

Introductory

This pericope is exclusive to Luke. It is the appointed text for Thanksgiving in TLH, LW, and LSB. It is also the text for Trinity 14 in the TLH one-year lectionary and for Pentecost 21A in LW. The account of the Ten Lepers follows the story about the field hand coming in from a hard day's work, and what about meal prep and the like vis a vis the farmer?

That story ends with rhetorical proclamation that the farmer doesn't thank the farm hand for only doing his duty, and the man ought not to expect thanks. Then the statement to The Apostles that when they have done what He commanded them – their duty – they ought not to think too highly of themselves for it, no more than the hired man.

Most of your hearers have been hearing this account for most of their lives, and it ought to be pretty well-known to the hearer from church services and from hearing it in Sunday School. The basic point is pretty easily understood; Jesus healed ten men of leprosy, and only one of the ten came back to thank Him for that wonderful gift of healing.

Leviticus (13:45-46) dictates proper behavior for a person who has leprosy; "The leper who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry, 'Unclean, unclean.' He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean; he shall dwell alone in habitation outside the camp."

Numbers (5:2) commands that lepers be kept separate; "Command the people of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper, and everyone having a discharge, and every one that is unclean through contact with the dead;" Americans used to be familiar with the idea of quarantine because we used to do it routinely, but not so much these days.

When talking about disease, including leprosy, we need to remember that disease then may well look different from that same disease now. Modern leprosy is a bacterial disease, and what holds true for the modern form of the disease may or may not be true for it in the time of Jesus, and even modern leprosy has variant forms and not all leprosy is the same.

There is also a school of thought that holds to the idea that "lepers" and "leprosy" in the Bible have nothing to do with leprosy, but with "cleanness." They contend that the Hebrew and Greek words were first identified with that disease by Jerome in the Vulgate, Fourth Century. It's an interesting read, and I shall ponder a bit on their arguments at:

<https://www.nlt.org.uk/about/biblical-leprosy/>

I have always thought that the highly contagious nature of the disease was the reason for the separation of lepers from the general population, but upon further examination we find that not to be the case; leprosy is contagious, but not as much as I have thought.

It's thought that leprosy spreads through contact with the mucosal secretions of a person with the infection. This usually occurs when a person with leprosy sneezes or coughs. The disease isn't highly contagious. However, close, repeated contact with an untreated person for a longer period of time can lead to contracting leprosy (healthline.com).

The practice of separating lepers from the rest of the people certainly would have gone a long way towards slowing the spread of the disease, and the public shame of that social separation may have been worse than the disease itself.

A review of the OT concept of "clean" and "unclean" would not be out of order when talking about this text, as well as the meaning of those terms for us, i.e. they mean nothing. Reference the sheet filled with unclean stuff that was presented to Peter in Acts.

This link will take you to *To Touch a Leper*, a very informative piece by Sharon Amari:
http://www.sigcommunication.com/ezine/articles/sharon_amari/touch_leper.htm

This text is more about the one and less about the nine. Preachers tend to focus more on the nine and less on the one, and the effect of that is to talk to people who are in the pew about people who are not in the pew, and a great recipe for creating Pharisees. It may be appropriate to commend people for coming to church, like Jesus commends this man.

Create emotion in the hearer, as well as appealing to the mind. Make the hearers feel the pain, isolation and loneliness of those men, and make them feel the relief and freedom that comes from being cured of that dreaded disease. Make them feel the joy that causes the man to worship Jesus, the same joy that they feel and so they worship Jesus.

In preaching, you may want to ask why only one in ten returned to give thanks to Jesus. One way to do that is to ask the question, and maybe pause and then ask it again and maybe pause and then say something like "they didn't return to give thanks for the same reasons that we don't return here to give thanks" and then maybe name some of those reasons.

For example; in my first parish, a town of 250 in Wisconsin, there were five taverns, each owned by a Lutheran, each of whom was a part of my flock, none of whom could come to church on Sunday morning. Each of them told me that there was no way possible for them to come to church because they were working on Sunday morning, duh.

The reason why people should come to church every Sunday is because of the gifts of God for the people of God that are offered there, as well as to worship Him. Do I have to? If I were passing out \$100 bills up at the Altar on Sunday morning, and another \$100 bill on the way out, would you ask me how often you have to come and get that \$100 bill?

