus' power to heal. And so it also must have been the case with these ten lepers, who cry out from a distance for Jesus to heal them. They had heard what Jesus can do.

Meanwhile, Jesus is set on making his way to Jerusalem. Notice that this is how Luke begins our passage: *On the way to Jerusalem*. Luke is reminding us that Jesus has one singular thing in mind—the cross. Everything that follows is in the context of Jesus' journey and direction towards his betrayal, towards his suffering, towards his death on the cross. The cross is his central focus as meanders along the border of Samaria and Galilee. Everything that Jesus does is in preparation for the cross. And so, as he enters *this* village, it is the last time they will see Jesus — the last time until they all make that journey for Passover, when our Lord gives up his life.

The ten lepers call out to him from a distance. The details of leprosy, a disease of the skin, is given in Leviticus 13. Lepers could not enter the synagogues or temple; neither could they remain *in town*. Lest they make anyone or anything else *polluted*, they were to remain out of town, away from everyone else. And so, it's no wonder that just as Jesus was entering a village, that these ten lepers cry out from a distance. This was as close as they were allowed to get, and so they *lifted up their voices* in faith: *Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!*

Jesus has mercy on them. He, of course, could have laid his hands on them to heal them, as he healed others. He could have sent them to the Jordan just as Elisha sent Naaman the Syrian. But Jesus heals however he pleases, and so he sends them to go show themselves to the priests.

It's worth emphasizing, one more time, that these ten lepers were following the customs and laws set aside for them. They were outside of the town, and they could not enter it. Only if they became healed of their leprosy could they then go to the priests for inspection, and when pronounced clean, begin to reintegrate into the town and society and the synagogue. But Jesus does not heal them and *then* send them to the priests. He sends them immediately to the priests for inspection. He sends them to be inspected, before they are healed.

And so, the fact that the ten lepers all begin to make their way to the priests demonstrates their faith. They believed Jesus would heal them before they got to the priests. And, as we heard, their faith in Jesus is well-placed, because the ten are healed while they are still on the way. Nine continue on their way, but one turns back.

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks.

We might think that this is a fitting end for this passage, that all ten lepers are healed by faith, and that one even returns to give thanks to Jesus. Though we also might wonder why this one returned, almost seeming to not do what Jesus told him, since he had not yet gone to the priest. Of course, he easily could have gone to the priest after seeing Jesus. In fact, the other nine lepers could have returned to Jesus after showing themselves to the priests. But we have no record that the rest ever returned to Jesus, only these words.

[17] Then Jesus answered, “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? [18] Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”

These words introduce a conflict. Jesus commanded the ten lepers to present themselves to the priests, and yet here, very clearly, he expected all ten to return to him to offer thanks and praise. Only one has done so, the foreigner, the Samaritan.

Recall this detail. When Jesus began his journey to Jerusalem, we heard that the Samaritans would not receive him, and did not welcome him into their towns. (Yet another reason he was traveling along the border.) But here, a Samaritan at last receives him. And Jesus commends him for returning to him. It’s what he wanted all ten lepers to do.

Why did Jesus expect all ten lepers to return to him? The key, I think, is in the title that these ten lepers give to Jesus. All ten cry out, “Master.”

And so the real question for us today is this: Which of these lepers not only believed that Jesus could heal them, but believed that Jesus was their Master? For if the other nine lepers believed Jesus to be their master, they would have returned to him. They would have sought his company. They would have sought to join the disciples.

Like the Parable of the Sower warns, they are healed by Jesus, but immediately they are caught back up in the cares and concerns of this life. They go on their way, cleansed. The nine can now re-enter society, get their old lives back or start new ones. It is a truly liberating time for them. It seems that they immediately forget what Jesus has done, and the mercy that he has shown them.

Is that not true of us also? That we, too, from time to time, forget the mercy that Jesus has shown us? That we also neglect to return to Jesus to offer him our thanks and praise?

Not so, with the Samaritan leper. He returns to Jesus immediately, for he does only call Jesus his master, but believes and acts like Jesus is his master. Notice he remains with Jesus until Jesus dismisses him: “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.” Perhaps he will now go show himself to the priest. Or, perhaps, he has no need to, because he has already showed himself to the highest priest of them all, our Lord Jesus. Who could possibly be better to declare the man clean than the one who made him clean?

This Samaritan leper is worthy of imitating. His example is our goal.

Like this leper, we turn back to the one who healed us, praising God with a loud voice, and we fall at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks.

Our situation is no different than that of the leper. The leper could not enter the temple, much less the city, without being cured. Neither could any of us enter the presence of God without a cure for our sin. And this cure we have received — the crucified body of Christ, his blood poured out on the earth for our sins and the sins of the world.

As plainly as possible, what is the point of worshipping together on Sunday morning?

Sunday after Sunday, week after week, month after month, year after year, decade after decade, we *are reminded* of what God has already done for us, and we respond in thanks and praise, giving glory to God.

There is a great danger of imitating the nine lepers, of beginning to forget to return to give thanks and praise. What is the danger of *not* returning regularly to offer our thanks and praise?

The danger of not returning *regularly, consistently* is, like the nine other lepers, a severed faith. The nine had faith enough to be healed. They called Jesus master, too, just like the one who returned. But, the other nine did not treat Jesus as master, or really believe him to be master, or else they would have returned to him. So, it is, for any of us who call Jesus our Lord, but neither give him thanks, nor carry out his commands.

The nine lepers had faith enough to be healed, but then they went on their way. How many have we known — perhaps even *me* — who had faith enough to receive baptism and the forgiveness of sins — and then, just stopped? And our faith withered, wilted, fell, and failed as the leaves of the trees in autumn. Only by the grace of God have we returned.

And so, Sunday after Sunday, we return, to offer our thanks and praise to God for what he has done for us. For is there anyone more worthy of our time, of our thanks, and of our praise than God, revealed in his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ? Is there anyone more worthy of our love than Jesus?

✠ All Glory be to God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, Amen.

[19] And he said to him, “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”