

Thanksgiving, 2021 (11-25) St. Peter Lutheran Church, Doss, Tx “Listening to the Lepers”

*Luke 17:11 As Jesus continued on toward Jerusalem, he reached the border between Galilee and Samaria. 12 As he entered a village there, ten lepers stood at a distance, 13 crying out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” 14 He looked at them and said, “Go show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, their leprosy disappeared. 15 One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back to Jesus, shouting, “Praise God, I’m healed!” 16 He fell face down on the ground at Jesus’ feet, thanking him for what he had done. This man was a Samaritan. 17 Jesus asked, “Didn’t I heal ten men? Where are the other nine? 18 Does only this foreigner return to give glory to God?” 19 And Jesus said to the man, “Stand up and go. Your faith has made you well.”*

What had the ten lepers been doing before they saw Jesus? Have you ever asked yourself that question? We could speculate that they might have been discussing what they heard from a scribe who was in one of their families, who brought food occasionally. He might have said that he’d heard a rabbi with teaching worthy of a scribe. “I made you a copy of a recent sermon I heard this Jesus give while He was sitting and preaching to the crowd in a field of lilies.” He left them the words and lepers though they were, one read for the others the wondrous words of Jesus about how God provides for people. “Read them again,” they would say. And they would hear not only the blessed that held great promise for that day when they could have their fill of food, and the tears of mourning wiped away, but also these words: *Matthew 6: 19 “Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where they can be eaten by moths and get rusty, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 Store your treasures in heaven, where they will never become moth-eaten or rusty and where they will be safe from thieves. 21 Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be. 22 “Your eye is a lamp for your body. A pure eye lets sunshine into your soul. 23 But an evil eye shuts out the light and plunges you into darkness. If the light you think you have is really darkness, how deep that darkness will be! 24 “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. 25 “So I tell you, don’t worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food,*

*drink, and clothes. Doesn't life consist of more than food and clothing? 26 Look at the birds. They don't need to plant or harvest or put food in barns because your heavenly Father feeds them. And you are far more valuable to him than they are. 27 Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? Of course not. 28 "And why worry about your clothes? Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, 29 yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. 30 And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won't he more surely care for you? You have so little faith! 31 "So don't worry about having enough food or drink or clothing. 32 Why be like the pagans who are so deeply concerned about these things? Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs, 33 and he will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern. 34 "So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.*

These words puzzled them for they pretty much did live from day to day waiting for the kindness of someone bringing food or water or a kind word. Sometimes they hid from the nasty names they were called and the rocks thrown at them. They didn't really worry about clothing because they lived in rags just as their bodies were deteriorating in their illness, their clothes were as well. They went back to those words of Jesus: *if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won't he more surely care for you? You have so little faith!* They asked each other: Do you feel cared for? And the response was either 'No, God doesn't want to come near me either. I am not fit for him, but I didn't do anything to deserve this.' Or they might say, "I have to think of God caring for me for I feel His fellowship and it means that I can do all things through Him who strengthens me, all things-even suffer. Another might say, "We gave up asking why we deserved this." Then another said, "But we chewed on the question in reverse. Why didn't we deserve this?" Several said that they were taught that suffering was a part of life and that life was not fair. Others said they were told that their illness was a result of sin. But that was not so in the teachings of Jesus when he healed the young man born blind. Sin was in the

world and it was broken, waiting for a Messiah to fix it. Could this be the man, this teacher who said these things about God's provision?

Another went on to say, I dwell on those words: 22 *"Your eye is a lamp for your body. A pure eye lets sunshine into your soul. 23 But an evil eye shuts out the light and plunges you into darkness. If the light you think you have is really darkness, how deep that darkness will be!*

"We may be without health, without fellowship of people from our hometowns, without food and drink often, without family to love and be loved by, but we do have eyes that can be that lamp for the body as the Psalm said, 'Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.' If we follow His word, we will see where we must go.' 'I would like to meet this rabbi.'" "But if we did," another said, "he might tell us to keep away to avoid contamination, to remain ritually clean as he surely must be." "But I have recognized," said another, "that it is not the light that I make and project on God, but His true Word that comes to me that gives me light and maybe even one day will cure me. We are already living in a kind of social darkness. I don't have to look at how ugly we've become but can look at the stars in the sky. They are there for everyone. Maybe tomorrow, hope will flower into something better."

And so, the night passed and on the next day, something wondrous did happen. One said to three others as they ate stale bread and drink cool water: "Do you remember Jesus' words, *Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs, 33 and he will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern. 34 "So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.* I've thought about the rabbi's words a lot, these words. God will give you all you need from day to day if you make the Kingdom of God your primary concern. I've been trying to figure out how to do that since we are imprisoned here in the wilderness." Another asked, "What about our relationship to each other? If we could treat each other with respect and justice, even love, maybe that would be like focusing on the Kingdom." Another laughed, "This is so funny in a sad sort of way that we who are outcasts are talking about forming a kingdom." But the other came back, "Don't you see that we can do that." The

other promised to think about it just as a third cried out that people were coming. “It’s the rabbi,” two of them shouted. “It’s the rabbi.” They moved toward him out of the rocky boulders not confidently, but cautiously, crying out: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” Then a little closer; “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” Just then He looked at them and said, “Go show yourselves to the priests.” One turned, the second who spoke of the kingdom earlier and how it could be manifest among them and said, “It couldn’t be so simple, could it? Is faith all he asks for? For I know what it means for us to go and show ourselves to the priests. We couldn’t do that unless we were cured.” Another said that they should do as they were told if they were to be faithful. And so, they went and as they went, their leprosy disappeared. One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back to Jesus, shouting, “Praise God, I’m healed!” He fell face down on the ground at Jesus’ feet, thanking him for what he had done. This man was a Samaritan, someone you wouldn’t expect to come back and say ‘thanks.’

Jesus asked the Samaritan leper, *“Didn’t I heal ten men? Where are the other nine? 18 Does only this foreigner return to give glory to God?” 19 And Jesus said to the man, “Stand up and go. Your faith has made you well.”* “Will the others lose their healing, Rabbi?” he asked. Jesus said, “No. It is a gift.” He replied quickly, “But we have been studying Your Word and talking about forming the Kingdom of God among our colony. The other 71 in the colony might catch the vision. Some might come. Some might get out of themselves and come and find You, Master.” Jesus smiled at him and said, “Yes the Kingdom of God has come near to you. Go find your friends and ask them to meet next week after they’ve had a chance to be reunited with their families and friends. Meet and speak of the Kingdom among you, and pray for the Spirit to help you to build it. Come back to the colony as a witness to the truth. Then move beyond yourself in thankfulness to let that Kingdom infiltrate your home and community. Ask yourself what you can do for others and call on God’s Name to help you. For the world wants you to ask: what can you do for me? My followers can’t afford to think that way. You have been healed by faith and by faith you will be saved. Now go, live it!” Amen