

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Thanksgiving, November 28, 2019**

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

Hymns: 570, 566, 38, 568, 54.

Lessons: Deuteronomy 8, Philippians 4:4-23, Luke 12:22-34.

Sermon Text: Luke 17: 11-19

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Thanksgiving is the day our country has set aside as a national day of Thanksgiving, with a presidential proclamation. For many people, it will only be a day to eat a huge meal, watch some football games on television, and be a vacation from work. But for the child of God, Thanksgiving is a special day to be reminded of God's goodness.

As we think of all the blessings God has provided for us – earthly, material blessings as well as the spiritual blessings, let us remember from the Word of God before us that

**HEALING THE LEPERS IS A PICTURE OF THE HEALING JESUS PROVIDES FROM SIN.**

- 1. Despite their miraculous healing, few returned to thank Jesus.**
- 2. Despite the miraculous gifts God gives men, few consider thanking Him.**

Our text tells of Jesus healing men – ten of them – from the terrible disease of leprosy. Leviticus chapter 13 describes the various kinds of skin diseases that were called “leprosy”. It seems from the descriptions found in that chapter that many diseases, including such ailments as we might call psoriasis and ringworm were included under the term “leprosy”. A dictionary today would describe leprosy as a chronic infectious disease affecting especially the skin and peripheral nerves and characterized by swelling and discoloration that enlarge and spread accompanied by loss of sensation with eventual paralysis, wasting of muscle, and production of deformities. What a horrible disease!

Leprosy was a dreaded disease with its cause and spread unknown in the Old Testament. The laws of God given to Moses were very specific about what must be done by the leper. In Leviticus 13:45-46 we read: *“The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp.”* The leper was an outcast. He was unclean. If, in some way, he or she should be cleansed of his leprosy, Leviticus chapter 14 specifies what he or she must then do. After his leprosy is no longer visible, the leper is to go to the priests, make sacrifices and complete other activities which make it clear that it is not because of his own doing that he has been cleansed. The offerings include a lamb called a “sin offering”. When we think about such ceremonies, we are also reminded of Jesus Christ who is the Lamb of God sacrificed for all the sins of all men, so that all men might be cleansed by Jesus of all their sins,

If we look at this terrible disease carefully, we see leprosy as a symbol of sin at its worst, in its greatest malignancy, involving complete separation from God, just as the lepers were to be completely separated from the rest of society. It was not only a symbol of spiritual sickness, but of spiritual death, for there was usually no hope of severe cases of leprosy being cleansed or completely removed.

Our sermon text says the lepers *“stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, ‘Jesus, Master, have pity on us!’”* With this picture, we must remember that we can't approach God because of our sins. Our sins make us abhorrent to God. The word the New International Version translates as “pity” is the King James Version word “mercy” and is truly the Greek word used for the mercy of God, his undeserved grace and love.

When we feel the weight of our sins, when we recognize the horror of our sin, the terrible guilt of our sins pressing on us, we want to plead with the lepers, ***“Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”*** There are times in our lives when we know no human can help us, and so we can only go to God. Some people don’t know the true God, but try calling to anything they think of as “god”. You, however, have come to know the true God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

The lepers came begging Jesus to cleanse them. There seems to have been no discrimination of Jew versus Gentile or Gentile versus Jew among lepers. They were all infected with this horrible disease. We see that they were well aware of their uncleanness. No doubt other people had reminded them of this, but they are aware of it by themselves. We – together with all mankind – must also be reminded of our spiritual leprosy, sin. We are unclean, evil, wicked, and abhorrent before God.

Jesus gives the lepers and us ways to be cleansed. For the lepers, this was following the Old Testament laws regarding leprosy. For all men, this is believing that Jesus paid the price for their sins so that they may have everlasting life simply by believing this fact and repenting of their sins.

The lepers had to trust in the Words of Jesus! Scripture says ***“As they went, they were cleansed.”*** He didn’t tell them that they were cleansed, as he did the one other time recorded in Scripture when he healed one of leprosy, in Luke 5. He told them to fulfill the Law of Moses so that their cleansing may be witnessed and the ceremonies and rituals associated with it may be completed. The priests did not cleanse, they only pronounced the leper cured, if he or she had indeed been cured. We find the same thing today: When I as pastor announce to you or to the congregation the forgiveness of your sins, I do not cleanse you. I simply announce the cleansing. And yes, God has cleansed you through Jesus Christ! When a fellow child of God tells you “I forgive you”, God forgives you, too. The forgiveness is really a gift from God, not from the person pronouncing the forgiveness.

