

The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity
09/01/2013
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Luke 17:11-19
David McMinn

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Word of God for our consideration this morning is from the Gospel According to Saint Luke the 17th chapter.

Do you know that after the attacks on September 11th, 2001 church attendance went up for several months? Do you know that after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941 church attendance went up at a time when a higher percentage of people were already going to church than they do now? You probably do know that in individual people's lives great tragedies or changes often times spur a return or first visit to church?

This should be understandable. God uses such things in our lives to get us to open our ears to be receptive to His Word. There's probably an endless list of people now in heaven who fit this scheme. Tragedy or great change in a person's life many times spur a return or first visit to church.

Times such as these convince us we need help or we need stability. Who or what is more stable than God? Certainly not frail and flighty humans. When the world is crashing around you and all seems lost the human mind innately understands that there is a God, and there is only God, who stands above it all. He's not swayed by the winds of change nor by the drumbeat of tragedy. He's God and He changes not. He created us and He loves us. Therefore it's innate for the human to cry out to Him.

At the end of one's rope the heart is open to hearing the Word many times when it wouldn't otherwise be. Then when the Word works its way in it does what the Word does. It works where and when the Holy Spirit would have it work. The man or woman faces a rough spot in life, the Holy Spirit hits them with the Word of God at the right time and faith is born inside that person. Faith is in no way due to their efforts.

What a joy that gift is. How wonderful it is to realize that all hope isn't lost. How wonderful to know that this life and all its tragedies and myriad changes is not the end of you, it's not the final word. How wonderful to receive the love of God, especially the love that's only known through the faith of Jesus Christ. He is the source of all hope and love.

Surely that describes the 10 lepers in today's Gospel. *"On the way to Jerusalem [Jesus] was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And 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."* Thus far the Word of God.

Surely these men, these lepers were at the end of their rope, all hope was dissipating fast for them. Lepers weren't welcome with the rest of civilization. If you lived in a community once you were diagnosed with leprosy your welcome as a neighbor was over. Nobody else wanted it. If you got this dreaded plague you were on your own somewhere other than in that community. They forced you to leave. So lepers tended to congregate together. It was a true showing of 'misery

loving company'. This is the way it was for the 10 men in the Gospel reading. They stood away from the rest of humanity and they cried out for Jesus to save them from their tribulation. They wanted release from their terrible affliction and their horrible isolation. This Jesus could be the ticket.

They've heard of Him. He's full of power from God. He heals the sick, feeds the needy, and raises the dead. He may even be the One promised in the Prophets. So as they see Him draw near they cry out as the helpless ones they are and He hears them. But more importantly they hear Him. They ask for mercy and He says, "*Go and show yourselves to the priests.*" There's no questions asked. He says "Go" and they go.

The priests are in the story because they're the ones who have to say that a person is clean or healed. They're the ones who will return the men to their lives. They don't do anything to facilitate the healing. They merely announce what God has already done.

You may know how all this feels. If not you probably will at some point. Tragedy and great changes leave very few of us unscathed in this life. It probably will not be leprosy but it'll be something else. We all get to the point where we've had enough. And I don't mean had it up to here with so and so or with this and that. I mean those times in life that are extremely tough, like death of loved ones and sicknesses and family conflicts and turmoil where we just can't do anything to help. There's no other place to turn. There's nothing else we can do. And we can't take anymore.

At that point, however it happens, God's Word steps into the breach and hope returns to your life. You're in despair. You're looking for relief and it's there that God shows His face in His Word. "This isn't the end after all, and maybe it even gets better in the here and now, but regardless in the long run faith say it's going to be okay." The picture improves, life is better and joy returns. And then what?

Well nine of the men who were healed and delivered from their circumstances went on about their business. It was nice to have Jesus around when needed but it was even better to be back to normal. There was no appreciation for the love and mercy Christ showed to them. They were appreciative only in the moment and then only to themselves. They had faith that Jesus could do the job they needed done and once that was over they had all from Him that they needed. It's not that they thought badly of Him. It's that they didn't think of Him at all anymore. Before He was their Savior, now He's just the nice man who helped them out.

That's the danger of coming to faith in tragedy and during great changes. We're so overwhelmed that when the crisis is over our temptation, because we're so emotionally driven, is to just forget what's done for us by Jesus. It's not that we have evil thoughts about God and Christ it's that we don't think about Him at all. It's a natural thing, sinfully natural. If you're sick you go to the doctor. But when you're made well you probably don't think of the doctor much, except maybe to cuss him because of his bill. In earthly, temporal life maybe that's okay. But toward God it's deadly.

God is not a God we need just when we can't handle things. See the truth is we have no control over anything, ever. We have that grand illusion sometimes that we're in control, but it's simply that, a grand illusion. God is in control around us, always. And God is continually enabling us to live out our lives. He provides everything we need from the next gulp of air to open heart surgeons. Nothing we have is a product of our own will. But more important, salvation, the truly important thing, comes through Christ alone. To not think about Christ because our daily life is in order also means that we're not thinking of Him concerning our eternal salvation. That's a bad place to be.

That's what tends to happen in our lives and it's what happened in the Gospel lesson today. These men were healed of a sickness through the power of the Son of God. Their Creator humbled Himself to come here as a man so He could heal them. But our need for healing isn't limited to the things of this life. We need salvation. We're bound for hell and Christ comes to interrupt our steady march there. Without His intervention we're doomed.

Like the 9 lepers, the danger is that we wanted to be fixed in this life and when things are better, when we feel in control again, Jesus simply fades from mind. He kind of rests in the back of the mind until we need Him again. But again control on our part is an illusion. This life won't last for ever. Death will come and Christ will return and we know not when.

As for the lepers Jesus daily provides all that you need for this body and life. As for the lepers Jesus is always there for you in all moments. But only one of the lepers noticed. *"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. 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."

Have you noticed what Jesus has done? Surely you have. Surely the faith of Christ shines brightly in you this morning so that you are here in this place, this morning thanking God for all He has done for you. Surely you're like the Samaritan. You're one not originally born in the household of God but rather made a member only through the shedding of the blood of Christ. Surely you're one that received the gift of life and faith and you can't but help come here and thank God for it.

And that's not all. Surely you've come here this morning expecting that a God who is so gracious will continue to do even more for you in Christ. Surely the gifts of God that sustain you day to day have not come to an end. There is more. You're right, there is. The God who has brought you safe thus far meets you again today. His Word is here healing your sin sickness. Here you again remember and receive the faith first given to you in baptism so long ago. Here Christ pours out His blood and serves up His body so that you again are forgiven of your sins and strengthened in your faith. So faithful is our Lord that your sins are forgiven for Christ's sake and you of all people are an inheritor of eternal life.

Where are the nine others? We don't know. For whatever reason the Word has not yet brought them here. We pray that it will. But you are here,

drawn by the faith of Christ and the mercy, compassion and generosity of the Father. And God does not fail to meet your needs. So "*Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.*" Amen.

May the Lord Jesus be with all the Saints. Amen.