

Fourteenth Sunday After Trinity

2026-09-06

Rev. Dcn. Skip Sopschak

All Saints Anglican Church of Traverse City

In our gospel reading for today (Luke 17:11-19) Jesus is "[passing] through the midst of Samaria and Galilee" on His way to Jerusalem. Here we are roughly in the middle of our Lord's final journey to Jerusalem which begins in Luke's gospel toward the end of chapter 9 where it's said that "[Jesus] steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." That leads, by the way, right into the story of John and James, the sons of thunder, offering to call fire down upon a Samaritan village that would not receive Him. This whole part of the text is a travel narrative with the journey to Jerusalem obliquely mentioned here and there throughout.^[1] It is famously non-linear, geographically. A Samaritan village is identified at the beginning, our passage today is placed well north between Samaria and Galilee, and in the interim there is, for example, the episode at Mary and Martha's house (Luke 10:38-42) which we know to be in Bethany very near to Jerusalem. There is disagreement as to whether the route was indeed so circuitous or if Saint Luke is ordering the stories to form a particular literary or theological motif.

Be that as it may, we have Jesus entering an unnamed village between Samaria and Galilee where he is accosted by ten lepers. We may note that people suffering from disfiguring skin conditions were perpetually, ceremonially unclean. It would not have been uncommon for them to congregate among themselves being otherwise excluded from society. These ten are complying with the law which requires they maintain distance from others. They call out to Jesus, refer to Him as Master, and ask for mercy. They do not ask for healing in particular. And Jesus does nothing more than simply tell them to "go shew yourselves unto the priests" (Luke 17:14). Unlike an earlier encounter with an individual with leprosy (Luke 5:12), healing (making clean) is neither explicitly requested nor explicitly performed by touch or word. The law required that recovery from such a condition be certified by a priest who acted in such an instance like a sort of health inspector. In following Jesus's instruction they showed faith at least inasmuch as they believed there was reason to do so. And as they went they were indeed made clean.

^[1] Thomas R. Schriener, *ESV Expository Commentary*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol 8 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 959.

Now it seems clear that the point of this story is not the miracle itself. We already have the account of an individual leper being healed by Jesus told by Luke and shared by the other Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 8:24 and Mark 1:40-44). This story of the ten lepers is unique to Luke. The lesson for us is in what happens next. Having all been made clean, one of them turns around and *comes back*. The other nine presumably continue on to be welcomed back into society by the priests, but one comes back to Jesus, loudly glorifies God, falls on his face at His feet and gives thanks. "And he was a Samaritan" Luke tells us. Jesus acknowledges him and rebukes the others with questions: "Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?" Only this stranger "returned to give glory to God." Only the Samaritan worshipped. And Jesus tells him "Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole." He receives something special, beyond mere physical cure. The literal meaning of the Greek, translated in the KJV as "made thee whole" is "saved you." His faith, demonstrated by an act of worship, *saved* him.

The fact that he is a Samaritan is not insignificant. In last week's sermon we heard the origin story, as it were, of Samaria and the rather low opinion "proper" Jews had of Samaritans. The northern kingdom of Israel had been conquered by Assyria and its people dispersed and intermingled with pagans. The Jews in the yet to be conquered southern kingdom of Judah developed a disdain for their "tainted" relatives that persisted unto Jesus's time. As Fr. Kurt pointed out, the Judeans "assumed a favored status with God" in contrast to the Samaritans. The comparison of the nine presumably Jewish, ungrateful healed lepers with the Samaritan who came back, can be seen as illustrating the error of that assumption. Other examples of Jesus favorably comparing "foreigners" to his own people include The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and His reaction to the Centurion asking for healing for his servant (Matthew 8:5-13 Luke 7:1-10). This story of the cleansed leper coming back to give thanks is notably similar to that of the Syrian Naaman cleansed of leprosy by Elisha (2 Kings 5:15). Which Jesus references when preaching at the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:27), much to the chagrin of his home townsfolk. So this certainly lends weight to the message that Jesus is ministering to Gentile and Jew alike.

