

INI

Luke 17,11-19

Thanksgiving 2015 — 26 November 2015

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, which was read earlier:

And Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten healed? But the nine — where are they? ¹⁸ Were none found who turned back to give glory to God, except this foreigner?” ¹⁹ And He said to him, “Rise, and go your way; your faith has made you well.”

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: Life can get busy. And when life gets busy, the little social amenities can get lost or even forgotten.

Remember, if you will, when we were children. I’m sure that all our parents taught us to say, “please” and “Thank You.” Perhaps we even had to learn to write “bread and butter” letters – in addition to saying thank you, a bread and butter letter put that expression in writing.

One need only read Ann Landers or Dear Abby to know

that when such expressions of thankfulness are neglected – for whatever reason – people can become deeply hurt.

Often, people write to such columnists to express anguish or hurt or bitterness at not receiving a “thank you” from other family members after having sent a wedding present or done a favor or even after having looked after an ailing or dying relative.

To people who have not been thanked, the silence of seeming indifference is profoundly hurtful. To them it says, “You don’t matter,” or “You’re nothing to me,” or, “So what?”

The all too-human reaction to ingratitude or thanklessness is hurt, or bitterness, or even a tit-for-tat response that can mean family members do not speak with each other for years. Again, from a human point of view, it can take years to overcome such bitterness, and sometimes it is seemingly never overcome, or death overcomes one or the other party before any reconciliation can be affected.

But how is it between people and God? How does God react in the face of the silence of thanklessness or ingratitude? This brings me to my sermon theme for today, “**When Silence Is Not Golden.**” I’ll develop this theme in three parts:

- 1) Ten Are Cleansed**
- 2) The Silence Of The Nine;** and,
- 3) Breaking The Silence**

1) Ten Are Cleansed. In today's lesson, Jesus is going up to Jerusalem with His disciples. In Mark we read why He is going, for Jesus told His disciples:

Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him up to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again. (Mark 10,33-34)

But the disciples do not understand Jesus, and rather than trying to comfort Jesus, James and John ask that they be given places of honor when Jesus comes into His glory. Jesus can only shake His head at such misunderstanding.

But Jesus is taking a rather round about route to go up to Jerusalem, going between the border of Samaria and Galilee.

There, in this borderland, are ten lepers. They are in a small village. According to the Mosaic Law, they cannot dwell in any walled city, so here they are, nine Jews and a Samaritan. As we have read and heard, Jews and Samaritans normally did not associate one with the other, but in the misery of affliction and being outcasts, these ten did associate with one another, since no one else would associate with them.

From a distance they saw Jesus, and they hollered, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

Jesus saw them and told them to go show themselves to the priests. What did Jesus mean? If a person had leprosy, that is, any kind of skin ailment, upon being healed, he or she should go to the priests to offer evidence of the healing. After a period of about eight days they were then to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God.

The lepers heard Jesus and went their respective ways, the Jews to Jerusalem and the Samaritan to Samaria. As they were going, they were healed, they were made clean. Both the Jews and the Samaritan, the foreigner, were completely cleaned.

2) The Silence Of the Nine. Now it happened that this cleansing occurred as they went their ways, but only one of the ten, after having realized what had happened, made a U-turn to come back to Jesus. After the Samaritan returned to worship at Jesus' feet and give thanks, to give glory to God, Jesus asked, "But where are the nine?"

Indeed, a good question. But as we hear Jesus speak, perhaps we can hear the sadness in His voice.

What Jesus did was really a tremendous miracle. The Jews taught that a leper was among the walking dead. Leprosy was considered to be from God and only God could heal this condition. Such a healing was considered to be a difficult as raising some from the dead (see Numbers 12,12) (Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 4.2:745 & 751).

Jesus has broken through the wall of sin separating people

from God and given healing to ten lepers. He is going to Jerusalem, there to be the final sacrifice for sin.

Here on earth, rather than thanks, there is the deafening silence of ingratitude; in Jerusalem, there will be the roar of mockery and betrayal.

