

Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost – 2022

Ruth 1:1-19a

2 Timothy 2:1-13

Luke 17:11-19

“By His stripes, we are healed.” That’s a quote from the Prophet Isaiah. It is a Christian powerhouse of a statement. “He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and by his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). Where has your sin gone? It has gone on Christ. The Son of God was made man to keep the law perfectly, to pay the price for our sin, to triumph over sickness, disease, death, hell and Satan, and open the Kingdom of Heaven by His death and resurrection. Every sinner needs healing. Where are we to go?

How many of y’all have ever felt excluded? Every Middle-Schooler knows what it is to be excluded. We had Jr. High in my day but it was the same puberty nightmare whatever you call it. Friends with the right group one day, on the outs with the same people the next. Excluded; cut from the basketball team or the cheerleader squad, not invited to the party, struggling to fit in, walking by yourself from class to class – who here remembers those *wonderful* days? Not all of us are born JFK, built-in position and charisma and confidence. How about the lepers? Do you know what leprosy is like? It’s like your body is decomposing while you are still in it. They were outcasts, those ten ole boys whom Jesus met on His way to Jerusalem. Everywhere they went they had to shout “unclean!” to anyone who got too close. Even the most compassionate people kept their distance. To the commoner, leprosy was a sign of God’s temporal judgment against that person and the commoner thought that they must’ve deserved it. Have you ever felt excluded? Have you ever felt *outside* of God’s grace?

What if what you were like on the inside were to become manifest on the outside, for all the world to see? No cosmetics could cover up greed and lust and selfishness and self-indulgence and hypocrisy and deceit. What if the moment you had an evil thought it would show itself on your face – just you, no one else. God says to love your neighbor as yourself. How would you like it if all that you are *not*, in regard to that commandment, would appear in vivid technicolor on your fancy mug? No? You hide your sin, don’t you (as do I)? You hide it even from yourself, with a smooth line of reasoning, with logic that you can justify. “That person doesn’t deserve my love. I don’t have to love someone who has harmed me.” What if your faithless moments, your indifference toward God and His Word were visible for the world to see? The reaction on the part of those who saw you would be visceral: ooooooh! Gross! Do you know what it would be like? It would be like having leprosy.

It was no picnic to have leprosy. Having leprosy makes the Wicked Witch of the West look like Cinderella. Walking death, that’s what it was. A walking corpse – like one from whom men hide their faces. “Unclean!” Now there’s a self-esteem booster. Try rehearsing that day after day. They had been removed from the worship life of Israel. That is the kicker; that’s what you need to keep in mind. Distanced from the Temple, the place where God shared His holiness with Israel, they had been excluded from the worship life of Israel because of their disease. Is it possible for you to feel the pain of those men? 10 of them; “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us”

(Luke 17:13). What are they asking for? It is a cry for salvation. Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

“When he saw them he said to them, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests’” (Luke 17:14). Ah, the priests! They were the ones who had to sign off on these men being clean and certified to reenter the worship life of Israel. The priests were at the Temple, engaged in the sacrificial system – blood and atonement and forgiveness – the OT sacrificial system which God Himself put into place. And St. Luke gives us the plain facts: “As they went they were cleansed” (Luke 17:14). Again, try to feel what they felt. Elation? Surprise? Disbelief? Wonder? That dread death that ate at my flesh is gone. I am whole again, free again, beautiful again.

And then it was off to a champagne brunch at September’s. And then it was off to the spa at Glen Ivy. Those nine, where did they go? Were they ignorant, callous, or just self-absorbed? Did they go for shots at the Pink Flamingo? Did they go to Glamis to have fun in the sand? Jesus is a little miffed at the other nine, don’t you think? “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?” (Luke 17:17). Were they ungrateful, obtuse, or just spiritually shallow? Why is this episode in the Scripture? Oh, you better pick up your heads at that question. Rest assured; this episode is included in the Scripture for you.

That one man... he was compelled to go back, wasn’t he? Why? When the others went skipping off, that one Samaritan man simply had to go back. Why? That man who healed me, I asked Him for mercy and He healed me. It was an epiphany, a revelation of God’s glory. The Samaritan’s eyes were open – true God and true man... in one person. When he saw that he was healed he realized that the locale of God’s presence had shifted from the Temple in Jerusalem to the body of the Messiah, the body of Jesus. Faith rushed back to God. Faith ran with grateful elation to God. Where was God? In that Man. The Samaritan’s worship is a statement of faith, just exactly like what Peter said on another occasion: “You are the Christ. You are the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). Put these words of Ruth into the mouth of the Samaritan leper who fell at Jesus’ feet: “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you” (Ruth 1:16-17).

Can I put those words in *your* mouth? Is that why you are here, because the Lord Christ is here? Are you here because He took your disease and has given you His perfect health? Has He brought you near, included you in His church, included you in His grace, His life, and the family of His Father? He was headed to Jerusalem. You know what happens there. Jesus was headed to the cross and the stripes from a whip that would lacerate His back. He came to endure the punishment that we deserve, be inundated with the disease of our sin and die our collective death. Love, compassion, fidelity to you – He endures all that is wretched in this world because of His love for you. All that which is opposed to Him, all evil, all that is profane and empty, all vanity and pride, all that is hellish and demented and dark – He took it. By His stripes, we are healed. Healed! He heals us not from afar, but by drawing near, by bringing us close to Himself. By virtue of His triumphant work God’s grace is all around you which will never exclude you – never!

Were you not washed in His blood... on the inside? In baptism you *were* made new. New; a heavenly nature, a Christlike nature, a sinless and death-defeating nature. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are new and we are never alone. At the end of this episode, Jesus tells the Samaritan: “rise, journey, your faith has saved you.” That’s *precisely* what the Greek says. The healing of leprosy is about as close as you can get to experiencing the resurrection. The process of deterioration and death is reversed by the miraculous intervention of the Lord Christ. “Rise, journey, your faith has saved you.” Jesus has raised you to new life. We journey with our Lord, following Him through this world. We are in His presence in this place. The faith which He breathed into us saves us. By His stripes we are healed.