

October 9, 2022
Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Luke 17:11-17 (Ruth 1:1-19; 2 Timothy 2:1-13)

GOD SHOWS MERCY TO HIS PEOPLE IN THEIR TROUBLES.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St Luke, the 17th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

The introduction of our Collect of the Day made this objective statement:

“Almighty God, You show mercy to Your people in all their troubles.” (Collect of the Day, Proper 23c)

Make no mistake. The Lord God *does* show mercy to *all* His people in *all* their troubles. That includes you, dear baptized believer in Christ. He is longsuffering and compassionate toward you in your trials and tribulations – even when it does not look like it.

Your problem and mine, is that our sinful human nature wants to trust the eyes in our heads, which are *eyes of the flesh*. You trust that seeing is believing, building false gods, trusting what you see. But *human eyes* cannot see how God is working behind the scenes in all things – through your trials and tribulations – to bring about His good and gracious will and your eternal salvation. (cf: Romans 8:28) But thanks be to God, in Baptism He granted you *eyes of faith* to grasp hold and cling to His invisible promises, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of your *faith*. (cf: Hebrews 11:1; 12:2) So in our weakness we pray that Almighty God:

Grant us always to recognize [His] goodness, give thanks for [His] compassion, and praise [His] holy name... (Collect of the Day, Proper 23c)

We hear about this kind of faith in our readings this morning. In our Old Testament lesson, we hear about the faith of Ruth, a young widow from Moab who becomes an Israelite. (cf: Ruth 1:1-19) Naomi’s husband and two sons had died, so she decided to leave Moab and return to her hometown of Bethlehem. Orpah, the wife of Naomi’s one dead son is content to return to her own mother’s house and gods. But Ruth, the wife of the other dead son, insists on going to Bethlehem with Naomi, saying:

“... where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.” (Ruth 1:16–17)

It is Ruth’s proclamation of faith in the God of Israel and the beginning of a journey that ends with Ruth becoming the great-grandmother of King David and an ancient ancestor of Jesus.

In our epistle reading, St Paul is writing to his young protégé named Timothy. The letter is Paul's last will and testament of sorts as he is bound in chains awaiting execution. He knows death could come any day, yet he takes the time to write a letter to encourage Timothy, reminding him of his faith in Christ Jesus as he now takes Paul's place in entrusting men into the Office of the Holy Ministry, exhorting him to share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus, fighting the good fighting of faith. (cf: 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 2:1-13)

In our Gospel reading, Jesus commends the faith of the Samaritan leper. Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem where He will face God's entire wrath against your sins and mine and the sins of all mankind. As He enters a village ten lepers call out to Him for mercy. Leprosy is an infectious disease that disfigures its victim, giving the appearance that the flesh was rotting away. A leper was as good as dead because he was required by law to be isolated from everyone except other lepers. He was obligated to stand far off, shouting "*unclean! unclean!*" so others would not accidentally come into contact with him. (cf: Leviticus 13:45) It was a lonely life of separation from the healthy society.

By nature, you and I have much in common with the leper. Sin is a leprosy of the soul. It is a disease that corrupts your thoughts, words, and deeds. It causes separation between you and your neighbor, from family and friends. But more importantly, it makes you unclean before God, isolating you so that you are nothing more than a leper standing far away. Without healing your sin will separate you from God for eternity.

The lepers in our text apparently heard about Jesus and His teachings and miracles. They know their unworthiness and that Jesus has no reason to answer them. Yet humbly believe that He has the power to free them of their disease and return them to their community. Observing the Old Testament Laws concerning leprosy they:

"... stood at a distance¹³ and lifted up their voices, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.'¹⁴ When he saw them he said to them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.'" (Luke 17:13-14)

According to the Law all who had been healed of leprosy were required to be inspected by a priest and pronounced "*clean*" before resuming a normal life in society. (cf: Leviticus 13) Jesus sent them to the priests as a test of their faith. He never said that they would be healed. But why else would He send them to the priests? So having no visible evidence of healing, all ten lepers are faithful in doing what Jesus commanded. They go with faith in His promise.

That is what faith does. While knowing your unworthiness before God, you cry out: "*Lord have mercy!*" holding fast to what you do not see, firmly trusting that the Lord hears and delivers His people out of all their troubles – and if not bodily on this side of heaven, He will deliver you spiritually and eternally with Him in heaven.

