

“Unconditional Love”

Dearly beloved, Jesus heals “unconditionally” – no strings attached. When only one of the ten lepers returns to give thanks – Jesus doesn’t withdraw His healing from the other nine – He heals them all.

He sends ten disease-ridden men to the church – “Go and show yourselves to the priests” – “and AS THEY WENT they were cleansed” – even before one returned to give thanks.

This Gospel isn’t given in order to leave you crushed by guilt – but you’ve probably heard it used that way before – a haranguing sermon about your ungratefulness. A sermon that goes something like this – “Just look at all the blessings God has given to you – you’d better show your thankfulness – or He may cut off His blessings to you.”

Rather, this Gospel reveals God’s undeserved love to you in Christ Jesus. It’s true – we ARE thankless, selfish, excessive people. We fail to Realize the daily bread Our Father gives to us – and Receive it in thanksgiving. We take our spouse for granted. We despise certain people at church. And we certainly don’t give thanks for “those people.”

Such is the leprosy of our sin – and yet – the Lord comes to heal us. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

I know, that doesn’t sound right. Jesus should come to punish us. Rather than giving us what we deserve (His punishment and wrath, now and forevermore) – He gives us what He desires (grace, healing from the leprosy of our sin, restoration to God, and life forevermore).

Folks, Jesus has important things to do. He’s on His way to Jerusalem. Why does He pass this way? Why does He bother to enter this village were ten men were afflicted with leprosy?

The Son of God goes out of His way – He comes from heaven to earth – to heal these men. It’s as we confess in the Nicene Creed – that Jesus, “who for us men and for our salvation” – came down from heaven.

The Son of God not only comes down from heaven – but He takes on human flesh and blood – all so that He might endure the wickedness and evil of a fallen world, and suffer the consequences of mankind’s sin. He comes in the flesh and is tempted in all things, just as we are – and yet, He is without sin.

The Son of God comes in the flesh ... to suffer and die. When He was struck, He was bruised. When He was stripped, He was humiliated. When He was whipped, and nailed, and pierced, He bled. When His body gave out from all the cruelties and indignities of His Passion, He died.

That is why Jesus came to these lepers – to take their horrible, wretched disease from them – to take it into His own flesh. He takes away the life-sucking disease of their sin – their shame – their isolation from family, community and congregation. He cleanses them, and gives new life to their bodies.

Jesus sent these men to the priests, and one of them returned, praising God, and “giving thanks.” From Jesus CAME all goodness, all blessing, all health and life – and so this man returns, cries out with a loud voice, falling on his face BEFORE JESUS, and “gives thanks” TO Him.

Jesus sends you to the church – in which Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all your sins, and the sins of all believers. No demands. No strings attached. Jesus forgives, and heals you, unconditionally.

And so you return, falling on your face before the Lord – receiving what He promises and offers – realizing and receiving the gifts He so freely gives – giving thanks, and praising His holy name.

Soon you will leave God’s house. What then? Having been cleansed of all your deadly and leprous sin – what do you do?

You continue to give thanks and praise to God in your day to day life – in what you say and do. Like the leper – you return to your family, your neighbors – and with the new life you’ve been given – you serve their needs – giving thanks to God for all His benefits to you.

Do you ever wonder what happened to the other nine lepers? Did they also realize the gift they'd been given and receive it with thanksgiving? Did they just go back to their lives, ungrateful for the new life they'd been given?

God focuses us on this ONE man who returned to give thanks and praise to Jesus. What happened to him? Jesus says, "Rise and go your way, your faith has [literally] saved you."

"YOUR faith," Jesus says. A faith which trusts in Jesus. A faith that believed Jesus would and could heal him – and therefore, cries out for mercy. A faith that looks and clings to Jesus Christ alone.

That is how HIS faith "saved" him. This Samaritan leper didn't trust in himself. He didn't have faith in HIS FAITH. The object of His faith – the thing he trusted, looked to for all good – was Jesus. In the midst of his sin – in the despair and hopelessness of his sickness – he believed in Jesus.

This is the faith that God creates and bestows on you in Holy Baptism – guards and protects with His Word – and nourishes, sustains and strengthens in His Supper. And so today, you come before the Lord – crying out for mercy. He gives you His Body and Blood and you are cleansed from all your sin.

And now He proclaims to you – "rise and go your way, your faith has saved you." With all His gifts, the Lord has given you the Holy Spirit – who always points you in THE FAITH to Jesus – who saves you unconditionally. Amen.

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