

Pastor Jon's Sermon from October 13, 2019 at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Neenah, WI
Luke 17:11-19

The Healing of Ten Lepers

Today, we heard the story of the Ten Lepers. Have you ever felt like an outsider? What is it like to feel excluded? Or perhaps we are the one's excluding others or labeling them without even knowing it. But thanks be to God, Jesus continually embraces the outsider in the Gospels. The way Jesus treats people teaches us that when we draw a line between ourselves and others, you will find Jesus standing on the other side of the line... seeking justice and reconciliation.

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus demonstrates his grace and mercy for 10 lepers. He commands them to go and show themselves to the priest, which would declare them clean and allow them to be restored to community. They went as commanded. But one leper, a Samaritan, returned to give thanks and praise to God in human flesh. Jesus seems to commend this attitude of gratitude. He lifts up the Samaritan's thankfulness as the way to live life. Remember, Samaritans were natural enemies of the Jews. And Jesus was a Jewish rabbi. So the Samaritan returning to give thanks to Jesus is even more powerful. Jesus wondered, didn't I heal 10, but only one returned to give thanks? What about the other nine?

I can't blame them, after being excluded from their families and community, for so long.

How good are you at thanking God for your daily blessings?

I am in a thankful mood today because I was able to get our furnace running at 5:30am on Saturday. After two visits from the HVAC company, the furnace still didn't do what the thermostat wanted it to. I learned what the problem was on You Tube. I tried a few things to no avail. True story, when I was ready to give up I prayed... God, please, we need heat... it fired up. Then on top of that, our van's heater wasn't working. It would kick in 10 minutes after the car started. Again, I went on You Tube and figured out that I could be low on antifreeze. So I went to Walmart, got some antifreeze and

some radiator treatment, and poured it in. You could hear the engine giving thanks as I poured it in... it idled better. These little accomplishments make me thankful.

So yes, thankfulness is one of the messages we are reminded of today in our Gospel. The second thing I want to lift up is the radical inclusion of Jesus in this text and throughout the Gospels. Inclusion and love for all peoples is a sign of God's kingdom on earth. When foreigners or outcasts are welcomed by Jesus and by us, something changes for the better.

I saw an example of this change, which I think is for the better, during last week's Packer game. Did you see on the Fox broadcast when they showed former President George W. Bush sitting next to Ellen? They were laughing and having a good time at ATT stadium. She was there to cheer on her friend Aaron Rodgers, and Bush was there to cheer on the Cowboys. During the game that evening and the next day, the internet trolls came out, and people were lashing out at George W saying, "Why is he sitting next to Ellen?" People were saying the same about Ellen. He is a moderate republican and she is a liberal democrat. He is a straight and she is gay. He is credited for causing the Iraq war, and she is a pacifist.

On her show the next day, she took time to address the backlash. She said, "We're all different and I think we have forgotten that that's OK. Just because I don't agree with someone on everything doesn't mean I am not going to be friends with them. When I say be kind to one another, I don't mean only the people that think the same way you do. Be kind to everyone."

Just by Jesus heading to Jerusalem through Samaria in our Gospel says a lot about Jesus. Most Jewish people avoided Samaria all together and took a different route. He wasn't afraid to walk where people who thought differently and worshipped differently lived. He exhibited kindness for all. And on this journey, he encountered these lepers and listened to their plight and healed them.

How often do we not see one another? How often do we turn a blind eye to our fellow humans on the margins? How does our privilege blind us to the needs of others? How often do we put labels on people

and exclude them? In our country, we have the means to avoid others and insulate ourselves from those on the margins. And yet, it is in the margins that Jesus promises to meet us. Jesus says in Matthew 25 in the sheep and goats story, when you visit someone who is sick or in prison, or give someone something to drink or eat, or give clothing to someone in need, you did it to me, says Jesus. “What you have done unto the least of these you have done unto me.” We meet Jesus face to face when we care for people on the margins.

Jesus also knew what it felt like to be excluded. He was chased out of his hometown after preaching because he was Joseph, the carpenter’s son. People in his hometown couldn’t believe his message. So he pointed out how God healed foreigners like Naaman in our first lesson. So they wanted to throw him off a cliff. He was deserted by friends and family on the cross. He felt isolated and alone, crying out from the cross, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” But then Easter came. The cross received its power after Easter. All of this tells us that God doesn’t abandon us when we are suffering, but is deeply present with us.

I am not sure what you are going through today. But I do know that sometimes it takes someone from the margins, like a Samaritan leper who is healed by Jesus, to remind us how to give thanks to God for everything.

Like the leper, we have reason to give thanks and praise. When we recognize our own brokenness, blindness, and our separation from God and others due to our sins, that’s when the cross takes over. Today we are promised forgiveness in the bread and wine. In baptism we are reminded of God’s powerful grace found in the simple gift of water and word.

Would you agree that because of what Christ has done for us, we have a lot to be thankful for.

Amen!