

09/013/20

14th Sunday after Holy Trinity

“A thankful Samaritan”

Luke 17: 11-19

Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.

Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off.

And they lifted up their voices and said, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

So when He saw them, He said to them, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed.

And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God,

And fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan.

So Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?”

Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?

And He said to him, “Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well.”

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

St. Luke is the only one of the evangelists who includes in his account of our Savior’s life the episode which is our text this morning. That he should tell us about this grateful Samaritan whom Jesus healed from leprosy is in keeping, really, with Luke’s reputation as the “Gospel-writer for the outcasts,” the evangelist who especially shows how our Lord extended His gifts of grace and mercy and forgiveness to those whom the rest of society abhorred and ostracized—tax collectors, public sinners, or Samaritans like the one in our text.

The Jews hated and despised the people of Samaria, and, generally speaking, the feeling was mutual. On the one hand—although their complete history was somewhat clouded by the time of our Lord’s earthly ministry—the Samaritans claimed to be the true children of Abraham, and it is probable that they were at least in part descended from the ten tribes of Israel which had broken away from Judah during the reign of Solomon. The Jews looked down on them as racial half-breeds, because their blood-line had been mixed with that of their Assyrian conquerors. And on the other hand, the Samaritans also considered themselves to be the true followers of

Moses. They would not go to the temple in Jerusalem, gathering for worship instead in their own facility on Mt. Gerizim in Samaria, where they taught and practiced their own version of the Law. The Jews therefore considered them to be also religiously impure—stubborn apostates from the truths revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures. When Jesus refers to the grateful man in our text as a “foreigner,” He is really only expressing—and not without a bit of irony—what the people of Judea thought about the Samaritans. That our Savior Himself harbored not a trace of such prejudice in His own heart can be heard in His words of farewell to this man, “Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well.” St. Luke has left us this important account in which also you and I can learn from this Samaritan the kind of gratitude that ought to characterize the lives of Christ’s people.

I

Luke tells us, as Jesus came into a certain village “there met Him ten ... lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’” We can note in passing that the dreaded disease of leprosy proved to be a great equalizer for these sick men. In their suffering, the grievances they had against each other seemed less important. Because they were shunned by the rest of society, they willingly kept company together. Because they were all dying from the same horrible affliction, they found it acceptable to plead for help together. “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” they cry. Somehow, they had heard of the Prophet from Galilee. Somehow, they had all come to believe that He was the Lord’s Anointed who could help them. Their shared affliction and their shared hope were at this moment far more important to them than the differences which had once kept them apart. That is often how it is when such asinine bigotries no longer serve their purpose of making some people feel superior.

Their prayers for our Lord’s compassion and healing do not go unanswered. When Jesus sees them, Luke tells us, He says to them, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” We should be aware of the stern test to which our Savior puts the faith of these men. To be allowed into society again, they would need to be examined by the priests in the temple and officially declared to be cleansed from their affliction. Jesus sends them on their way to present themselves to the priests before they have experienced the healing power of His word. As they begin their journey, they still see in each other and in themselves the marks of the disease—the terrible blight on their skin, the whiteness of their hair, the wasting away of fingers and toes. Yet the ten hold Jesus to His word, and they set out for Jerusalem. “And so it was,” Luke writes, “that as they went, they were cleansed.” Because Jesus of Nazareth truly is the promised Messiah of whom the Prophets had written,

His Word accomplishes what He promises. Because Mary's Son is none other than the very Son of God—the second Person of the great Three-in-One who has created all things—their faith is rewarded and they are healed.

II

Of those ten men whom Jesus cleansed from leprosy, only one comes back to thank Him. "Were there not ten cleansed?" He asks, "But where are the nine?" And we can feel the pain and the disappointment in our Savior's voice as He continues, "Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" He had ended their suffering. He had rescued them from a long and painful death. He had made possible their return to their families and to their friends and to a normal life in their homes. Yet only one had come back to express gratitude to his Healer. "But where are the nine?" Jesus asks. And His question calls us to examine ourselves.

On the one hand, it is not so hard for us to understand these men who were healed and who did not return. In their excitement, they wanted to get to the temple as quickly as possible. What filled their hearts and minds were thoughts of being reunited with their wives and their children, the pleasures of a normal life in their villages, the simple joys of talking with friends. And yet, we hold them accountable for not coming back to Jesus. We expect and look for expressions of gratitude—some word or gesture of thanks—when we give things to people or do favors for them. That is really a duty that each one of us should demand from ourselves and which we rightfully expect from others. "But where are the nine?" Jesus asks. How often do we need to include ourselves among those nine?

For our sakes, the eternal Son of God took to Himself our flesh and our blood as His own in the womb of the holy Virgin. For our sakes, the Creator of all things humbled Himself and made Himself to be the lowest of Servants. For you and for me, Christ Jesus lived a life of perfect service and love for His heavenly Father and for all those around Him. To ransom us from sin and the devil's claim on us, He poured out His life's blood on the cross of Calvary. His Easter-morning victory over the grave—that, too, He won not for Himself but for you and me, so that we might live with Him. We have received so much from Him—so much more than healing from a physical disease, so much more than some earthly blessing. Our Savior asks of those who did not return to thank Him for healing them, "But where are the nine?" How often must we confess that His question applies to us?

III

To the grateful Samaritan who had fallen before Him in heartfelt gratitude, Jesus says, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well," and in the original text His words "Go your way" are really an invitation to

this man to travel along with Jesus—an invitation to learn yet more about the Kingdom of God, to have his understanding of the Lord's Anointed deepened, to have his faith strengthened. That is really the way it works when we express our thanks to our Redeemer-God. We receive from Him, again. We think about what He has done for us. Our mind is filled again with His mercy and His love for us. We think about and thank Him for the gracious forgiveness that He bestows so freely on us, the sure hope of heaven that He puts in our hearts, and the care that He shows to us every day. In thanking Him for these, we thus experience His gifts anew. Our faith in Him is made firmer and more secure. In this blessed circle of gift and gratitude, we are always blessed again, and thus also our desire to thank Him increases.

In the prayer that our Savior has taught us, we ask for things which our Lord bestows on us daily and richly even without our asking, as Martin Luther reminds us in his Catechism explanation of that prayer. All that we ask for—that His will be done, that He grant to us the daily bread we need, that He forgive us our sins, and all the other petitions which we raise in that perfect model of Christian entreaty—are, Luther points out, granted in abundance by our merciful and generous Lord every day. And thus the Lord's Prayer should be for us a daily exercise in joining the grateful Samaritan in our text—a daily exercise in giving thanks for His saving grace, His merciful healing, and His Shepherd's care for us.

May the Holy Spirit grant this to us for Jesus' sake. Amen.