

WORSHIP IN THE NAME OF JESUS**Sermon for the 8th Sunday after Pentecost 2020 (Praise and Thanksgiving Service)****Luke 17:11-19**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, Luke 17:11-19: ¹¹ **As Jesus was travelling to Jerusalem, He went along the border between Samaria and Galilee.** ¹² **As He was entering a village, ten men who were lepers came toward Him. They stood at a distance** ¹³ **and called out aloud, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”**

¹⁴ **When Jesus saw them, He told them, “Go! Show yourselves to the priests!”**

As they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵ **When one of them saw that he had been healed, he came back, loudly glorifying God.** ¹⁶ **He fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, thanking Him; and he was a Samaritan.**

¹⁷ **Jesus asked, “Were not the ten made clean? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Has no one been found to return and give glory to God except this foreigner?”**

¹⁹ **Then Jesus told him, “Get up and go! Your faith has saved you.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

I think it is fair to say that the past 12 months have been remarkable. In this time our country has seen massive bushfires with lots of homes and possessions destroyed. The ongoing drought and heat left paddocks scorched and vulnerable to dust storms. Then we had heavy rain, that washed precious topsoil away from paddocks and filled farmer’s dams with silt and wrecked roads. We seem to go from one extreme to the next. Then, of course, along came covid 19, bringing panic and death and illness to many people all around the world and being forced into lockdown, how strange it was that we could not even hold Easter services in our churches! We are still living in a time of pandemic. We are seeing world economies suffering from the fallout of this disease. Many family businesses are under threat – some have even gone broke. Today, although things have somewhat eased, we know that this could change overnight. We look to the southern states and see covid 19 flaring up again and wonder if or when it will become a serious problem again for our state. There could be tighter restrictions coming for us again soon. We must pray without ceasing¹ that a swift end will come to this pandemic. There are also ongoing protests made about how the colour of one’s skin apparently leads to how one is treated, and now there is rising tension with China. What is next for us? Jesus says, *“Do not begin to worry about tomorrow! For tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own”* (Matthew 6:34). So we leave our future in His capable hands.

Yet with all the trouble that has happened in the past few months, and continues today, nevertheless, there is much for us to be thankful for. Yes, even though we have all been affected by recent events, and continue to struggle through various doubts and fears, surely, we have to acknowledge that we continue to be truly blessed by our heavenly Father. Can you remember what Luther says in his Small Catechism in the explanation to the First Article? Let me refresh your memory. He says that the Father has given us *“clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all [we] have. He richly and daily provides [us] with all that [we] need to support this body and life... All this he does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in [us]. For all this it is [our] duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.”*

¹ 1 Thessalonians 5:16

Obeying our God, being obedient to Him, is what the lepers do in our text. **“As Jesus was travelling to Jerusalem, He went along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As He was entering a village, ten men who were lepers came toward Him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and called out aloud, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” ¹⁴ When Jesus saw them, He told them, “Go! Show yourselves to the priests!”** According to what God had told the Israelites through Moses many years before², any healed leper was to go and show himself to the priests and offer sacrifice. Jesus’ purpose in sending these lepers to the priests was to fulfil the Old Testament but also to do something more. Jesus wanted the cleansed lepers to go to the place of sacrifice³ and offer themselves as testimony that a corresponding spiritual healing accompanies the physical cleansing He bestows. The sacrifices in the temple would include the shedding of blood, looking forward to the cleansing atonement of the Messiah, who was travelling to Jerusalem to offer His blood as the final, once-for-all cleansing. Jesus wanted the priests in the temple to confirm that the miracle had taken place. The miracle would also confirm that Jesus was who He says He is, namely, the One who cleanses the entire sin of all humanity.

Anyhow, being obedient to Jesus, who together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is God, they obey. The remarkable thing thou is that **“As they went, they were made clean,”** that is, they were healed. It is *while the ten lepers are travelling to the temple* that they are healed. They go by faith. Earlier, Jesus had healed another man with leprosy. That leper *“fell face-down and begged Him, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.” ¹³ Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him. He said, “I am willing. Be made clean!” Immediately the leprosy left him”* (Luke 5:12-13). These ten lepers had confidence – faith - from Jesus’ previous healing activity that they too would be healed as they follow His command to go to the temple.

What a profound gift! Not only were the men given relief from their skin irritations, but also, on account of this healing, they were now able to be declared clean by the priest and gain entrance into public worship, where they could serve God and bring Him thanks and praise. Without the cleansing our Lord provides, these lepers would not be able to enjoy the privilege of worship you even now enjoy.

