

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Thanksgiving Day, November 27, 2014**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 570, 568:1, 39, 567, 50:1-2..

Lessons: Deuteronomy 8:10-20, Philippians 4:10-20, Luke 17:11-19.

Sermon Text: Luke 17:17-19.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

How do you feel when someone doesn't even say "thank you" to you? How do you feel when someone isn't grateful for something you have given them or done for them? I think that we would almost universally feel hurt, disappointed, and maybe even angry when someone doesn't even say "thank you".

Well, in the Word of God today we find an even greater ingratitude. Jesus healed ten men of leprosy, a dreaded disease which would ultimately lead to their death and which even now forced them to be separated from other people except other lepers. *"Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?"* Can you see sadness in Jesus' question? At this time he is now on his journey unto death. Among other things, his soul is disturbed by the ingratitude of Israel. They accepted all God's material benefits, but closed their hearts against deliverance from sin, and so they remain in death.

Today, let's talk about

**GRATITUDE**

- 1. The ingratitude shown to Jesus.**
- 2. The thankfulness of faith.**

In the Bible leprosy is not something to be ignored or something that was easily cured. Chapters 13 and 14 of Leviticus discuss the disease in detail. The New International Version (NIV) does not serve us well there when it translates the Hebrew words used consistently for "leprosy" and "lepers" with much weaker words, such as "infectious skin disease" and "infectious disease" and "mildew". Those chapters even speak of mold and mildew infections on buildings and clothing, using the word for leprosy. And we know how mold and mildew can spread rapidly and easily, sometimes inconspicuously. Of course, we are now learning how dangerous untreated mold and mildew are in houses, but God made his people aware of this long ago. But terms like "infectious skin disease" is certainly too weak to really give the picture of leprosy.

In the New Testament the NIV is consistent with the King James Version in calling leprosy "leprosy".

Bible dictionaries tell us of the horribleness of leprosy. It is not a pretty picture. It is a dreaded disease that kills after corrupting the whole body. It is even gross and ugly to think and talk about leprosy. Leprosy often first appeared as diseases of the skin and proceeded to attack joints and mucous membranes. It began as scabs or bright spots, especially attacking the hair, head, and any spot which had been accidentally injured by fire. The hair falls from the head and eyebrows, the nails loosen, decay, and drop off. Joint after joint of the fingers and toes shrink up and slowly fall away. The gums are absorbed and the teeth disappear. The nose, eyes, tongue and the palate are slowly consumed. Those who had it were not permitted to come close to others. They were aware of the nature of their disease. Even today leprosy is an ugly sight, although modern medicines can treat it to some degree.

God required lepers to be separated from society because of their horrible condition, which would ultimately lead to death.

Today's history lesson happened on the border between Samaria and Galilee. Previously Scripture records in Luke chapter 5 that Jesus had healed a single leper. Now 10 men infected with leprosy come asking for mercy. In the previous incident, Jesus had healed him and then sent him to the priests to verify the cure. If and when lepers were healed, they were to go to the priests to verify that they really were healed. This was part of the procedure God had established among his people. Lepers were to be kept separate from the rest of society. Priests were more than just 'public health officials'. They were the ones responsible for representing the people before God and for offering sacrifices for the sins of the people.

Here Jesus immediately sends them off to the priests, and they are cleansed on the way. Ten were healed but only one came back to thank Jesus. We assume that the other nine were Jews. They had asked Jesus for mercy, not directly asking for physical relief. Their appeal is not in vain. They then must go the way Jesus told them, trusting in Jesus' words.

Let's talk for a moment about the important picture of leprosy as a picture for our lives. Leprosy is a dreaded disease, and so is a picture of sin that kills, after corrupting the whole body.

Not just a few of us but every single one of us is infected with the leprosy of sin. Sin pervades our lives from the moment we were born, and even before. We confess and admit: **"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."** (Psalms 51:5) Every one of us is infected with spiritual leprosy, the leprosy of sin.

In some cases the leprosy of sin is visible. Don't we especially see sin in other people? But we don't always recognize it in ourselves and by nature, our sinful original sin, we don't want to.

But sin affects every part of our lives. Because of our sins, we, all humans, "are by nature sinful and unclean", to repeat the words we use in the confession of sins. We confess to God that "we have sinned against [him] by thought, word, and deed." The hymn-writer reminds us: "There was no spot in me by sin untainted; Sick with sin's poison, all my heart had fainted; My heavy guilt to hell had well-nigh brought me, Such woe it wrought me." (The Lutheran Hymnal 143:6)

Sin separated us from God. We dared not approach God because of our sinfulness. We would be left and separated from God to waste away our lives and finally die eternally in hell.

