

Luke 17:11-19
"Thanks Be to God!"
Thanksgiving Eve

November 26, 2025
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

"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'" (Luke 17:11-13).

On this eve of the National Day of Thanksgiving, we can see the gravity of the situation. Leprosy was bad; it was really bad. Leprosy wasn't something that could be cured by any over-the-counter or behind-the-counter drug. Leprosy couldn't be cured by bedrest.

As leprosy would progress, it attacks the skin, peripheral nerves and the mucus membrane. Pain would turn to numbness. The skin would lose its original color and become thick, glossy and scaly. Sores and ulcers would develop. The face could swell to look more like a lion than a man. The voice would become hoarse and grating. If you had the signs of leprosy, and were declared "unclean" by the priests, you could no longer live in your community, you were basically outcasts from polite society, left homeless without the support of family or friends. A leper was an outcast.

If there was anything positive, contrary to popular belief, leprosy was not a flesh-eating disease. However, due to the loss of feeling – *especially in the hands and feet* – people with leprosy could wear away their extremities and faces unknowingly. This horrible disfigurement caused by leprosy made this disease greatly feared.

It was so feared that it was the traditional Jewish belief that leprosy was God's judgment for sin. A leper was considered cursed by God.

So, here, on this eve of the National Day of Thanksgiving, we learn of a lonely group of outcasts, ten men who would normally not be together, except for leprosy, standing at a distance, desperate to be once again included in polite society. These men lifted up their voices, or what was left of their voices, saying, ***"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"*** (Luke 17:13).

They had heard the news about Jesus. Could it all be true? Could Jesus heal them? They saw Jesus as their last chance for deliverance. Mustering all they had left, these ten men begged Jesus to heal them.

Across a distance, Jesus heard their cry for mercy. He spoke to them saying, “*Go and show yourselves to the priests*” (Luke 17:14).

Clearly, Jesus did not immediately heal these men, but He commanded them to show themselves to the priests. But why didn't Jesus heal them all instantly? He had done that in the past and He would do that in the future. But why not in this instance?

It is likely that Jesus was testing the faith of these ten leprous men in His ability to heal them in His time. And Jesus' command would be an affirmation of the validity of the Law of God. For, by obeying, these men were demonstrating faith and fulfilling their obligation as the Law required. The priests who would receive these men would function as the local health inspectors, and this was an elaborate process, lasting for eight days and involving various examinations, sacrifices and rituals, to determine whether a person was free from leprosy (Leviticus 14:1-32).

What's ironic about this requirement is that these very priests who rejected Jesus would have to validate the undeniable fact that the lepers had been healed. They would be forced to confirm His supernatural power and thus become reluctant witnesses to His deity.

Up to this point, these ten leprous men are acting in unison. They all pled for Jesus to heal them; they had all obeyed His command and started their way to the priests. As they walked, they began noticing changes, positive changes. They were healed.

I'm sure they were all astonished. They were amazed! I'm sure they were full of joy! I'm sure they were thinking about how their life was about to change. They would all soon be living **normal** lives! But for some reason one of the healed men turns back, while the others march on to the priests.

There is something to note here. The Jews were taught that God was primarily a Redeemer and a Savior. These lepers came to Jesus for the hope of redemption. Could Jesus also be the Savior? Could Jesus be God?

Now, so often, we want to jump to the obvious with today's Gospel lesson, which is to be thankful. And that is why this text is always the Gospel text for Thanksgiving. But let us not oversimplify this message. You see, today's Gospel lesson is not just about the lepers being thankful or not.

Remember, Jesus told the lepers to follow God's commandment to verify their healing. And as they went, all ten were cleansed. All ten were healed. But only nine of them continued on their way.

So, were the nine thankful? Clearly, they were! They were glad as they could be that they were healed. They could soon live normal lives again! Unfortunately, they didn't fully recognize who it was to be thanked.

The unlikely Samaritan grasped who needed to be thanked. Of course, going to the priests was proper, but Jesus was the true source of his healing and every good gift. Jesus said to this healed man: "***Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well***" (Luke 17:19). It was his faith in Jesus that had made him well. It was his faith in Jesus, given to him and to us by the Holy Spirit, that made us well.

On this eve of the National Day of Thanksgiving, we have so much to be thankful for. These healed men were desperate for healing. They could do nothing to save themselves.

In our desperation for salvation, Jesus saved us too. We were once lost and condemned because of our sins, but Jesus purchased and won us from all sins, from eternal death, and from the power of the devil. Jesus saved us not by paying for our reconciliation through silver or gold, but instead through His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, so that we may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom.

On this Thanksgiving and every Lord's Day, by faith, Jesus richly forgives our sins.

We have so much to be thankful for. Thanks be to God that He is merciful, patient and loving toward us. Thanks be to God that Jesus willingly went to that cursed tree to die and rise for us, so that sin, death, and Satan would have no power over us. Thanks be to God that He continues to prepare our hearts and minds through Word and Sacrament ministry.

We have so many reasons to give our thanks to Christ, our Lord. Chief among them is His forgiveness that He won for you through His atoning death upon the cross. So, may we always give God thanks by coming into His presence each Lord's Day as He continually serves us, His Church, with forgiveness, life, and salvation through His Word and Sacrament! Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +