

## **“Christ, Our Temple and High Priest”**

### **Luke 17:11-19**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“Just get in the car.” Parents, you’ve all said it to your kids at one time or another, and kids, you’ve all been the belligerent questioners who have to turn around ask, “where are we going?” My father always had one of two answers when that question came up. His response was that we were either going to Boston or to Detroit, even though we lived in Alabama. The point being, it doesn’t matter where the destination is, “Just get in the car!” If you’re going to take your young child to the doctor, knowing that it is going to be a trip that ends in shots or some other unsavory treatment, it’s not likely you are going to tell them that’s where you’re headed. If that situation was like our story in the Gospel lesson, the child would be expected to “just get in the car,” and then on the way their malady would miraculously be healed. Such is the account of the ten lepers in Luke 17.

In our text this morning, Jesus says, “Go and show yourselves to the priests (Luke 17:14).” This is a pretty simple command from the Lord. He doesn’t even bother to tell them that they will be healed, but just to go to the temple and present themselves to the priests there. Why does Jesus tell them to go do this with no explanation of the reason for their trip? If He told them that on the way they will be healed, you’d have to think that they might laugh it off or think Him insane. But at the very least they have respect for Jesus as a teacher, and so they head toward the temple as He instructed. And on the way, just as they asked of Jesus, God’s mercy is given to them. They are healed of leprosy, a vile disease that left them as outcasts from society. After being healed, only one of the ten returns to Jesus, “praising God with a loud voice,” in order to give Him thanks. We don’t hear about what happened to the other nine, but it is likely they continued on to the temple and were restored to society. But this one who returned is the only one who actually did what Jesus told them to do. He presented himself to Jesus Christ, the true Temple and the Great High Priest.

So many in the world are like the nine lepers who just went on their own way. Think about the number of people who receive a clean bill of health after a major issue and praise the medical teams and technologies that made it possible. They elevate the medium over the source and minimize the reality of what truly took place—a miraculous healing. They don’t want God to be involved in the process, because it will minimize the fight they put forward as they battled against whatever was attacking them. In their minds, the healing relief that they received had nothing to do with their faith in the on true God, but in their ability to endure and persevere. Because they were strong enough,

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the malady went on its way. They become their own temple and their own source of cleansing.

Now, there is nothing wrong with building up a loved one as they go through a trial of that magnitude. There is nothing wrong with giving encouragement and giving them a boost of morale. The issue here in the context of our lesson is about the response to God's mercy. How many of those nine lepers do you think told the priest at the temple that the Son of God healed them? I would wager not very many, if any at all. It was probably all about their suffering through such a horrible disease and how it molded and shaped them, making them stronger than ever. But the goal of these trials in the life of someone in the faith is not to give you a strength to persevere in the world, or to be capable of doing greater things than ever before.

The purpose of the sufferings of the Christian is refinement, as it says in Isaiah 48:10, "Behold I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction." The battles of this life are not given to you for the benefit of your earthly life. They are given to you, or allowed to happen to you, for the benefit of your everlasting soul. And the men and women who work to heal and assuage those afflictions, even the ones who do their work without faith, are God's instruments of refinement. Everything about your experience in the world is intended to bring you closer to your Creator and Redeemer. It is all about bringing your faith the help it so desperately needs, and that help is Jesus alone. All the blessings of this life, the ones God has given us to sustain us here on earth, are because of Him. Healing of disease comes on account of Christ. He empowers the people of the world, endowing them with gifts from on high, to be His means of healing the afflictions of His people.

But great care must be taken not to make these people your temple and high priest of healing and well-being. The temple of modern medicine is the home of a false god that so many in our society worship today. Too often we place doctors and nurses on a pedestal, failing to acknowledge the truth that without God's gracious gifts to them, they would have no power to heal anyone. Because it is not they who heal, but God who heals through the talents and knowledge He has given them. His mercy abounds even in the face of those who seek to erase Him from the picture altogether. Many doctors and nurses, as I mentioned before, do their work without faith, placing their faith in themselves and their abilities which they created and earned on their own. Their failure to acknowledge that God has given them the ability and knowledge doesn't change the fact that their ability has been given by Him. God works through those who don't have faith all the time. We see that throughout Scripture with people like Balaam, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Pharaoh, Caesar Augustus, and many more.

