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Trinity 14
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Luke 17:11-19
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

He fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks.

One of the reasons I hear people give for going to Church is so that they can praise and thank God. In fact, this goes right along with the Second Commandment and its explanation:

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.

Call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise and give thanks. Isn't this exactly what we see the leper do in our lesson? He, along with his fellows, while standing at a distance—they were unclean, troubled by their disease, excluded from the community of believers and the worship of God—lifted up their voices to Jesus. Their prayer: *"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."* Jesus answered their prayer, granting them His mercy. And upon seeing that he was healed, the one leper turned back and praised God with a loud voice. He then fell on his face—another way of saying he worshiped—and gave Jesus thanks. Call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise and give thanks.

This, my brothers and sisters in Christ, is an example for all of you to emulate and imitate. This is how you are to come before our Lord and Master, keeping the Second Commandment by using the name of our Lord properly. And this will be the gist of most preaching this week. However, this isn't Gospel preaching. Rather, it is entirely a preaching of the Law. Is it important Law? It most certainly is. Sure, it's not the Law that says, "Stop! Don't even think of doing that!" It also isn't the Law that thumps you over the head, telling you what you've done wrong. Rather, it is an alien use of the Law, providing guidance to the believer. It's still Law, for it demands something you could never do perfectly. It's still Law, because your conscience can still be burdened when you realize that you fail to be as grateful as this leper.

How can you easily tell it's the Law? What's the clue? It's simple, really. The focus is on the leper; the focus is on you; ...the focus *isn't on Jesus*. You need to see what Jesus is doing

here. You need to behold our Lord in all His mercy. It's only then that you can understand why the leper responds the way he does to Jesus.

You see, God doesn't just command you to call upon His name in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks without a reason. He's not the kind of God to demand meaningless and empty acts as a sign of your obedience. And this is where we get back to the reason for coming to Church. God doesn't command you to come to Church—by the way, in case you forgot, God and His Word actually do command you to assemble with the saints and that you are, in fact, sinning when you forsake the assembly, that is, when you don't come to Church—God doesn't command you to come to Church *without a purpose*.

"We come to Church to praise and thank God." Is that statement Law or Gospel? Who's doing the action? We are. Thus, it has to be Law. But coming to Church isn't a matter of the Law. Think about Jesus Himself being the Church. After all, the Church is the body of Christ, and where Jesus is, there is the Church. And the lepers cry out to Jesus. He commands them, "*Go and show yourselves to the priests.*" Jesus tells them to obey the Law, which had been given through Moses, so that they might be declared clean by the priests and thus enter back into the community of believers—the communion of saints, that is, the holy Christian Church.

But the one leper has a greater understanding than the other nine. He responds to Jesus not according to the Law, but according to the Gospel. Once he sees that he has been cleansed, he runs to Jesus. He doesn't go to Jesus because he is commanded—the Law said to go to the priests. No, he goes to Jesus in response to Jesus' mercy and compassion. He needs what Jesus has to offer. He needs the Word of Christ, which our Lord gives to him, "*Your faith has made you well.*"

JESUS IS JUST AS GOOD TO YOU AS HE WAS TO THE LEPER.

You come to Church because Jesus is good to you. The leper turned from the Law and to the Gospel because of Christ's great mercy and love. There's a word for this: *gottesdienst*. *Gottesdienst* is a good German word that means "Divine Service." This congregation doesn't have a "Service of Praise and Worship." This congregation gathers to participate in the "Divine Service"—or, as we might put it, "God's Service." You come to Church so that the Divine—that is, so that God—might serve you with His gifts of Word and Sacrament. You come to receive those gifts. You can thank and praise God wherever you might be,

whenever you want to. It is only before His altar and from His pulpit that you receive His Divine Service. And, of course, God's gifts foster within the faithful praise and thanksgiving in response to His gracious goodness.

I once had a farmer ask me, "Pastor, can't God hear me just as well from my tractor seat as from a church pew?" He surely can. But it's not about God hearing you. It's about you hearing Him and receiving from Him salvation. You don't find salvation on the tractor or your workplace or the classroom. Salvation is found and offered only here in Church. The lepers went to Jesus for salvation, that He might be good to them. Here, in this place, Jesus is good to you.

And how has Jesus been good to you? You were like the lepers, excommunicated from God and His people because of the disease of sin. Yet, the Holy Spirit brought you the Word that there was a person that could heal you of your infirmities: Jesus the Christ. This Jesus then took your uncleanness, took your sin upon Himself, and bore it in His own body. He became alienated from His heavenly Father, crying out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" He who had no sin, became sin for you. He bore that sin to the cross, paying for its consequences in the flesh, dying the death you deserve.

Jesus has been good to you by joining you to His death and burial in the waters of Holy Baptism. He washed you, made you clean and pure, declared you righteous and fit to stand within the assembly of all believers. He is your High Priest—the only priest you need. He made the offering of Himself on the altar of the cross, and now feeds you His own body and blood—for Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb of God, which takes away the sins of the world—takes away your sins. Jesus brings you into fellowship with Himself, with God the Father and with the Holy Spirit, so that you might live and reign with Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.

Live and reign with Him... everlasting. Jesus is good to you, everlastingly. Even amidst the great troubles of this life, Jesus is always good because it goes well beyond this earthly life. His goodness, indeed, goes beyond the heavenly life and toward life everlasting. You may not always feel thankful, for your focus may be shortsighted. After all, nine out of ten lepers didn't see beyond their present sufferings. But the one recognized that there is more to life. More to life, as in, life, true life, is more than this present world with all its stuff. Rather, the leper had a view to eternity and the everlasting.

That's the reason you're in Church this morning, hearing God's Word and preparing to come before His Altar. It is with a view to the everlasting. For, it is in His Word and at His Altar that you receive the forgiveness of sins; and where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation. You are joined with the communion of saints in the body and blood of Jesus. At this Altar, heaven and earth intersect and all the company of heaven is reunited with this assembly of believers here. Here, Jesus continues to be good to you by joining you with Himself and with all those who have gone before you—including this faithful leper.

This, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is His Divine Service to you.

In Jesus' name.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ + Jesus.