So nine of the ex-lepers continue on their way to worship God in the temple in Jerusalem, but **“When one of them saw that he had been healed, he came back, loudly glorifying God. ¹⁶ He fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, thanking Him; and he was a Samaritan.”**

From the perspective of the Jews, the Samaritans were misfits. They shared a bloodline with the Jews but had intermarried extensively with other tribes while the Jews were in captivity. The Samaritans accepted only part of the Hebrew Scriptures and worshipped at their own Mount Gerizim rather than in Jerusalem. The question here, as it was with another Samaritan, the woman at the well in John’s Gospel, is *“Where is the Father to be worshipped?”*

Jesus’ answer to the woman at the well was *“Believe Me, woman, the time is coming when you will not be worshipping the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem... However, the time is coming and is now here, when the genuine worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:21, 23).

The hour of which Jesus spoke here was the hour of His Passion and death, the hour when He, as the Great High Priest, would willingly sacrifice Himself on the cross, the hour when He would atone for all of the sins of the whole world. This hour is very much in sight as the text reminds us that **“Jesus was travelling to Jerusalem.”** Jesus sent the lepers down the very same path, but the way in which Jesus would be received in Jerusalem and the way in which the lepers would be received could not be more different.

The lepers would likely be met by a pious indifference on the part of the priests. Performing the ritual of cleansing a leper was business as usual for the priests. Jesus, on the other hand, would be rejected by the chief priests and the elders and the scribes. The lepers, in accordance with the Law laid out in Leviticus,

² Leviticus 14:1-32

³ Luke 5:14

would be sprinkled with birds' blood, shaved, and bathed. Jesus would be scourged till He bled; He would be blindfolded and mocked. The lepers would bring sacrifices to the temple after seven days. Jesus would become the once-for-all sacrifice on the cross, the fulfilment of the whole sacrificial system of the Old Testament. Jesus would be killed, and on the third day, be raised back to life.⁴

Maybe we can begin to see that our text is not so much about who did or did not do what Jesus asked of them, who is or who is not the most grateful for the restoration of health given them. Rather, it is about *right worship*. The nine lepers were slaves to the Law. They sought God's gifts in observances and sacrifices. They sought God's presence in the temple. They lacked the Samaritan's God-given faith in the Gospel, the faith that sees standing right there before them the One who has come to fulfil the Law completely; *here* is the One who would sacrifice Himself as the Lamb of God; *here* is God present in the flesh, Jesus, Lord, Immanuel, which means God with us⁵; *here* is the living temple that will be destroyed and in three days be raised.⁶

The text is about *worship*, not on Mount Gerizim or on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, but worship in spirit and truth, worship in the name of Jesus, worship where Jesus is present, worship in the faith that clings to Jesus and His saving work.

At the very centre of this Samaritan frame stands the Samaritan's worship, which was a confession of his faith. **"He came back, loudly glorifying God. ¹⁶ He fell on his face at Jesus' feet, thanking Him."** In his revelation he had of Jesus while on the island of Patmos, the apostle John at one stage fell down to worship at the feet of an angel. The angel said, *"Do not do it!... Worship God!"* (Revelation 22:9). Falling on his face at Jesus' feet, thanking Him, this Samaritan *was* not worshipping a false God, but God Himself. *"I and the Father are One,"* Jesus once said (John 10:30). But Jesus is also the Son of God, and this Samaritan saw the connection between the presence of God the Father in the temple and the sacrifices there, and the presence of God in Jesus, who is the Father's final sacrifice. The Samaritan returned to Jesus, glorifying God the Father for the miracles that He was bringing to the world through Jesus. But now he recognised that the glory he gave to God was to be expressed in worship of and thanksgiving to Jesus, who is God become flesh⁷, and whose cleansing atonement superseded the cleansing rites of the priests in the temple.

The Samaritan's posture is one of worship - falling on his face at Jesus' feet. It is possible that the Samaritan never made it to the temple, for when he saw that he was healed, he realised that *the location of God's presence had shifted from the temple in Jerusalem to the body of Jesus*. His worship confessed his faith, this conviction about God in Jesus. The place to give thanks for cleansing is wherever Jesus is.

One thing to notice here too is that Jesus does not chastise the man for not going to the temple, but simply asks, **"Were not the ten made clean? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Has no one been found to return and give glory to God except this foreigner?"** Why didn't the others come to the same conclusion this Samaritan did. He alone had faith that God's presence was now in Jesus, and with that presence comes God's mercy and cleansing.