Forgiveness, that is, healing, came to the lepers, because of the compassion of Jesus. Forgiveness comes to us as well, because of the same compassion. As Paul writes, “While we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”

The nine who went without a second thought remind us of those children who take the presents at Christmas and run away, overcome with delight at their good fortune, and never giving a word of thanks. Or those who receive wedding gifts and cannot be bothered to give thanks. Or countless others who receive their daily bread – everything that belongs to the support and wants of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, field, cattle, money goods, a pious spouse, pious children, pious and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, discipline, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like – and do not give thanks.

But despite the silence, Jesus bears the burden, the burden of shedding His holy and precious blood for us and the burden of enduring the innocent suffering death that we and all others throughout time deserved.

3) Breaking The Silence. And so only one returned. And

the one who returned was a foreigner, a Samaritan.

To him, Jesus said, “Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well.” Quite literally, the last expression may be translated, “Your faith has saved you.” It reminds us of when Jesus said, “What is easier to say, your sins are forgiven or take up your sleeping mat and walk?”

On the one hand, the nine who were healed and walked away never to return received what we might call temporal blessings. That is, they who had been counted among the walking dead, were now once again normal and had their life restored to them. They could now live normal lives. But they had this newness of life only for the here and now. One day their lives would end and, as all other human beings, they would pass through death. But instead of death being a gateway to eternal life and eternal blessedness and companionship with God for Jesus’ sake, they would enter into eternal death and eternal separation from God.

On the other hand, the Samaritan, returned to give glory to God and worship at Jesus’ feet. He too had been counted as among the walking dead, but his newness of life would last. It would last because Jesus’ word of healing also was a word that gives faith through forgiveness. This faith is a gift from God and this faith looks to Jesus as its author. Just as Jesus triumphed over death, so if the Samaritan continued in the faith given to him by Jesus, when death would eventually come for him he would walk through death to eternal life and blessedness and companionship with God.

To countless millions over the ages Jesus has offered the precious and holy gift of Baptism, which is a washing and cleansing with water and the Word. This is the cleansing that He offered to the lepers as well, but here with just His Word.

There is always the risk that such a gift will be neglected, and like a plant without water or nourishment, faith will shrivel up and die. Rather than the thanks of growing up and listening to the Word of God, there will be the silence of indifference and neglect.

In commenting on this text Luther had some word to which we would do well to listen:

We must live among ungrateful people, but we should not take offense and cease to do good on that account. On the contrary, as Solomon says (Proverbs 5,16) we should “let our fountains be dispersed abroad,” continually do good and pay no attention to the poor thanks we reap. Just so God lets His sun rise daily on both the grateful and the ungrateful (Matthew 5,45). ... for it requires no skill to live with the pious only and to do good to them, but it does require ability to associate with the wicked without becoming wicked yourself. (*What Luther Says*, 4:5566)

But thanks be to God, that in spite of ingratitude, in spite of the silence of thanklessness, Jesus comes to us to forgive, to renew, and to cleanse. And we have been forgiven so that in spite of the thanklessness silence of the world, we may speak the words that Jesus speaks to us.

Conclusion: There may be times when silence is golden. We learned this as children. But as children we also learned to say “thank you.” Silence is not golden when we should be giving thanks. But the silence of thanklessness is not golden, nor, in this case, is meeting silence with silence, the silence of resentment or bitterness.

Jesus met the silence of thanklessness by continuing his journey to Jerusalem. there to be betrayed and to die. But on the third day He rose, and rather than meet silence with silence, He came to a silent world with the Word of Forgiveness, the Word of Compassion, the Word of Mercy. The silence of thanklessness is the silence of sin. But in spite of the silence, Jesus risked His life for us and for a world lying in silence; thanks be to God that He now speaks and gives us a faith that expresses itself in thankfulness. Should we ever find our thankfulness waning or drying up, then let us look again at Jesus’ Cross, where He exchanged His life for ours, where He went through death so that we might have life, a life which continues forever. This is truly something for which we can be thankful. Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

St. Stephen Lutheran Church of the East Bay & Central Valley
21290 Birch St.
Hayward, CA 94541-1538

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