

October 13, 2019

St. Luke 17:11-19:

***“From the Company of Misery to the Company  
of Jesus - A Lesson from a Leper”***

*I. Leprosy and Us.*

*II. The Rich Man and Lazarus.*

*III. From Misery to Jesus.*

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St. Luke 17:11-19

Dear Friends in Christ,

The text for this morning, the healing of the ten lepers, is the appointed Gospel lesson for this Sunday. I was a bit surprised since it has been the traditional text for Thanksgiving Day, and remains the same for this year.

I didn't want to do a sermon on this text for that reason, but the fact that giving thanks to the Lord should be a constant...well...I thought...why not? We are considering . . . .

## **FROM THE COMPANY OF MISERY TO THE COMPANY OF JESUS - A LESSON FROM A LEPER**

### **I. Leprosy and Us.**

I'm calling this part of the sermon "Leprosy and Us". Some might think that odd, but there is a connection, as I think most of you know.

Today there are still a number of countries with leper colonies. The nature, severity and consequence of leprosy for the Old Testament church were spelled out in chapters 12 through 14 of the Book of Leviticus. Consider these words:

"The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.' He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp." (Lev. 12:45-46)

I ask you to carefully consider the following from the Lutheran Confessions; specifically this from *Article I of the Formula of Concord* concerning Original Sin:

In the first place, it is an established truth that Christians must regard and recognize as sin not only the actual transgression of God's commandments but also, and primarily, the abominable and dreadful inherited disease which has corrupted our entire nature (i.e., original sin). In fact, we must consider this as the chief sin, the root and fountain of all actual sin...This means that in the sight of God original sin, like a spiritual leprosy, has thoroughly and entirely poisoned and corrupted human nature. On account of this corruption and because of the fall of the first man, our nature or person is under the accusation and condemnation of the law of God so that we are "by nature the children of wrath," (this clearly stated in Ephesians 2:3) of death, and of damnation unless we are redeemed from this state through Christ's merit. (Theodore G. Tappert, Editor, *The Book of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article I, Original Sin*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1959, p. 509.5,6.)

I would simply have you note again the statement: "original sin, like a spiritual leprosy...". And with that, I would once again place before us these words from Leviticus concerning bodily leprosy: "The leprous person who has the disease shall remain unclean...He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp." Please keep that in mind for these next few moments.

### **II. The Rich Man and Lazarus.**

I have never considered the account of the rich man and Lazarus a parable. There are others who don't either. The part that frequently comes to mind, and did so relative to our text for this morning is this:

The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame." (Lk. 16:22-25)

Consider the terms of the rich man's death as the result of unbelief. Death apart from God's love in Christ is to enter eternal *anguish*. It is to exist in an indescribable *flame*; to burn but never find relief or escape. It is to never again taste *a drop of water*. Never. Forever.

Now, let's go back to that statement from The Formula of Concord:

"...original sin, like spiritual leprosy, has thoroughly and entirely poisoned and corrupted human nature. On account of this...our nature or person is under accusation and condemnation...we are 'by nature children of wrath,' death, and of damnation unless we are redeemed from this state through Christ's merit.

Left to ourselves (our "spiritual leprosy), we would enter into eternal *anguish*. We would exist in indescribable *flame*. We would never again receive even one *drop of water* for comfort. We would exist *outside the camp* - outside the light and love of God's presence. And that brings us to our text . . .

### III. From Misery to Jesus.

....as 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." When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. (vv. 12-14)

The lepers sought the Lord. Because of restrictions they stood at a distance. The cry of "have mercy on us" was the only thing they could offer and mercy was the only thing they could seek. It is the same for the leprosy of sin; sin that eats at our lives, brings conflict and, yet, as much as we wish to get rid of it we can't! I always see this in my life, as you do in yours. It is the on-going struggle - the reality of the sin that's always pulling and tearing and destroying. Without the love of God in Christ we would be the forever and ever walking dead.

And there's Jesus: "Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went they were cleansed." They were cleansed on the way. They sought mercy. They received it. It's the love of God in Christ for those who see what they are. It's the great truth: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 Jn. 1:8,9)

It's all we have to offer. Our sin. What God said to Israel of old He says to His people for all time: "The Lord God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you..." (Deut. 7:7,8a)

The reality of that great mercy and love of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, marched to a monstrous Roman Cross and forever obliterated our sin and the sentence we deserved; death and hell. Oh, man, it's so simple: "Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so." In one moment 10 lepers are removed from the company of their mutual, shared misery to healing. ***From The Company Of Misery To The Company Of Jesus.*** And then comes the shock . . .

#### IV. Lessons From A Leper.

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. Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well." (vv. 15-19)

A Samaritan, one who represented a people despised by the Jews, returns to give thanks. Jesus healed all 10, but this one's faith - the faith God gave him - brought Him into the light of eternal joy. Jesus!

Jesus did the same for us. Healed us of our filthy, damning leprosy of sin that infected us with death and hell. We cry to the Lord the words of the Psalmist: "I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!" (Ps. 116:17-19)

This isn't Thanksgiving Day. This isn't a Stewardship Sunday. But a leper - a Samaritan at that - hits us with a question, and one that is overwhelmingly simple: What is Jesus worth to you? To me? Really worth?

Truly, ***A Lesson From A Leper.***

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott