



The Westminster Pulpit

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3900 West End Avenue Nashville, Tennessee 37205-1899

“Mercy me! Mercy you!” **Sermon on Luke 17:11-19**

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Our text for this morning comes from the 17th chapter of Luke’s Gospel. It is only eight verses long, but it is packed with several of Luke’s themes.

You will hear these words at the very beginning of our reading: “On the way to Jerusalem...” Eight chapters earlier, Luke says that “Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem.” Jesus is intent on going towards the cross.

“On the way to Jerusalem...” “The way” you may remember was the name of the early church. We were people of the way. At the end of our reading, Jesus will say to the one healed, “Get up and go on your way.” We are left to wonder which way will that be? One’s own way? Or the way of Jesus.

It is the way of Jesus to find him on the borderline between two places, two people who have great animosity toward each other, Jews and Samaritans. I’m sure there are safer places the Word of God could have gone, but the way of Jesus is right there between the two.

Another of Luke’s themes is repentance. In Luke’s Gospel, it isn’t so much a list of all the things done wrong as much as it is turning oneself to that which is right. You will hear about one out of ten who make the turn.

You’ll hear Luke’s theme of joy when the turn happens. The Gospel of Luke loves a party! Lost sheep, lost coin! “Rejoice with me and see what I have found.”

Luke has a theme of falling and rising. When we near Christmas, you’ll hear Mary’s song, “He has brought down the rich and lifted up the lowly.” Luke has Zacchaeus coming down out of a tree.

Luke likes to lower the expectations of the ones who think they're holy. Priest and Levite walk right on by the beat-up one. And raise up the one's least likely... surprise! My neighbor is from North of the border. A Samaritan!

And our Samaritan will fall to his knees... And Jesus will raise him up! Falling and rising.

So, listen for the themes of Luke. Listen for the Word of God.

Luke 17:11-19

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, 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 made clean.

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan.

Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.

On Thursday night, I attended a fight, and a hockey game broke out. Hockey is like going to the Coliseum in Rome. The crowd applauds an insane hit. Applauds taking off the gloves. Loves the fight. There's no holding back when the refs make a bad call. No holding back when the home team scores, telling the goalie, "It's all his fault." Hockey is one of the worst aspects of the human condition, but I enjoy it—it's fodder for Sunday morning.

At some point during every game, the opening bars of Lee Greenwood's "Proud to Be an American" begin, which is the cue to stand up and honor a specific service veteran who is in the stands.

That night, the serviceman happened to be a World War II veteran. Not many of them are left. And when the camera caught him, it was clear the crowd's reception touched the old soldier. And the crowd responded to his emotion with more passion and affection. Cheers and applause. EVERYONE! Standing up together! Everyone, Preds fans, Blue Jacket fans, those wearing the black and white stripes, all together, now! It was good to be all on the same team... and then we returned to the fight, I mean, the game.

Ten lepers. They were all on the same team. All in the same place. All saying the same things. They were a team of outcasts. They were people you would avoid for your own health. Don't get near them.

Ten lepers. They only had each other. They were known only as Lepers. Imagine being known only by your disease.

Before they caught the disease, I suppose one was a farmer. She worked in the shop. He was a kid playing ball in the street. She was the one who lived in the biggest house in town. While she could barely make ends meet. It's the way we are.

Whatever they were as individuals, they became known as the seven, eight, nine, and ten lepers. They were their only support group. Empathy. "I'll scratch your back; you scratch mine.

As Jesus was on his way, he entered a village, and ten lepers were of one mind and they approached, keeping their distance. "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." "Heal us." They said it in unison. They all agreed.

If Jesus were at a distance on this day, what do you suppose we could shout in unison? What is our common need? One voice.

Would our need be health-related? Would our need be to be healed from our fears? Maybe healing from being so uptight? Lord, give us peace! What would be our common cry?

Those long ago ten knew! One voice! "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." Luke writes that he did, "Go show yourselves to the priest." What that means is, "You're healed."

They all got healed. All together! All at once. How did that go over in the group? Do you think everyone was happy for each other? I suppose.

But Luke tells a story about workers in the vineyard, and it didn't matter if you worked all day in the sun or started ten minutes before quitting time. Everyone got paid the same. And even though they were all part of the group, those who worked on the farm all day long got the same amount. Well, that reminds me of another story of a man who had two sons. And even though they were brothers, there was some disagreement over treatment. "Listen, you've never even given me a small goat to celebrate with my friends, but when this no-good son of yours comes home, you celebrate."

I'm just wondering if, even in a group of ten lepers, there might be one or two in the group who were a little annoying. Imagine having leprosy and being annoying, too. Maybe one or two didn't put their effort into shouting to Jesus. They didn't really have their heart in it. And yet, no matter who they were... they all got healed.

Which isn't fair, but it is life in the Church. We believe that when it comes to the Word of God, the mercy of God, it falls on everyone. Mercy me! Mercy you! As Sophie says often, "There's nothing you can do to make God you love any less. There's nothing you can do to make God love you any more. God loves everyone equally."

As one who is here more Sundays than most, that gets me a little irritated. Do you know right now, a good portion of our congregation is at the beach drinking a beer? It's 8:30 in the morning! You mean to tell me God loves them equally? Mercy me! Mercy you!

Jesus bats 1,000 in the mercy department. But Jesus only batted 100 in the receiving Thanksgiving department. "Where are the other nine? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Which, of course, is the surprise of the parable, that of all the people to come back to give thanks, it was the one who played for the other team. We are supposed to take our cues from the one who turned his life around. The one who no longer

stood at a distance when it came to God, but fell at his feet. The one who was raised up! Stand up! Go on your way! Your faith has made you well!

But we know all ten were healed. What do you mean, "Your faith has made you well?" Unless Jesus is saying, "There's more to life than having your ailments fixed." You know that!

I suppose that old soldier in the stands knew that. He was old! I looked it up. The youngest he could have been to fight in WWII would have put his age at 97. He could be as old as 104. I can't imagine what his health is like. Because look, I'm 62 and for some reason, my ankle is killing me this morning. But I soldier on. You are unaware of my bravery.

Life is more than the healing of the body. That old soldier holding back the tears. Everyone in the crowd standing up and cheering in one voice... whatever they were feeling, the bad ankle, the bad knee, the hiccup in the heart... it all evaporated into thanksgiving. So rare!

We have all been given the gift of this day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Heard it said by a young woman dying of cancer. Life is more than having your ailments cured.

This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice in an angry world. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Can we make that turn? Can we return to the source? Can we be humble and thankful and then be raised up? Hear the Word of God!

"Stand up! Our faith has made us well! Stand up! Let your face shine with the light of Christ! The more we look like our savior, the louder the cries from those who need a savior. The more mercy we show, the louder the cheers, and the more mercy there will be for those who need mercy.

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