But I'd like to return to the point made here about the importance of worship. We could spend quite a lot of time defining it and recounting the evolution of worship through various periods in the Bible. But let's simply observe what our Samaritan did: He loudly glorified God, he fell down on his face at Jesus's feet, and he gave thanks. Praise, humility, and gratitude. I think that's a good working definition of worship. Now let's be clear: Jesus said, "thy *faith* hath made thee whole." And yet worship is on display and Jesus did not object to it, on the contrary His response was pretty positive.

So, why are we encouraged, even commanded, to worship God? Much of The Pentateuch is devoted to detailed instructions regarding it. The Psalms are in great part calls to worship. I'll admit that I have in the past found it troubling that God should seem so desirous of our worship. And, to be

honest, found the tendency of Christians to be praising God at every opportunity to be a bit off-putting. You may not be surprised to learn that C. S. Lewis played a part in setting my attitude aright on this matter.

In his book *Reflections on the Psalms*, there is an entire chapter, "A Word About Praising," devoted to the subject.^[2] Lewis relates having the same reservations I just described. We also share the concern that you may find it a bit silly, but bear with us. We generally disdain the man who expects and enjoys praise and we don't much care for the crowd of admirers indulging him. Lewis admits that "Thus a picture, at once ludicrous and horrible, both of God and of His worshippers, threatened to appear in my mind." He then proceeds to show us the category error this represents. We all find certain objects, of art for instance, maybe cuisine, cigars, something... to be admirable, even praiseworthy. It is also quite natural that, admiring something very much it occurs to us that others should be given an opportunity to enjoy it as we do. We all know an aficionado of something or other, and we may well be one ourselves. We certainly understand the idea of an admirable object. We can take another step and imagine something so admirable that when we find someone who isn't keen about it we suspect there might be something wrong with them. Puppy breath? A beautiful sunset? Beethoven's Ninth Symphony?

Now for a great leap: consider God. Not mere object but the cause of all objects, including ourselves. Ultimate truth. Ultimate goodness. Admirable beyond imagining. If we have any capacity to praise, it is only because of Him. If we acknowledge God, there is no other right attitude toward Him available. As Lewis put it,

My whole, more general difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us, as regards the supremely Valuable, what we delight to do, what indeed we can't help doing, about everything else we value.

God does not need our worship. Despite all the exhortations to praise and worship in the Psalms, He tells us explicitly in Psalm 50:12, "If I be hungry, I will not tell thee; for the whole world is mine, and all that is therein." He wants us to worship Him because, loving us, he wills the good for us. And if we fail to admire that which is most admirable, if we fail to praise Him, to worship Him, there is most certainly something wrong with us. Finally, we notice that praise is actually the culmination of the enjoyment of a good, and that is often enhanced when shared. Enjoyment of the most good Thing is available to all of us. Let us at all times enjoy Him. Let us do it together when we can. Praise God.

^[2] C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harper Collins, 1986), 105.

Our reading from the Psalter today, Psalm 19, depicts this beautifully:

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handy-work
One day telleth another; and one night certifieth another.
There is neither speech nor language; but their voices are heard among them.
Their sound is gone out into all lands; and their words into the ends of the world.

All of creation praises the Creator, the very heavens declare His glory. Time itself, all voices, all language, is praise for Him. We really just need to be aware of our part in that.

Returning to our Samaritan then, his worship of Jesus is spontaneous. Recognizing the divinity of Christ, there was simply nothing else to be done but to fall on his face at His feet. But it was that recognition, his faith, that saved him.

I noticed something interesting about our opening hymn today. The text is by Oliver Wendell Holmes. It turns out that he is not the Supreme Court Justice, but his father. He was a medical doctor but also an acclaimed poet and novelist, friends with Emerson, Longfellow, and Hawthorne. Let's close with his words:

Lord of all being, throned a far,
Thy glory flames from sun and star;
Center and soul of every sphere,
Yet to each loving heart how near!

AMEN.