But there are many who do acknowledge God's great gifts to them. And there are many who go through affliction and trials in this life who do see God's hand as the reason they are healed. They are like the leper that returns to Jesus. As you receive the grace of God throughout your life, even in the moments that aren't so "big" like a great healing event, return to Him, to your Temple and High Priest, to offer thanks for His gracious mercy. Present yourself to Him as one who is cleansed, not only of your physical malady, but most importantly as one who has been cleansed by His blood, washed clean of the stain of sin that would otherwise leave you at enmity with Him. And so, you "share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 2:3)," rejoicing with your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ as you battle the scourge of sin in the world side by side. Though, the strength you need to share in that suffering is not provided by you either. That is what our Epistle lesson today opened with in 2 Timothy 2:1, "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

The greatest gift He brings and the greatest healing He has for His people comes to us in His Means of Grace. No doctor, scientist, or health guru has been given the ability to cleanse and heal your wounded soul or to give you the strength to persevere through trials and tribulations. That is a power you receive by His Word of healing, by His medicine of immortality that you will soon receive at His table in His very body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. That is the source of all healing. There is the grace which gives you strength to persevere and face anything that comes your way. Your power is no power at all. The power of Christ in and through you is your great strength, and the reason you come here to return thanks like the tenth leper. You don't need societal acceptance of your healing at the Lord's table. You are accepted as cleansed, despite your sinful flesh, by His grace alone, for the sake of Jesus alone. There is no greater gift we can receive than to be here and be granted forgiveness. And there is no greater thanks we can give than to be present here, offering our sacrifice of thanksgiving by giving ourselves in faith to one another.

Jesus heals the sick in order to show His divine mercy. He forgives the sinner because He seeks to bring them into eternal life with Him. The importance of Jesus' closing remark to the one leper who returned to Him cannot be overstated. Having been cleansed, healed of His malady, Jesus doesn't say to him, "Be restored to society as a healthy man." He tells him, "Rise and go; your faith has saved you." He got in the car like he was told, but he was the only one who stayed in and reached the destination. He understood that to go and present himself to God, all he needed to do was turn around and thank Him in person, going to the true Temple, the only Priest that can give him the assurance of his healing. The faith of this man, worked in him by the power of the Holy

Spirit, has marked Him as one of God's elect children. He is saved, not from leprosy, but from the scourge of sin, death, and the power of the devil. He lives a life in Christ, bearing the mark of his Savior as he bears his cross and follows Him. He is no longer an outcast as a leper or as a Samaritan.

He has been united with the whole host of heaven and all the saints as one body in Christ. This man is a child of Abraham, a member of the true house of Israel. That is the power of Jesus' words after healing him. In the same way, we return to Jesus in thanks for His gifts to us. Here in the Divine Service, we return thanks for His free gift of forgiveness brought to us in Word and Sacraments. In this life we go to Him to be cleansed and we beseech Him in prayer to intercede for us before His Father in heaven. He is the Temple, the holy place where God dwells on earth. He is our High Priest, who makes intercessions on our behalf that the Father would not bring His wrath upon us. We come to Him to receive peace, that we may then depart in peace with God, as we will sing after the Supper. In the reception of His very body and blood and the hearing of His Word, He proclaims the same to you as He did the leper, "Rise and go your way; your faith has saved you (Luke 17:19)." And that faith will bring all of His elect to the joy of His heavenly dwelling, where we will live in the light of His eternal glory—the glory of Christ, our Temple and High Priest, forever cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, made righteous for His sake alone. Amen.