

Returning Praise to God

Proper 23

Pastor Josh Frazee

Luke 17:11-19

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

The school season has returned. It's officially autumn. Time to get your flu shots—well, if you get them, anyway. Not everyone does. But then, not everyone gets sick from the flu. How many of you have?

Or, if you haven't gotten sick from the flu, how many of you have caught a bug or virus from a classmate one of your years at school?

In some way, shape, or form, each of us have gotten sick. Some illnesses are short-lived, and others last for long periods of time.

So how many of you, after having been treated, returned to your caretaker—your mom or dad, grandparents, or doctor—and thanked him, her, or them for treating you? Or maybe you have thanked them. How many of you were concerned with your parents or grandparents after you were healed? I should hope most of you—if not then, at least as you grew older you were brought to be grateful for all that they did for you in taking care of you in raising you. But what about your doctors? Did you ever think of them after they had treated you? I would hazard the guess that, if you're like me, you didn't. And I'm not saying that you should, necessarily, it's just worth pointing out that after the service was rendered, you may not have thought about your doctor much.

Granted, that may not be the case if your doctor helped you through a more advanced problem. Sometimes a problem with the body can be so life-threatening that you feel indebted to your doctor and may even send him or her a Christmas card every year, or something along those lines.

Perhaps you even thanked God for healing you, or for working through your doctor or parents or grandparents to bring you back to health. How many more times do you think of thanking God for healing you for that ailment? Again, it probably depends on the problem. For most, though, it may never cross your mind again, except maybe at Thanksgiving.

That can be well and good; but are the healings of temporary bodily sicknesses the reason we call God the great Physician of body and soul? Perhaps we can get more focus on this thought as we turn back to the Gospel text from Luke.

Verse 1

In our third reading for this morning, Luke depicts Jesus “(o)n the way to Jerusalem...passing along between Samaria and Galilee...(A)s he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.’”

Just going that far, we can already draw connections between the ten lepers and ourselves. How? Well how many people want to be around you when you have the flu or a heavy illness? Do they not instead try to keep away from you? Or when you're well, do you want someone bringing germs and viruses to you?

At the time of Jesus' earthly life, those with leprosy were not permitted to even approach other people—and for good reason, leprosy was a terrible skin disease. No one wanted to be infected with it. In the book of Leviticus, there are one and a half chapters on dealing with those with leprosy. This is because, as the commentary notes say, it is the “Most serious of all skin diseases. Sufferers were to give warning of their uncleanness with shouts of ‘Unclean, unclean!’ Their disease was transferable and could make others ceremonially unclean on contact. Infected individuals (had to) live outside the camp and have no further

contact with family and friends”—Sounds a lot like when you get a serious cold or stomach flu, doesn't it? No, don't come near, I don't want to catch what you've got!—But leprosy went one step further. The “Most significant (problem leprosy brought to those who had it was) their exclusion from divine worship (ESV Study Bible, p.183).”

So how many of you consider missing divine worship on a Sunday morning the most significant problem a sickness or disease could cause you, let alone missing while remaining healthy? If you do miss while you are healthy, how easy is it to return the following week? If you've ever missed, you know how hard the devil works on you to miss again. If you persist in avoiding church and you fall away from faith, what advantage do you have compared to those who never knew the Gospel of Jesus to begin with?

Verse 2

“When (Jesus) saw (the lepers) he said to them, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks.”

Here, a man with leprosy—a skin disease so bad he could not socialize for his entire life, or attend worship services—he is healed, along with nine others. Yet when he returns to Jesus, giving thanks to God, Jesus doesn't acknowledge faith on the part of the nine, but only on the part of the one who returned. This man, this Samaritan, was healed of a terrible skin disease and he returned giving praise. Granted, his sins were also forgiven, his faith having made him well, but this is not mentioned until the end. All that the Samaritan knew at this point was that his leprosy had been healed, and he returned giving thanks—more than Jesus had commanded him to do.

You, brothers and sisters in Christ, have been healed as well—but not from a skin disease, but from your sin. You have been made clean from your sin which separated you from God Himself, sin which prevented you from going to God your Heavenly Father. Does your thanksgiving measure up to how much you have been forgiven?

Again, the Samaritan returned to Jesus giving praise to God—more than he had been commanded to do. Do you give thanks to God for your being healed? Or are you more like the nine—showing no thanksgiving at all?

Far too often, we are like the nine—giving little or no thanksgiving at all. If it were up to how thankful we are for us to be saved, we would still be unable to approach God for anything and headed on a one-way course to hell. Of our sinful natures, we cannot approach God or come to Him. That's why He came to us.

Just as Jesus came to the lepers who could not approach Him, He also comes to us who, by birth, are unable and unwilling to come near to Him. He came and went to the cross of Calvary to pay for all of your sins—including your lack of thanksgiving. He paid for all of your sins and gave you forgiveness.

Verse 3

So, how do you receive this forgiveness? By faith. Jesus said to the leper, “‘Rise and go on your way; your faith has made you well.’” But what faith had the leper shown?

Well, the leper had taken Jesus at His Word. When Jesus had told him to go and show himself to the priests, he left with the other nine. Simply by doing what Jesus said, he and the other nine had been cleansed of their leprosy. And so it is for us today: when we listen to Jesus' Words, we are cleansed of our sin.

How is Jesus able to do this? Because He is God, as the leper demonstrated by his actions. Once he had been cleansed, the leper returned praising God—and he fell at Jesus' feet and put his face down. The leper knew that only God could restore him, and when he was restored, he knew that Jesus was at least of God, if not God Himself.

Today, we know that Jesus was and is God—the second person of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We know that His death on the cross paid the price for not only our sins, but the sins of the whole world for all of time, because He was and is God. If He had been only man, it would not have been enough.

Like the leper, we only know these things after the fact. God came to us when we were still sinners—before we were even born—and paid the price for our sin, mine and yours. Even this morning, we came to this service probably not as thankful as we should have, yet God did not and does not throw you out. Instead, He comes to you with a Word: “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”
In Jesus' Name. Amen.