The cleansing of the lepers seems to come instantly and we have to think that they all knew they were cleansed. Perhaps they were on their way to the priests, but one of the lepers promptly turned back to Jesus and came as close as one who had not been pronounced cleansed might come to Jesus.

One of those who was cleansed, only ***“One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.”*** One writer said that an almost complete loss of voice is one of the symptoms which accompany some forms of leprosy. So it is remarkable that this one out of the ten who were healed praised God ***“in a loud voice.”***

In this cleansing, we are reminded of the peace and comfort of the forgiveness of sins, God’s greatest gift. We can approach God because of the blood of Jesus. Hear what the writer to the Hebrews tells us: ***“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”*** Hebrews 10:19-22.

Then, because of that cleansing, we can thank God with our entire being! We thank him because “His mercies still endure, Ever faithful, ever sure.” In addition to earthly things, we praise and thank God for our eternal salvation! There is no greater gift than this.

We surely have an abundance of material blessings. We even dump our crops on the ground for storage because our storage bins aren’t big enough for them all at harvest time. But Americans were reminded by a report from the United States Department of Agriculture that 40.0 million people lived in food-insecure households in the United States in 2017. This compares with 35 and a half million people at least some time during 2006. That means that 11.8 percent of all Americans, more than one out of every ten households, at some time during the year, had difficulty providing enough food for all their members due to a lack of resources. Worldwide the problem is even worse. One source said that 25,000 children die each day because of malnutrition – not having enough to eat. Another source said that 40,000 children die each day because of malnutrition – almost as many people as live in Mankato and North Mankato! When we consider such data, we must realize that we have been especially blessed – far more than many others! But more importantly than any earthly blessing, you have the privilege of hearing the greatest blessing of all: the good news about Jesus Christ!

But how many thank God for all that they have? And we ask ourselves: does our gratefulness show in all our lives? Are the commandments a guideline that we gladly and willingly follow? Do we share with those less fortunate? And you can ask yourself many such questions.

Ten were healed. One turned back to give thanks. ***“Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”***

We must assume that Jesus’ question shows his disappointment that the other nine, whom we may guess included Jews, did not thank him for his miraculous deed of cleansing them. It sounds like Jesus is marveling at the ingratitude of something which would change their entire lives from this day forward.

The one whom we would probably least expect to thank God, at least if we were Jewish and proud of our religiousness, is the one who returns to give thanks to God – a Samaritan, from a nation hated by the Jews. In Jesus’ questions we also see Jesus finding in the gratitude of the Samaritan – the Gentile – a source of joy knowing that another human –and this one a Gentile – has come to thank God for his blessings. This is very definitely a reminder that Jesus’ miraculous healing is for all men.

When we remember that most of the Jews in Jesus’ lifetime rejected Jesus Christ, we can see this as a warning to the Jews: only a foreigner, a stranger, a Gentile, returned to give thanks to God. This hints at the near future – even in Jesus’ lifetime – when the Jews by and large would turn away from him, and very soon after his resurrection many Gentiles would come to him, giving God the glory for their salvation. We see that Jesus is willing to accept the Gentiles, too. He died to heal them – more importantly or more directly and specifically, he died to heal us –you – who are Gentiles. And here is another reminder to us: We have been strangers and foreigners to God’s kingdom. But it is God’s work that we are healed and are a part of the family of God. Peter tells us: ***“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.”*** 1 Peter 2:9-16.

In Jesus’ question we find a rebuke for all who receive his blessings, either material blessings or spiritual blessings but do not appreciate them. There is also a sadness in the question ***“Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”***

Jesus told the Samaritan, the Gentile: ***“Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”*** Doesn’t it make us wonder what could happen even on earth if we had such faith?

Don’t Christ’s words also apply to the faithful today? They too are to take Christ’s word that they have been cleansed of their sins. This is truly a matter of faith, for we still feel ourselves sinners, suffering the leprosy of sin. However, Jesus died to pay the price for all our sins. That is a fact. Today we are reminded again of that fact. We must go forward in faith, being confident that in the use of his Word and his sacraments, his appointed means of grace, we believers will find that spiritual health which according to the sure word of promise is already ours. As we depart believing these words, we truly have healing for our sins.

Let every remembrance of the forgiveness of sins, God’s greatest gift for mankind, bring us to thank God not only as we celebrate a day the world sets aside for “thanksgiving” but every day of our lives.

Surely we are grateful for the earthly kindnesses God has shown us. But we are even more grateful for the spiritual kindnesses and genuine mercy and pity God has shown us in Jesus Christ. Today I say to you, today I remind you: ***“Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”*** Amen.