If we are shocked at the ten percent worship attendance that Jesus got, then we should not be. We should rather be used to it because it's what we live with in America. Let's run the numbers. 40% of Americans are members of Christian churches. Of those 40%, how many of them are in church on any given Sunday?

The LCMS congregation that gets 50% of the butts in pew on Sunday morning is doing well, and 1/3 is the norm, and attendance is declining in most of the congregations around here, with a few holding their own, and fewer still increasing. At least people don't blame the Pastor as much as they used to because "that's the way it is everywhere."

The other denominations generally do not do as well as the LCMS, and if you consider that nobody is ever removed from the membership rolls, it's worse than the bleak numbers at their web sites. Their attendance is shrinking faster than ours even though they are the place where those excommunicated or removed from LCMS congregations land.

The Methodist church in Pittsburg, KS was happy to take in the man who had been excommunicated from my church. for unrepentant adultery. Along those same state lines, Till the Killer, the famous Wichita mass murderer, had been a member of an LCMS congregation, who rightly excommunicated him, and he joined another church.

You might want to compare church attendance to that of Christians in the rest of the world, like the Brits or the Germans, whose attendance is barely into the single digits. On the other hand, the Irish and the Poles trend a lot higher, but given the move away from Christian ethics in Ireland, you wonder if anybody is listening to what they're hearing.

When we were there ten years ago, many Irish were talking about becoming "more American," and regrettably they have, overwhelmingly legalizing things like abortion and gay marriage. To answer my own wondering, the first mode of persuasion is ethos; credibility, and the priestly scandals have left theirs in tatters.

Textual Notes

11. It happened "ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ πορεύεσθαι εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ – while He journeyed towards Jerusalem." The verb is a present infinitive, focus on the connection between the person and the act. Earlier (9:51), He had "set His face to Jerusalem, that's where He's headed, and that trip to that place and what would happen there was part and parcel of His person.

He's going via “καὶ αὐτὸς διήρχετο διὰ μέσον Σαμαρίας καὶ Γαλιλαίας – through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.” So, we have Him in Samaria, heading north, towards Galilee, to get to the south and Jerusalem. Robertson points out that,

This is the only instance in the N.T. of *dia* with the accusative in the local sense of ‘through.’ Xenophon and Plato use *dia mesou* (genitive). Jesus was going from Ephraim (John 11:54) north through the midst of Samaria and Galilee so as to cross over the Jordan near Bethshean and join the Galilean caravan down through Perea to Jerusalem. The Samaritans did not object to people going north away from Jerusalem but did not like to see them going south towards the city (Luke 9:51–56) (WP).

We have noted here before that, as he says, the Samaritans would often harass people going from Galilee south through Samaria on their way to Jerusalem. This was due to the animosity on the part of the Samaritans, who thought that the Jews thought that they were better than them, which they did. But if they were going the other way, that was okay.

12. The village is almost never named, and here “ἰσερχομένου αὐτοῦ εἰς τινὰ κώμην – He entered into a certain village” probably because this incident could have happened in any of them, as could have what awaited Him,” ἀπήντησαν δέκα λεπροὶ ἄνδρες, οἱ ἕστησαν πόρρωθεν – ten leprous men met Him, standing far away.”

The verb is “ἀπαντάω,” and it occurs in the NT only here and in Mark 14:13, where the disciples who are sent to fetch a donkey are told that a man carrying a jar of water will “meet” them. The subject of the sentence are the lepers, and the verb is in plural number; the men, not Jesus, initiated the encounter. But they kept their distance.

Luke the doctor makes tells us “they stood at a distance – οἱ ἕστησαν πόρρωθεν.” The adverb “distance – πόρρωθεν” occurs in the NT only here and in Hebrews 11:13, used of those who died in the faith, having seen heaven only from afar. The distance is unspecified, we have a group of unclean men who are used to not getting too close to clean people.

13. Upon making contact with Jesus, “αὐτοὶ ᾤραν φωνήν – they lifted up their voice.” The pronoun “αὐτοὶ - they” is plural, and the verb “ᾤραν – lifted up” is plural, but the noun “φωνήν – voice” is singular. Almost all of the translations wrongly have it plural “voices.” With one voice, an idiom still used today, the leprous men address Jesus

They say, “Ἰησοῦ Ἐπιστάτα, ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς – Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” We are familiar with the word “Ἰησοῦ - Jesus,” but not so much “Ἐπιστάτα,” a word that occurs only seven times in the NT, all of them in this Gospel, always with Jesus as the subject. Looking at those occurrences, the word seems to emphasize His authority.

