

October 17, 2010
Pentecost 21

"Cheer Up, Christian, You Are Clean"

LUKE 17:11-17

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" ¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. ¹⁵ One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him-- and he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

I am holding in my hand a jar of pickles. On the outside of this jar it says that these pickles are "Kosher." There are other foods available in Albertsons that are also "Kosher." In some places you can buy meat that is "Kosher." Does anyone know what the word "kosher" means? It is a Hebrew word that means "clean."

In the book of Leviticus God told his Old Testament people that they should avoid certain foods that the Lord considered unclean such as pork, shrimp, and other foods. The purpose of these "kosher" laws was to mark God's people as being different from all other people on the face of the earth. The Lord also used these laws to illustrate to his people the importance of being clean, and pure and holy in his sight. This purity could only be found in the Savior that the Lord had promised to them.

If someone had a skin disease such as leprosy they were required by God to live separate from the rest of the people until they were clean and then pronounced clean by the priest. These lepers were like the people standing along the streets with sign boards pointing to big sales or home sales. Their shouts of being unclean were a powerful reminder to all people that God expects us to be clean before he can accept us and love us.

We have come to this worship service this morning because we know that God wants us to be clean, not 99% clean like ivory soap, but 100% clean in his sight. We gather together deeply aware of how unclean we are because of our sin. Yet, we rejoice together in being clean through Jesus. We love being clean. It makes us feel good. There is the shower in the morning, the clean clothes, the bed sheets that dried in the wind, the house that is clean instead of dirty. This morning we want to celebrate the joy we have together of being clean from our sin through Jesus. It puts a smile on our face, a song in our heart and a spring in our step as we begin another new week of life on this earth.

The need to be clean

The ten lepers who came to Jesus longed to be clean. Listen again to their plaintive cry for mercy. "As they were going into a village ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood

out at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master have pity on us." There is a note at the bottom of my Bible that reads that leprosy is, "A Greek word used for various diseases affecting the skin-not necessarily leprosy." Notice that they were at distance from Jesus. By Old Testament law, they had to stay away from other people. Think of how hard it would be to be away from people that you love. You could not embrace your children, your wife and your grandkids. You had to quit your job. They cry out to Jesus with a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us." They believed that Jesus, Lord and Savior, could heal them and help them.

When we hear how these people were separated from other people because of various skin diseases, we are reminded how sin can separate us from people and their love for us, and even worse, separate us from our God. Remember when you were a little child and being a total brat. Your mom and dad disciplined you. You went to your room and pouted or gave them the silent treatment. Think of how sinful behavior pride, and selfishness and angry words can keep you from being close to other people in marriage, or your family or your job.

Sin also separates us from God and makes us unacceptable to him. Listen to how God described his Old Testament people in Isaiah chapter one: "From the sole of your feet to the tope of your head there is no soundness- only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil." In Isaiah 59:2 the Lord says, "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear." The separation that sin brings is an eternal separation. Ephesians 2 says that at one time we were "with sin and without hope." Sin is like filthy scum and dirt that clings to you and cannot be removed no matter how good you try to be. That is why Romans 3 makes the sweeping statement, "There is none who does good no not one."

People try to look good on the outside, but that does not make us clean on the inside. Jesus told the Pharisees how foolish they were to try and make themselves clean by outward religious acts and deeds. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish and then the outside will be clean." This cup can be clean on the outside, and have something totally filthy on the inside. How can I ever be clean on the outside and the inside? How can I ever be Kosher, or 100% clean and accepted to God on the inside and outside? With the ten lepers we cry out in our worship, and also in our daily life, "Lord have mercy on us! Christ have mercy on us! Lord have mercy on us!"

The joy of being clean through Jesus

Jesus heard the prayers of the ten lepers who called to him for help, just as he hears our prayers for help this morning. "When he saw them, he said, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were cleansed." Old Testament law required that the person who became clean had to go to the priest and be pronounced clean. These ten lepers obeyed the voice of Jesus that called out to them. They started on their way to the home of a priest even though they were still covered with sores that made them unclean. As they went on their way, they were miraculously healed by one another.

If you were acting this out in a movie how would you show this scene of the lepers being healed? Would you not show them suddenly looking at each other in amazement at how the ugly sores were suddenly gone? They roll up their sleeves, they look at their arms, then they look at their legs, and everything is clean, not a spot remains. Listen to them shout for joy and say, "Let's run and show ourselves to the priests so we can be back together with our families and friends. I cannot wait to be home again."

This past week we watched in amazement as Chilean copper miners were pulled from deep under the ground and brought back to their family and friends. My dear Christians, see again this morning how Jesus has rescued us from the pit by making us clean, forgiving all our sin by his precious blood that was shed for us, uniting us with our God. Make the words of Psalm 103, the song of joy in your life. "Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits- who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion."

How strange though that nine of the ten lepers run to the priest to get their pronouncement that they are clean but only one returns first to thank Jesus for the healing. "One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him- and he was a Samaritan." One of the greatest joys in my ministry is to see people who seem so far away from God such as this Samaritan suddenly falling at Jesus' feet and thanking him for rescuing them. Think of the joy that Jesus had when the outcasts of society, the sinners, and even self righteous came to faith in him and knelt before him. Your friend for whom you are praying each day may soon be joining you in kneeling at Jesus feet and giving him thanks. Such is the marvel of God's amazing grace.

This man who returned to thank Jesus really received a triple blessing in his life. He had the blessing of being healed, then he had the blessing of giving thanks to Jesus, and then there was the added blessing of hearing Jesus speak to him and encourage him. Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to give praise to God except this foreigner?" Jesus then said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well." This man was privileged to hear Jesus encourage him to get up and live a whole new life with his family and friends. Not only was healed of his leprosy, but he was given this amazing faith in Jesus his Savior that provided him with the forgiveness of all his sin.

So, Jesus speaks to us this morning. He says, "Rise and go." You are healed. You are washed clean. You are forgiven. You have peace with God. Now live with your husband and wife, family and friends as a redeemed child of your heavenly Father.

I end this sermon this morning with sharing again with you one of the great moments of my life this past year. When Susan's dad was in his final days of life on this earth, I was privileged to be there when he woke up and said so loudly and clearly, even though it was hard to speak, "I am so thankful!" Is that not the theme of your life and mine? "I am so thankful." I am so thankful for being kosher or clean in the eyes of my heavenly Father. This makes me his dear child. This makes his love for me so real ever day. "I am so thankful." "Cheer up Christian, you are clean!" Amen.