That is true worship, worship in spirit and truth, worship that grabs hold of the cross with the faith that Christ has died and risen *for me*. Because of this faith, the Samaritan is not merely healed. **"Get up and go!"** Jesus says to him; **"Your faith has saved you."** True faith gives thanks to the One who brings salvation. This Samaritan's faith uproots trees and plants them in the sea⁸, for it brought this foreigner to the temple - to Jesus, the true temple wherein God's presence resides. This Samaritan had received the gift of faith, which trusts in the work of Christ, leading to eternal salvation.

⁴ Luke 9:22

⁵ Isaiah 7:14

⁶ John 2:19

⁷ John 1:14

⁸ Luke 17:6

We have this same faith. Look how closely the worship of the Samaritan in our text resembles our own worship. Actually, in the first place, the lepers as a whole come to Jesus in the very same way that we do. **“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”** Are these not the words of the Kyrie in our liturgy? *“Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy”*? For centuries Christians have offered this simple prayer for mercy as they come together. In this prayer, we ask our Lord to hear us and help us in our necessities and troubles.

After the Kyrie, the worship of the nine lepers and the worship of the Samaritan, our worship, diverge quite completely. The nine lepers duck out early. They hurry off to the priests to be declared clean, while the Samaritan turns back to Jesus, the Great High Priest, to be declared righteous. Jesus is left there questioning, **“Were not the ten made clean? Where are the other nine?”** for Jesus had much more yet to offer. He offers *Himself* on behalf of the whole world in His coming death on the cross. He offers eternal salvation.

In this time of hardship, of future uncertainty, we must remain mindful of God’s gifts given throughout our lives. I am sure not one of us would have any trouble remembering all the great blessings given to us. But what about the gifts offered to us right here in this place? We call our Sunday morning service the Divine Service because here in this place God serves us. He serves us in the gifts of the Means of Grace, Word and Sacrament.

How many of us ignore, or even despise these gifts by ducking out early, failing to show up at all, or being otherwise unfaithful in our attendance at the preaching of the Word and the reception of the Lord’s Supper? How many of us fail to acknowledge that Jesus is here present with us, where His Word is proclaimed, and where we regularly celebrate His Supper? As children of our heavenly Father, from whom we receive every good thing in our earthly lives, we do right to turn back to Christ and join the Samaritan praising God with a loud voice.

We do this very thing in our worship in the *Glory to God in the Highest* (Gloria in Excelsis), the great hymn of praise, using the words of the angels at Jesus’ birth, *“Glory to God in the highest. And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”* Addressing the Father we say, *“We praise You, we bless You, we worship You, we glorify You.”* This glory He has shown in sending His only Son, the Lamb of God, to take away the sin of the world.

The Samaritan **“fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, thanking Him.”** In this, he acknowledged in faith that Jesus is Lord, that Jesus is God, that Jesus as God performed this healing miracle and also saved him from all his sins. We confess the same in the words of the Nicene Creed: *“very God of very God... who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven...and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.”*

As the Samaritan bowed at the feet of Jesus, acknowledging that he was in the presence of God, so we too acknowledge that Jesus is truly present here where He says He will be. *“Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord,”* the One who says, *“This is My body...This is My blood.”*

So come what may. Whatever the future holds for us, we must not be afraid. As He has done in the past, the Lord still comes to us today. He will never abandon or forsake us.⁹ As we worship Him, let us continue to worship in spirit and truth, to worship in the name of Jesus, to worship where Jesus is present, and to worship in the faith that clings to Jesus and His saving work. Here is our faith, our worship. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

THE GENERAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, Creator and Lord of all, from whom and through whom and to whom are all things, to You be glory for ever! We thank You for all Your blessings: for the life You have given us and all creatures; for the precious gifts of body and mind; for Your daily care for us; for the joys of home, family, and friends;

⁹ Deuteronomy 31:6

for good government, peace and order in society; for the light of education; for the resources of healing and health; and for all things by which You bring joy and satisfaction into our lives.

But especially we thank You for having made Yourself known to us in all Your love and mercy, for calling us by Your Gospel to life, peace, and hope in Jesus Christ our Saviour, and for gathering us by Your Spirit into Your family, the Church.

We confess that, in spite of all Your goodness, we still falter and fall. Our sinful nature continually pulls us down and holds us back from following You. Disobedience, obsession with earthly things, selfishness, and lovelessness, worry and lack of trust, ruin our daily living. Free us again by Your forgiveness, and renew us by Your Spirit's power that we may rise above all our frustrations and failures, and find new joy and victory through Him who died for us. Touch our souls with Your love, that day by day we may be revived and healed to sing Your praises in every area of our life.