On at least a couple of occasions it is used by people who need a little bit of help, and who seem to think that He can give it; like here. Here we see a group of ten men who find commonality in their bacterial infection and the subsequent rejection by society, who share the same desire for healing, and who speak with one voice their plea for help,

These men clearly had some awareness of what Jesus could do. It is not uncommon for people with problems to seek out Jesus for help, like these ten do. Luke records (5: 12-16) a previous healing, and word of it had gotten around. They ask only for mercy. Theirs is the posture of people who are well aware of their utter inability to help themselves.

They make no claim to be worthy or deserving of the divine intervention for which they ask. It is the same posture the Christian has when he comes to confession, asking only for mercy from the only one able to help the utterly helpless. This might be a good time to reference or even quote from the Confession of Sins at the beginning of Divine Service.

14. Jesus sees them, and He speaks to them, and that would have been unusual. If you look at photos of lepers on the Internet, it's not a disease that's easy on the eyes. Easy to just pass on by without seeing this collective pariah, even if they were yelling at you at the top of their lungs. People today often have a hard time going to hospital or the nursing home.

And He talks to them as well, telling them “Πορευθέντες ἐπιδείξατε ἑαυτοὺς τοῖς ἱερεῦσιν – having gone, show yourselves to the priests.” “Πορευθέντες – having gone,” is a participle, and “ἐπιδείξατε – show” is in the imperative mood. This was in accord with OT Law (Lev. 13:49; 14:2ff.), which made it the priest's job to make such pronouncement.

Priests in those days were to be found in Jerusalem or Hebron, and some commentators think these ten would have had to journey to Jerusalem – closer than Hebron, but still a considerable journey – to find the nearest priest, but others opine that there were priests scattered throughout the land, and they would have been able to find one closer than that.

It's a moot point; “ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ ὑπάγειν αὐτοὺς ἐκαθαρίσθησαν – it came to pass in their departing they were cleansed.” Like the previous leper, these men were not miraculously healed by Jesus. They are said to be “cleansed,” not “healed,” emphasizing the ceremonial un-cleanness of lepers, and the ceremonial cleanness that comes with the miracle.

Luke talks about “healing,” focusing on one of the ten, saying that “εἷς δὲ ἐξ αὐτῶν ἰδὼν ὅτι ἰάθη ὑπέστρεψεν – one of them, having seen that he was healed, turned around” and spoke. The verb “ἰάομαι – to heal” usually means physical healing, but it can mean spiritual healing which seems to be the case here, that word being juxtaposed with “cleansed.”

It is not clear at this point if the others also saw that they had been healed, but how could you not notice something like that? Is it possible that they saw a miracle happen right before their very eyes, in their own bodies, and did not believe it? Most certainly it is, and such a thing happens all the time, in all times and in all places.

The verb “ὑπέστρεψεν” has the man essentially changing course 180 degrees; he is on his way to find a priest, he sees that he is healed, he turns around and starts walking toward Jesus, for the purpose of thanking Him for what he recognizes to be miraculous healing. The others? They apparently just keep on walking, looking for a priest?

16. But the story is not about the nine, but about the one, “with a loud voice praising God – μετὰ φωνῆς μεγάλης δοξάζων τὸν Θεόν,” which sounds a lot like what we do, especially on Sunday mornings. We note that the verb used here is “δοξάζω – to praise,” less specific than the more specific “εὐχαριστέω – to give thanks” in the next verse.

The one man fell on his face at the feet of Jesus, showing utter respect and reverence, and “he was thanking Him – εὐχαριστῶν αὐτῷ.” The verb is a participle, meaning continuous action. Now the other shoe drops; “καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν Σαμαρεῖτης. – and he was a Samaritan.” This would have been very dramatic in the original telling. Make it dramatic in your telling. That only one man in ten returned would likely have been to His hearers surprising. But to hear that the one was a Samaritan would have been almost unthinkable to the hearers of Jesus, and a surprise, especially coming at the end like it does. God does have a flair for the dramatic. Go ahead and talk about the Samaritans again.

