

**Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan**  
**The Twenty First Sunday after Pentecost**  
**October 9, 2016**  
**Luke 17:11-19**

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

Have any of you ever had to be hospitalized in the intensive care unit? I know some of you have been and many of you at least know someone who has. One thing which strikes me every time I walk into an ICU is how isolated you are in the ICU. You're only allowed to have one or two visitors at a time who need to call before they come in. Plants and animals aren't allowed in. You can't leave the ICU unless the doctor says you can.

What do patients in the ICU have in common with lepers? One thing they both understand is isolation. Lepers were isolated from the rest of the world in Jesus' day. People believed leprosy was easily spread from one person to another. This belief forced lepers to live in isolated colonies where they wouldn't come into contact with healthy people. Lepers who were banished to these colonies weren't supposed to leave them much like patients aren't supposed to leave the ICU.

People hospitalized in the ICU and lepers both face periods of isolation. However, there is a major difference between people in the ICU and lepers. People in the ICU can get better and leave the ICU. Lepers didn't have this option. They were forced to live in isolation for the rest of their lives. Their families didn't want them to stick around because they were afraid of becoming infected. They were rejected by a society which wanted nothing to do with them.

This was the difficult reality which these lepers were facing. They were forced to live in colony which meant isolation from the people they loved. These lonely and desperate men are the men who come to meet Jesus in order to try and gain relief from their isolation. **"Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him."**

Jesus is traveling along the border between the regions of Samaria and Galilee when he meets these ten men. Longing for human contact they have banded together to try and remove their sense of isolation. One day, they hear Jesus is coming. They have heard about Jesus and his ability to heal and they seek him out. They realize this might be their one true shot to live a normal and healthy life. Jesus might be able to end their isolation.

**"As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, 'Jesus, Master, have pity on us!'"** The men find Jesus. They respectfully stand at a distance and beg him for mercy. The word the NIV translates as pity comes from the Greek word which can also mean mercy. I think the word mercy paints us a better picture of Jesus than the word pity does. Why?

I remember a game I would play with friends when I was growing up. We called it mercy. You'd join your hands together and start twisting them around trying to overpower your opponent. This would go on until one of the kids would scream out, "Mercy!" because he was in too much pain and his opponent would stop. Does it sound like this game should be called mercy or pity? Does it sound like the lepers' request?

These men were asking Jesus to do more than to simply make their pain stop and go away. They realized they were asking him to rescue them from a hopeless situation and they believed he could rescue them.

How do we know this? **“As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, ‘Jesus, Master, have (mercy) on us!’ When he saw them, he said, ‘Go, show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went, they were cleansed.”**

What happens when Jesus tells the men to go show themselves to the priest? Do they wait around and dawdle? Do they challenge him and ask why he hasn’t healed them yet? What do they do? They leave immediately showing that they trust he will heal them while they go to show themselves to the priests. Why do they have this trust? They know Jesus will have mercy on them because they know he is a man filled with compassion for the hurting.

Why make such a big deal about Jesus having mercy on people versus pity for them? Chuck understood the reason perfectly. One day (while having a conversation with one of his friends) Chuck started mocking their mutual friend. He called this friend stupid, made fun of the way he looked and the fact he smelled. He mocked the way he talked and walked. He trashed his friend. Yet, who did Chuck see when he turned around? He saw his friend who had heard everything and was crushed by Chuck’s words.

Chuck’s shoulders immediately slumped as the guilt of his words isolated him from his friend. He was faced with two options. He could either confess or try to laugh it off. Chuck chose to confess. What do you think he wanted to hear from his friend? Do you think he wanted to hear him say, “I feel sorry for you that you said those things about me.”? Or do you think he wanted to hear him say, “I forgive you.”? The difference between I feel sorry for you and I forgive you is the difference between pity and mercy.

Have you ever found yourself in Chuck’s isolated shoes because you have done something wrong? It might be against a spouse, child, parent, friend, co-worker or even yourself. We’ve all let people down or wronged them. We’ve all said stuff we didn’t want to or done something we wish we could take back. Not only do we feel a sense of isolation from the person we’ve wronged, but the weight of the guilt is compounded by the fact our sin isolates us from God.

I think each one of us knows what this isolation feels like. It weighs down on us like an 800 pound gorilla on our chest and makes it hard to breathe. It can rob us of our appetite or sleep. It gnaws away at us. We long to have something remove this sense of isolation. We can turn to many places: alcohol, drugs, work, fun in nature, but wherever we turn the isolation follows. We try to run as fast and as far as we can, but we can’t out run it.

This isolation is the reality which our sins bring into our lives. Our sins separate us and remove us from God’s presence. Where can we find mercy which will remove the isolation and restore our relationship with God? We can find it the same place the lepers did. **“We have come into the presence of God, who created us to love and serve him as his dear children. But we have disobeyed him and deserve only his wrath and punishment. Therefore, let us confess our sins to him to plead for his mercy.”**

**“Merciful Father in heaven. I am altogether sinful from birth. In countless ways I have sinned against you and do not deserve to be called your child. But trusting in Jesus, my Savior, I pray: Have mercy on me according to your unfailing love. Cleanse me from my sin, and take away my guilt.”** We came

before our God at the beginning of our service seeking this restoration to God's presence by asking him to have mercy on us by forgiving the guilt of our sins.

We don't want to be banished from his presence forever because of the leprosy of sin. What is Jesus' response to our pleas to be restored to him? **"God, our heavenly Father, has forgiven all your sins. By the perfect life and innocent death of our Lord Jesus Christ, he has removed your guilt forever. You are his own dear child. May God give you strength to live according to his will."** Jesus' answer to our please is a resounding and unmistakable, "Yes, I have had mercy on you."

We confess our sins and beg Jesus to have mercy on us and he does. He has removed the guilt of our sins forever. He has wiped it away as if it never existed in God's eyes. He has thrown it into the incinerator of his love and destroyed it. Jesus showed us this mercy through his death on the cross and has proved it is ours through his resurrection from the dead. Gone is guilt. Gone is the isolation we felt from our sins. We are restored to him by his love for us.

Bask in this glory for a moment. Your sins which isolated you from God and caused you so much grief and hardship are gone. We have had a right relationship established with our God because of Christ. Jesus has shown us the mercy which we longed to feel. He has pulled us out of the isolated wilderness of sin and into the company of his family. He has met our cries for mercy with a mercy which is complete and total.

What is our response to the mercy our master has shown us? **"And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw 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 lepers realized he had been healed on his way to show himself to the priests and he immediately turned around and raced back to find Jesus in order to thank him.

He wasn't quiet about it either. In fact it seems like he made a really big scene. He comes back shouting at the top of his lungs and singing God's praises. He bows down in worship at Jesus' feet thanking him for the mercy he has received. He realizes he has his life back. The leprosy is gone. The isolation is gone. The slow and painful death is gone. He can't keep his joy in. He has to let his praise and thanks loose.

Why would we want to stay away from Jesus and refuse to let our joy out? Why would we want to turn back to a life of isolation from God? Why would we want to rob ourselves of the joy of God's salvation? Yet, when we choose to stay away from God's house, aren't we choosing isolation over restoration? Aren't we robbing ourselves of the joy of our salvation? Aren't we saying Jesus' mercy isn't all that important?

We aren't here because church is a social club or an opportunity to see our friends or because we have to be here otherwise God won't like us. We are here to sing the praises of our master who has had mercy on us because we can't get enough of hearing about his love for us. We rejoice because his mercy has rescued us from the isolation which our sins had plunged us into. We are here to be reminded that Jesus has had mercy on us. Amen.