Arouse Your Church everywhere, O Lord, to remember Your unending mercies and Your continual presence. By the preaching and teaching of Your Gospel continually cleanse and strengthen Your people, so that they may show forth the riches of Your saving grace in every corner of the world.

Especially pour out Your blessings on the AELC. Make every one of us strong in Your saving grace. Answer the prayers of those who have special needs. Fill us all with Your love, and use us to strengthen those who are weak and wavering, to rescue those who are in danger of falling away, and to support those who have problems and troubles. Bless the work of our pastor, our elders, our Sunday School teachers, and all others in their various positions, as they serve You in our congregations and earnestly reach out to others in our community.

Be gracious to our country, O Lord, and bless all who occupy positions of public leadership and responsibility, that they may carry out their tasks according to Your will. Hinder all evil influences that threaten the good of our society; protect us from injustice, violence, dishonesty, and selfish gain. Bless all honest occupations and daily work, so that all may receive a proper return for their efforts and have something to share with those in need. Give us weather that is appropriate to our needs.

Bless our homes; protect them from all harmful influences, and fill them with Your presence. Bless all married couples with love and true oneness. Help all parents to bring up their children to know, love, and respect You; and help all the young to grow in body and mind, in favour with God and men.

As the future of our nation, and that of those around the world continues to unfold with the ongoing battle against covid 19, may You use this pandemic to bring about good to the nations. May more people turn from their suffering to You for health and healing, for the restoration of all. In the meantime, protect and keep us from harm, and bless the ongoing work of doctors and nurses who are caring for the unwell.

Hear these prayers, O Father, and give us anything else that we need, for the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

READINGS FOR PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING SERVICE

Deuteronomy 8:1-10

¹ "You shall be careful to carry out all the Commandments that I am giving to you today, that you may live, become numerous, enter and take possession of the land that the LORD has promised with an oath to your forefathers! ² You shall also remember the whole journey on which the LORD, your God, led you through the

wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you and test you, that He might know what is in your hearts, whether you would keep His Commandments or not! ³ So, He humbled you, let you go hungry and fed you with manna, which neither you nor your forefathers had known about, to teach you that a human being does not live by bread alone but that a human being lives by every Word that comes out of the mouth of the LORD. ⁴ Your clothes did not wear out on you,

and your feet did not swell during these forty years. ⁵ You shall know in your hearts that, as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD, your God, is disciplining you! ⁶ You shall keep the Commandments of the LORD, your God, by walking in His Ways and by fearing Him! ⁷ For the LORD, your God, is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams of water, springs and subterranean water, which flows out of valleys and hills. ⁸ It is a land with wheat and barley, grapevines, fig trees and pomegranates, a land with olive-oil and honey, ⁹ a land where you will eat bread without poverty, where you will lack nothing, a land the stones of which are iron and out of the hills of which you can dig copper. ¹⁰ You will eat all you want and bless the LORD, your God, for the good land that He has given to you.

Philippians 4:6-20

⁶ Do not worry about anything but in everything make your requests known to God by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving! ⁷ The peace of God, which is beyond all understanding, will also guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, my fellow-Christians, keep your minds on all things that are true, all things that are noble, all things that are right, all things that are pure, all things that are lovely, all things that are appealing and anything that is excellent and praiseworthy! ⁹ Continue to put into practice what you have learned, received and heard from me and what you have seen in me! The God of peace will also be with you.

¹⁰ I am very glad in the Lord that now again you have revived your concern for me. You have been concerned but have not had an opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying that I need anything. For I have learned to be content in whatever situation I am in. ¹² I know how to be in need and know how to have plenty. In every way and in everything I have learnt the secret both of being fully satisfied and of being hungry, both of having plenty and of having too little. ¹³ I can do everything through Him who strengthens me. ¹⁴ Yet it has been kind of you to share my trouble. ¹⁵ You people of Philippi also know that

in the early days of the Good News, when I left Macedonia, you were the only church to share with me in the settlement of our mutual account. ¹⁶ Even while I was in Thessalonica, you sent aid once and again when I was in need. ¹⁷ Not that I am looking for the gift but for the growing profit in your account. ¹⁸ You have paid me in full, and I have more than enough. I am fully supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus what you have sent. It is a sweet aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, which pleases God. ¹⁹ My God will give you everything that you need according to His riches, in glory, in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be the glory for ever and ever! Amen.

Luke 17:11-19

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