17. In the manner of the modern Lutheran, Jesus responds to the one by rhetorically asking about the nine, “Οὐχ οἱ δέκα ἐκαθαρίσθησαν – were not ten cleansed?” The “Οὐχ” at the beginning of the sentence expects an affirmative answer, and since the question is asked rhetorically – of course they all know the number – He does not wait for an answer,

18. He continues “οἱ δὲ ἐννέα ποῦ – the nine are where?” Do we detect in the question surprise, or is it disappointment, or maybe something like bewilderment? Perhaps some righteous anger, “οὐχ εὐρέθησαν ὑποστρέψαντες δοῦναι δόξαν τῷ Θεῷ εἰ μὴ ὁ ἄλλογενὴς οὗτος – were none found turning around to give praise to God except this foreigner?”

Yes. That is correct. The word “ἄλλογενὴς – foreigner” is a hapax in the NT, and occurs several times in LXX (Septuigent, the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT). Literally, it means “other kind,” i.e. not a Jew. Let us be reminded yet again that modern racism is a product of the Enlightenment and was virtually unknown in the Christian West before that.

When the Romans and the Greeks thought of themselves as being better than the Barbarians and the Jews, which they did, and when the Jews thought of themselves as being better than the Barbarians, which included the Romans and Greeks, which they did, it was about geography and cultural and social superiority, as well as being about race.

It is well-known that the Nazis proclaimed Arian racial superiority in Germany before WWII. Not so familiar is the widely believed idea of Japanese racial superiority that gripped that nation on the other side of the world. The book is *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies* by Ian Buruma and Avisahai Margalit, on Kindle for \$5.99.

Or you can go on the Internet and find any number groups in this and other countries who hawk white supremacy. The Guy on the Radio who says that you can fit them all into a phone booth is right, but that doesn't mean they're not there. As is the case with many subjects, WIK is a good place to start, and just how much do you want to know anyway?

19. Neither is that rhetorical question answered, and now He turns His attention back from the nine to the one who is there, saying to him, “Ἀναστὰς πορεύου· ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε – rising, go, your faith has saved you.” Few translations pick up on the man's faith having “saved” him, preferring such words as “cured” and “healed” and “made whole.”

The verb is in the perfect tense, past action with results that endure, and if the revelation that the man was a Samaritan caught our attention, then this last verse is the real bomb shell. If there was any doubt up to this point, those words tell us that the man clearly is a Christian, i.e. a person who has faith in Jesus, and that faith saves him.

He has worshiped Jesus, and now Jesus has talked about the man's faith, and stated that it is the man's faith that has saved him. Going back to the original cry for “mercy,” we see that the issue here is less about the physical disease and its cure and more about the spiritual disease and its cure, and we're all going to die, and then what?

Law/Gospel

Sick/Healed – The men are sick, and Jesus heals them. There are physical sicknesses, some of which are terminal, and there is the spiritual sickness that is always terminal. Jesus heals both of these sicknesses, now or later. If you're having the Sacrament of the Altar, go ahead and talk about the Sacrament as “the medicine of immortality.” If you're not having the Sacrament, then talk about it more.

Dirty/Clean – It is our sin that makes us unclean in the eyes of a spotlessly holy God. There are hundreds of similes and metaphors to create analogies in the minds of the hearers, things can also be used to convey the cleanness that comes with the blood of Jesus. This would be a good time to talk about the cleansing properties of Baptism. You may want to reference a recent *National Geographic* special edition on water. If you don't have a copy, you can get it in my dentist's waiting room. Btw, if you at some point describe hell as a root canal that does not end, you will create a lot of serious pathos in the minds of any of your hearers who have been so tortured.

Rejected/Accepted – Like the ten men, we are rejected and outcast. Like the ten men, we are accepted by God on account of Jesus.

No Mercy/Mercy – None of these men deserved anything from Jesus. They do not plead with him to heal them on the basis of merit. They plead with Him to give them a healing that they did not deserve, and He does. We plead for mercy at the beginning of the church service and several times during, especially in the Kyrie. Are those words in the hymnal the exact same words used by these men? It's good for people to be reminded that the words we say to God are God's words, and so those words are appropriate.

Sermon Titles

Where's He?

Going to Church

He Was a Samaritan

Hymns

Today Your Mercy Calls Us – LSB 915

God of Grace and God of Glory – LSB 850

O God of Mercy, God of Might – LSB 852 (not familiar, but learnable and singable)

Anything from the long and excellent *Praise and Adoration* section (LSB 790 – 822)

Rev. Steven L. Anderson
Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church
Grand Mound, IA