

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost – 2025

Ruth 1:1-19a

2 Timothy 2:1-13

Luke 17:11-19

There are times when Jesus unloads on the object of His ire (overturning the tables of the money changers in the Temple courts comes to mind). On one occasion, Peter got a full dose of Jesus' indignation. Peter had attempted to sway Jesus away from the cross, as though the cross was beneath the Lord, an unfruitful path that Jesus should avoid. The words alone were blistering. Imagine Jesus' facial expression, His tone. "Get behind me, Satan! You are an offense to me for you are not mindful of the things of God but the things of men" (Matthew 16:23 NKJV). The Lord Christ came down hard on the Pharisees in an extended outpouring of his fury over their religious hypocrisy. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to" (Matthew 23:13). There are other times when Jesus is more muted in His judgments.

I have two sons. As a young lad, one son, all I had to do was look at him disapprovingly and he would immediately stop whatever he was doing, taking my admonishment to heart. He was easily corrected, and I knew it. The lightest touch was all that was needed to discipline him. Where are the other nine? "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?" (Luke 17:17). One can't rebuke someone who isn't there. Maybe I'm assuming too much here – with you, I mean. Do you see statement, the question of the Lord's as a rebuke? It's not DEFCON 1 (like overturning tables or calling someone's ideas demonic) but it sounds to me like Jesus is unimpressed. You get that, right? Leaving the Lord of heaven and earth unimpressed – that's not your goal, right? How easily are you corrected? Are you a "light touch" kind of disciple or more of the thick-headed variety?

Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem. Luke is keen to tell you this for one reason. Luke tells you this to put what is about to happen within the context of our Lord's suffering and death, within the context of the Lord's determination to render Himself as a sacrifice for sins, His determination to pay the price our sins demand, His determination to confront death and hell, to lay claim to humanity by His cross and empty tomb. The Lord, on the way to Calvary, is met by lepers, ten of them. Leprosy is pretty gross. Your body starts decomposing while you're still in it. It's visually disturbing. A leper is isolated from society, isolated from the worship life of Israel, isolated from the Divine Service which takes place at the Temple. "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us" (Luke 17:13). Do you believe that their prayer is heartfelt? I believe it is. What are they asking for? If death were cloaking you, what would you be asking for? Here's a provocative question: "What if what you were like on the inside began to show itself on the outside?" What if your gentle manners couldn't mask your corrupt desires, your selfish pride, your vindictive spirit? "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." Jesus knows what they're asking for; He knows what they need; He knows what it will require *of Him for Him* to give it *to* them.

"Go and show yourselves to the priests" (Luke 17:14). Why? Why not just cleanse them right there? The theological answer is that the lepers had been excluded, by virtue of their disease, from the worship life of Israel. Only the priests could approve their return. Only the priests

could validate their disease is rectified. Remember, the Temple is where God shared His holiness with His people. The Temple was where the sacrificial system was enacted. The priests were God's agents to serve the people, to govern the things of God. Go show yourselves to the priests has an OT ring to it, doesn't it? The Temple always pointed *forward* to something greater. The sacrificial system pointed *forward*, the priests themselves *pointed* forward to something truly substantial. And the ten diseased lepers are walking away from new wine; the ten diseased lepers are walking toward old wineskins.

I've never gone from being dead to being alive. I've never, in an instant, gone from having cancer permeating my body to not having cancer at all. I've never gone from having my neck in the noose to being cut down from the gallows. I've never, in an instant, gone from the doghouse to the penthouse. There was a woman, an adulterous woman, who was on the verge of death. The truth of her actions was not in question. Her accusers, it is assumed, had ample evidence. She was guilty and the punishment would be severe. And Jesus stepped in. "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone" (John 8:7). Picture all the woman's prosecuting attorneys dropping their rocks and walking away. She, with her head down, doesn't notice any of this. Then the Lord, drawing her eyes to His, asks her, "Woman, where are your accusers?" (John 8:10). He's pointing out to her that she has none.

What are *your* accusers? Try to be honest, try to be truthful and self-aware. Think of yourself steeped, not in leprosy, but in lust and greed and deceit. Those are your accusers. The prosecuting attorney has ample evidence of your guilt. Pride infects your soul. Hate and laziness and a lukewarm approach to the things of God is the disease that creeps into our spirits. Have you protected the holiness God has given you? Do you delight in profane talk, profane programming, profane humor? Where are your accusers? St. Paul lamented his sinful condition. He knew what it meant. The good he wanted to do, he didn't do. The evil that he didn't want to do this he found himself doing. He ends this self-examination with a leper's cry. "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24).

The lepers were cleansed. It was a miracle. It was a new creation. It was a preview of the Last Day. And one ole boy runs back. He *must* run back. He is compelled by joy, by faith, by the realization of who that man is – he runs back. The Temple is an empty husk – this man is God incarnate. He runs back. The priests are mere shadows of the good thing that this Man truly is. He runs back. Gratitude and awareness carry Him back to Jesus' feet. His disease has been put to flight. His body no longer accuses him. Death no longer clings to him. And he runs back. "Behold, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5). That's what Jesus is saying by cleansing this leper and his mates. But how? How will He make all things new? Where is your disease? Where is your infidelity and your infernal lies and your mismanagement of God's gifts and your hyper-judgmental attitude and your doubt and your fear and your death? It was put on Jesus. By His stripes, we are healed (Isaiah 53:5). He takes our diseases and our spiritual disfigurement and our hubris and our lovelessness and our sorrows. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). He was accused. God the Father located our sin in His Son and He punished it. You know this is true. The Samaritan leper ran to Jesus' feet. Peter said: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Thomas said: "My Lord and my God." And you come to this Divine Service and confess His holy name. They are all of a piece.

Where are the other nine? Weren't there ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? It's not a DEFCON 1 question, but it is sharp, it is serious, and you need to hear it. The nine aren't in church. The nine ignore the Divine Service. The nine don't run back. They were busy taking shots at the Pink Flamingo. They were busy at the spa in Glen Ivy. They were busy shopping at Nordstrom to celebrate their clear skin, their deliverance from their affliction. Were they grateful? Were they aware of who that was who healed them and the new creation He brings? I take it back. When I said that I've never gone from death to life, I take it back. I have. I am baptized. I am that Samaritan leper and I am compelled to be where Jesus is and He is here. The sickness of my sin, this body of death – Jesus became that body of death and He has given me His life. I went from death to life – I am baptized. Each of you is that man. Rise, journey, your faith has saved you. That's what our Lord says to *us*. His absolution takes us from death to life. We rise with Him. We journey with Him. The faith that His Word breathes into us saves us. In this place, we are gathered in His presence and He serves us with His sacrificial victory. We are compelled, by faith, by God's Spirit, to be in this Divine Service. The Samaritan leper echoes in you.