

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

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Gospel according to Saint Luke, the seventeenth chapter, beginning at the eleventh verse, and we read in Jesus' name:

***Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. <sup>12</sup> Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. <sup>13</sup> And they lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" <sup>14</sup> So when He saw them, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. <sup>15</sup> And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, <sup>16</sup> and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. <sup>17</sup> So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? <sup>18</sup> "Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this***

***foreigner?" <sup>19</sup> And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."***

And now may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

Naaman had leprosy. Naaman was a commander of the army of Aram, an enemy of Israel. Naaman could not be cured of his leprosy and thus was as good as dead. However, after a battle against Israel, Naaman's servant girl told her master that he should go to the prophet of Israel and he could heal Naaman. Naaman then got permission to go and find this prophet. Once found, the prophet Elisha told Naaman to go and dip himself into the Jordan River seven times and he would be healed of his leprosy. Naaman was furious at this notion. He had thought that the prophet would at least come out and wave his hand and say magic words to heal him... but to go and wade in some water, this was infuriating.

Then Naaman's servant told him, "If the prophet had told you to do some great thing (jump from a cliff, kill hundreds of men, swim the ocean, etc.) and you were healed, why not try this small thing he tells you to do." Naaman consents, goes to the Jordan River and dips into it seven times. When he came up the seventh time, his leprosy was gone. When he saw that it was gone he returned to Elisha to praise Elisha and Elisha's God for curing him.

In our text before us today we also have people who were healed from leprosy, ten in fact. Yet, when they realized they were healed only one came back to thank and praise God... a Samaritan, a foreigner, an enemy of the Jews.

Friends, we all have leprosy... the leprosy of sin. We are covered from head to toe in the blotchy spots of sin. We should be shunned by society and forced to live in separate towns because of our sin. We are as good as dead because of our sin. Yet, thanks be to God... that *Jesus heals our leprosy.*

So often sin is compared to leprosy, but why? As far as I've seen the leprosy is sin or sin is leprosy passage does not exist in the Bible. Maybe you can point me to the exact verse, but I am convinced that it is not present. So why then do we make this claim that sin is like leprosy.

Well lets look at some of the aspects of leprosy. Leprosy is a disease which once a person had they were forced out of the community and made to live a separate life. They could not interact with "normal" people. However, if there was a chance that they might be cleansed, they had to present themselves to the priests for verification. They were, for all intents and purposes, the very first form of the "untouchables."

Look at our text, the lepers are standing far away from Jesus because they knew the law. As they stood far away they shouted out to Christ... thus again showing that they were not willing to get close to a "clean," "normal," and "holy" man. As they stood far off they were calling out for Jesus to have mercy upon them. Mercy for a

disease? That seems a little counter intuitive. They should need healing, not mercy. Yet, they call out for Jesus to have mercy upon them... mercy to take this horrible affliction away, mercy to allow them the possibility of coming back into the fold of society, mercy because they were tired of being outside.

And now think of your sin. Think of all the times you have sinned in your life and then imagine that it were like a disease. If it were like any disease, I think leprosy would rank very high on the list of candidates. Sin forces us out of the community of believers and of God's faithful. Sin forces us to lead a separate life. Sin does not allow us to interact with God's "normal" people because our sin is too great. And yet, like leprosy there is a chance that our sin could be cleansed... that our sin, our leprosy could be taken away. But it is not by any work that we do. When it comes to sin, we are just like the lepers of our text. When it comes to our sin, we are separated from God. We stand afar off and call out to Him. "Lord, I'm sorry for the wrong I've done." "Lord, I know that I should have done it differently." "Lord, I know that

You were and are always right." "Lord, have mercy on me... a sinner." In fact, already today we have made this declaration in our liturgy. Lord... we are sinners, we need Your mercy, please help us.

And God did help us. He sent His Son Jesus Christ into our world to live a perfect and clean life. Jesus lived a life that we could only dream about living, in perfect adherence to God's Word and God's Law. Jesus then died an innocent death. He died so that He might nail all of our sin, all of our leprosy to the cross which He also was nailed to. And three days later Christ rose from the dead. He rose to proclaim His victory over death, hell, and sin. He rose to proclaim His victory over our sin... over our leprosy. And it is through faith in all that Jesus Christ has done, that we have heaven waiting for us.

And yet, there is more text. Just like Jesus did to the lepers, so He also does with us. Though we are cleansed by His life and death, like the lepers He wants us to trust in His Word. We do not see our sin wiped away, in fact we still live

with it, it is not like a leprosy that can be healed and is visible; rather, sin is deep down inside each and every one of us... and Jesus has the victory over our sin also.

And then there is the return of the one leper. After seeing his outward change, he returns to Jesus to thank Him for taking away this ailment and for giving him a new life. When he returns, Jesus notes that only one came back to praise God... and that nine were absent.

As Luther notes about this text, “That is the true worship of God, to come back, to praise God with a loud voice. That is the greatest work in heaven and earth, and also the only one which we may show God; for of the others He has not need, neither does He receive them: only to be loved and praised by us, that He likes... But that is terrible, that the Lord just knows that ten have been cleansed, a fact that had not reckoned with; and he does not hold His peace about it, but asks for them and seeks them: Where are the nine? O what a terror that will be when at that time they will feel the question and have to answer where they went

when they did not give honor to God!... We have all vowed in Baptism to follow Christ and His doctrine; no one has vowed to follow the Pope, bishops, and clerics. Thus Christ has altogether rejected and prohibited the doctrine of men.”

As Luther has told us, when we realize that our sins are gone.. when our leprosy is gone, we should be praising God. We should come back to Him with a loud voice and praise and worship Him because only He is worthy of our praise and worship.

And Luther also notes that in baptism, we make the vow to remain faithful to Christ and to what He has taught us. Unlike the nine who wandered away, we are reminded in a text like this that we should be coming back to Christ time and again, thanking Him for the forgiveness that He has given us.

And baptism... In the introduction I shared the story of Naaman. That comes from the book of 2 Kings chapter 5. And this story is often used as an Old Testament example or foreshadowing

of baptism. Naaman is told by the man of God to go and cleanse himself in the water and he will be cleaned from his leprosy. Once Naaman is cleansed, he comes back to Elisha and begins to praise Elisha and to praise God. As Peter describes baptism (3:21), “there is also an antitype which now saves us - baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Peter also explains how baptism is not merely the removal of dirt... but it is a washing which saves us.

Baptism is a cleansing flood which takes away all of our sin. Baptism gives us the power to constantly struggle to drown our Old Adam and allow the new man to rise. Baptism, takes away our sin... our leprosy. And because of this, we can come back to God, come back to Christ, and praise and thank Him for all that He has done for us.

Dear friends in Christ, ten men were healed and only one returned. So many times in your life you sin... and maybe only once do you return to God to thank Him for His forgiveness. Ten men

were healed and only one returned. So many times in our own lives we are healed by God... but every time we do not thank Him properly for all that he has done for us. Ten lepers were healed and only one returned... Christ has healed us of our leprosy and as we come into the presence of the one true God, we praise and worship Him for all that He has done for us.

Thanks be to God that He has cleansed us through the blood of His Son, which Jesus shed on the cross and which we are about to receive in the Lord’s Supper. Thanks be to God that He has cleansed us in the washing of baptism, in which He has given us faith and continues to strengthen it every day. Thanks be to God that we can come before Him and receive this daily cleansing, as we remember our baptism, to remove our leprosy, to remove our sin.

Thanks be to God. Amen.