

Pastor Kenneth Mars
St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY
Thanksgiving Eve
November 22, 2017
Text: Luke 17:11–19

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In tonight's gospel reading, we heard that Jesus is "on the way to Jerusalem." That's a rich phrase packed with all kinds of theological and salvific content. For we know that Jesus is going to Jerusalem to die as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and be raised from the dead on the third day for the justification of sinners. In other words, we know that Jesus is going to Jerusalem to secure our salvation and victory over every form of evil: sickness, misery, the spiritual forces of darkness, especially Satan who has the power of death. Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem to secure my salvation, your salvation, the salvation of the world.

On His way to save the world, Jesus meets 10 lepers. Leprosy was the most feared disease in the ancient world. It was a living death. In most cases, it meant separation from home, family, and society. On top of all that, it practically meant that the one with leprosy would die a slow, agonizing death surrounded by other lepers suffering the same fate. Ten lepers, sharing their dismal fate together.

God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit never created mankind to know sickness, warfare, and death. "On the way to Jerusalem" reminds us of the epic conquest Jesus fought on behalf of our death-infected world.

Ten lepers see Jesus. They cry out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us" (vs. 13). Those are the same words we say on Sunday mornings in the Kyrie, "Lord, have mercy upon us." That's not accidental. We come to Jesus in the same needy condition as those 10 lepers. We may not have leprosy but we do come to Jesus with a malady that is far worse and more devastating. We have sin, transgressions against God's Word and will. Because of our sin, we are justly subject to God's wrath which burns against every form of iniquity.

Those sins which we know and feel in our hearts and those sins which we do not know about all lead to one result: death and judgment. All the physical pains and sicknesses we experience in our lives reminds us of one brutal fact: we are all sinners and all sinners die. That's why we come to Jesus and cry out, "Lord, have mercy upon us."

Jesus sees and hears this cry of desperate need. He does not turn aside like so many others before. There is no fear or revulsion in our Lord's eyes, only love and compassion. He is on the way to Jerusalem for this very reason: to save these lepers and all the men, women, and children of this world. By the way, dear saints of God, we are the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, the body of Christ in this world. We are called by our Lord to embrace and care for sinners of all sorts, sizes, and shapes with His saving Gospel. Let us always pray that the Lord will provide us with the courage and compassion needed to reach out to all people regardless of the misery they are facing.

To the 10 lepers, Jesus gave a single command, "Go and show yourselves to the priests" (vs. 17). Leviticus instructed God's people that lepers who believed they were healed of their disease were to go to the priests in the Temple. If the priest declared them healed, the appropriate sacrifices of thanksgiving would be offered on the leper's behalf. Jesus is sending them on their way as if they were already cleansed of their leprosy!!

Ten lepers go to Jerusalem for cleansing. They are to follow the same path of Jesus who is also "on the way to Jerusalem." All believers must follow Jesus "on the way to Jerusalem"; to the victory and deliverance of the cross and resurrection. That's the only permanent and meaningful answer to sin and death given to us. There, in Christ's cross and empty tomb, we see that sin, death, and evil are defeated and God's steadfast love and life are triumphant. Let him who would be forgiven and healed deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me, says the Lord Jesus. As Christ died and rose again, so shall we, His baptized and forgiven people. Even in us – because of Jesus – sin, sickness, and death are defeated. Thanks be to Christ for His glorious grace!!

On the way to Jerusalem, 10 lepers are healed of their disease. The leprosy is gone! God has visited their affliction. Let the rejoicing and thanksgiving begin!

But one leper, a Samaritan, did not journey with the 9 to the Temple in Jerusalem. As a half-blood Jew/Gentile, he didn't really have much access to the Temple. Instead, the 1 Samaritan leper returns to Jesus, falls at the Lord's feet and praises God with a loud voice (vs. 15–16).

The 1 Samaritan leper teaches us what thanksgiving is all about: turning to Jesus who is the giver of every good and perfect gift. This Jesus is God revealed for us and our salvation. By His blood, He cleanses us from all sin, disease, and sickness. Thanksgiving for us Christians is about turning to Jesus and recognizing in faith that all good gifts of body and soul come from Him.

The one Samaritan leper teaches us to always return to Jesus and offer our thanksgivings to Him. Tonight, we return to Jesus on this Wednesday evening. Our dear Lord is here for us and our salvation in His Word read and preached. He went “on the way to Jerusalem” to bring eternal healing to our hearts and souls. Those sins which you know and feel in your hearts, those sins which you are not aware of, are forgiven by Jesus. Your hearts, minds, consciences, bodies, and souls, all of you, are cleansed by Jesus because He went to Jerusalem for you. For these good and perfect gifts, we give thanks.

Thanksgiving is really an expression of faith and praise. Did not the apostle Paul teach us in tonight’s reading from Philippians to not be “anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made know to God”? And did not the inspired apostle give a wondrous promise connected with those thanksgiving-laden prayers and supplications? “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

That’s a promise we can all be thankful for. A blessed thanksgiving to you all.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.