So much for the analogy of leprosy and sin. Neither sin nor leprosy is a pretty picture. It's not a pleasant sight. It is something horrible to look at, terrible to consider, and leads to a dreadful end.

But look at what Jesus did. He healed the ten who came to him pleading for help. **"They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, 'Jesus, Master, have pity on us!'"** (Luke 17:12-13)

And what did he do? He didn't immediately heal them with words, but he pointed them back to the Word of God, the command that Moses had given when lepers were cleansed, or thought they had been cleansed. **"When he saw them, he said, 'Go, show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were cleansed."** (Luke 17:14)

**"One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him--and he was a Samaritan."** (Luke 17:15-16) Here the Samaritan leper shows his faith. This man wasn't even a Jew. He wasn't one of the nation whom God had chosen to first receive his will and the Savior from all sins. He was especially grateful and thankful!

Look at all that Jesus does for all of mankind. Luke had told us earlier, when John the Baptist sent disciples to Jesus to ask about him and his work, **"Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached."** (Luke 7:22 KJV)

All those kinds of healing are a picture of healing from sin. Seeing Jesus Christ as Savior. Having our leprosy of sin cleansed, washed away. Hearing the good news of salvation. Coming to new life in Christ even while here on earth, and then walking in God's ways. And finally, having the Gospel of Jesus Christ and his salvation proclaimed in our lives, not just once but repeatedly. We have been healed of this terrible leprosy of sin.

Here is proof that Jesus is willing to accept Gentiles, too, which is really good news for us Gentiles.

Paul writes to Timothy that prayers and thanksgiving are to be made for all men at all times: ***"This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."*** (1 Timothy 2:3-4)

We see that the Gospel is not only intended for Jews, or for those of us who have already received the Gospel which has been preached to us. It is intended for all other nations, all other people, all other tribes, all other races, whether they are across the world or across the street in our own communities. We see from this example that response to the message of the gospel breaks down racial and national barriers. People from the far corners of the earth will sit down at the banquet of salvation by Christ's invitation. That is made clear, too, in the Old Testament history lesson in which Naaman, a Syrian, was cleansed of leprosy in Elisha's time. ***"There were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed--only Naaman the Syrian."*** Luke 4:27.

Ten men who needed help prayed to Jesus for physical help. Today many may pray for help but few return to thank God. So what is our response to having been healed and cured of our sins?

The majority of the world could not care less. Their attitude seems to be 'So what?' Don't many seem to think that they deserved to be cleansed just because of their attitude of asking Jesus? And today don't many people show – if not by their very words, but by their very actions – 'What's the big deal about sin and the forgiveness of sin?'

But how do believers react to the assurance of the forgiveness of sins? How do you react to the assurance of the forgiveness of your sins? At the very least, you would want to thank God. And that is what you are here for right now, to thank God!

Jesus found joy in the gratitude of the Samaritan. He even tells us ***"In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*** (Luke 15:10)

He came to his own, but they turned away, and neither praised him nor gave him thanks. But he would still receive recognition. It would come from strangers, from those afar off, from Samaritans and from other Gentiles.

We might ask as we celebrate a special day of thanksgiving: What are you really thankful for today? What do you really have to be thankful for? You could surely come up with a long list of earthly gifts God has provided you.

Our Old Testament lesson is a reminder of the blessings of God. God said ***"Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day."*** (Deuteronomy 8:11 NIV) But a few verses later he said ***"If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed."*** (Deuteronomy 8:19 NIV) If we seek to live according to his commandments, we have nothing to fear. But remember that it is Jesus' obeying them – perfectly – that, and then his death on the cross to atone for all our sins that saves us. That entire Old Testament lesson gives us a marvelous list of blessings as these people were about to go into the land God had promised to them!

Ten were healed, but where are the nine? That's all Jesus said. Just a statement of fact that Jesus poses as a question. Weren't ten healed, but where are the rest of them? This poor man, no, this most blessed man who was healed and wanted to thank Jesus came back and didn't know where the nine were. They were probably on their way to the priests to go through the motions to show that they had been healed. 'Well, I have been healed; the law says I must show myself to the priests before I get on with my life.'

How are we going to thank the Lord?

By rejoicing and being glad in this very day and in all that he has done for us. And I assure you, as a called servant of God, that ***"your sins are forgiven."*** (Mark 2:5)

In our hymns today we are giving thanks. In our prayers today we are giving thanks. In our lives today we are giving thanks. Let us give thanks tomorrow and the next day, too, and all our lives. Amen.