As the lepers went, all ten are cleansed. Ten lepers had shown faith. Ten lepers had been cleansed. But only *one* returns to give glory to God and worship Him – God in the person of Jesus. Nine Jews take Jesus' blessing of physical healing, but only one, the foreigner, the one least expected to return:

“... when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks.” (Luke 17:15-16)

In an act of worship the foreigner prostrates himself at Jesus’ feet in thanksgiving. The other nine had received God’s mercy and owed the same worship and gratitude to Jesus, but they failed to respond. Our text does not say but perhaps like the seed that was sown among the thorns, their weak faith was choked out by their newfound health and access to the cares and pleasures of life. (cf: Luke 8:7, 14) Ten were healed but the one foreigner who returned to give thanks received something far greater.

“[Jesus] said to him, ‘Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.’”
(Lk 17:19)

In the original language Jesus says, ***“Your faith has saved you.”*** (cf: Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Luke’s Gospel, 879–880) What wonderful words! Ten received new life on earth; however, only one received new life in Christ. Ten were cleansed of their disfiguring disease and no longer separated from society; however, only one was cleansed of the disease of sin and was reconciled with the Father in heaven.

Scripture does not say if the nine ever come to life-saving faith. But we do know that all ten would still, one day die and return to the dust of the ground. And on the Last Day, when Jesus returns, only those who die with saving faith in Christ, will be raised to new life in heaven, living eternally with Him in His kingdom. It is one thing to be healed from the bondage of the diseases of this world. It’s quite another thing to be healed from the bondage of sin and death.

The Lord God shows mercy to ***all*** His people in ***all*** their troubles. That includes you, dear baptized believer in Christ. Even when it does not always look like it – God is merciful to you. Unfortunately, there are times that in God’s mysterious hidden wisdom, it is His will that you are not healed from your trials and trouble as you wish, but His mercy endures forever. (cf: Psalm 136) Your salvation is secure.

Ruth’s husband died. Yet she did not go after another a young husband rich or poor. (cf: Ruth 3:10) No, by faith she sacrificed her cultural future, leaving her original family, country, and religion and trusted entirely in the God of Israel. St Paul was languishing in prison, chained like a criminal, awaiting execution, yet he knows his future in Christ is secure as he writes:

“If we have died with him, we will also live with him; ¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; ¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.” (2 Timothy 2:11–13)

God is love and He loves you faithfully because that’s who He is. It is the very essence of His nature. He shows mercy to you in all your troubles. In Baptism He granted you ***eyes of faith*** to grasp hold and cling to His invisible promises, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of your ***faith***. But the devil is still prowling, tempting you to look at your life with all its trials and troubles with eyes of the flesh.

God’s Law tells you what you are to do and not to do. But unfortunately, even when you know what you should do, you do otherwise. God allows you to find yourselves in tough situations where He tests your faithfulness. Jesus desires that you are faithful to His Word and not give in

to sinful desires. Faith always does what is faithful – not what is most appealing or most pleasurable. Yet daily you and I prove ourselves to be unfaithful.

While you remain unfaithful, Jesus remains faithful and listens to your cries for mercy. The disease of your sin does not push Him away. He knew you were sinful before He came in the flesh. He came to take your sin upon Himself, regardless of how diseased and disfiguring it has made you. While you were walking dead in your transgression, Jesus came to bear your sin and died on the cross to set you free from your bondage. And where does He pour out His gifts of mercy and healing? In Word and Sacrament.

Many people think that the pastor wants people to come to worship every Sunday and Bible study because it feeds his ego or makes the numbers look good. No. Your pastor wants to see you in worship and Bible study because like the lepers, you cannot cure yourself. Your pastor wants to see you in worship and Bible study because that's where our Lord promises to come to you with His healing medicine of forgiveness, life, and salvation. It where you are armed with the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. (cf: Ephesians 6:10–11)

This is the place where Jesus delivers His gifts won for you on the cross. For the sake of Christ Jesus, God has had mercy upon you. He has created and sustains faith within you and has adopted you into His Holy Church. Nothing can separate you from His love. (cf: Romans 8:38-39) You can be absolutely confident that He is with you always, even to the very end of the age. (cf: Matthew 28:20) Even when it does not look like it.

How does the Christian respond? You respond by giving thanks to God with a loud voice, worshipping Him and bearing fruits of repentance and faith, turning from your sin and performing good works and deeds, and giving tithes and offerings – not to earn His favor, but because of all that He has done on your behalf.

Jesus has redeemed you of all your sin and reconciled you back with the Father. He shows mercy to you in all your troubles. By faith in Christ Jesus, you are no longer lepers and outcasts but adopted children of God. Each and every day, by faith you can *“Rise and go your way; because your God given faith has saved you.”*

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.