

Rise Up and Go!

St. Luke 17:11-19

¹¹ And it came to pass that as he was going towards Jerusalem, he was also passing through a region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² And as he was coming up to a certain village, ten leprous men met him, who stood afar off. ¹³ And then lifted up their voice, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy upon us!" ¹⁴ And seeing, he said to them, "Go and present yourselves to the priest." And it came to pass that as they departed they were made clean. ¹⁵ But one from among them, seeing that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, ¹⁶ and he fell on his face before his feet and gave him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ But Jesus answered and said, "Were not the ten healed? Where are the nine?" ¹⁸ Were not found who turned back to give glory to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ And he said to him, "Rise up and go. Your faith has saved you."

In the Name of God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1. Introduction.

It is a great honor and privilege for me to be able to bring the Word of God to you this morning. I bring greetings not only from my home church, the Anglican Church of the Resurrection in San Marcos, California, but also from the Province of the Southern Cone of South America to which you also once belonged and to which God Almighty has called me to go as a missionary.

It is for this reason that your own rector asked me to address you this morning: as a missionary to the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina, hoping to depart for service at the beginning of next year. At the moment, I am travelling through the Pacific Northwest, seeking financial partners with me in missions and ministry, both through prayer and through financial support. I am excited to be able not only to offer Christians and churches in North America the opportunity to be a part of what God is doing south of them in a big way. I would love to speak more with you about this mission; clearly, I am extremely passionate about it!

But, on the other hand, I have *not* come here, as the Apostle Paul say, "as a peddler of the Word of God" (2 Corinthians 2:17), or to preach myself or my own ministry. On the contrary, I come here this morning as God's ambassador to "make known Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2) and without hesitation to "declare to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). We are here to "cast our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2) and to declare the praise of our Lord who "has received a Name above every other name" (Philippians 2:9). So, with this in mind, we turn to the lesson which we just heard in the Gospel according to St. Luke, chapter 17, verses 11 to 19.

At first glance, this may seem like an odd passage for a missions-themed message: at least it seemed that way to me before I dove into it and was confronted with a powerful challenge. The "big idea" of this text is this: ***The powerful salvation that***

Jesus brought incorporates us into his powerful mission. As we unpack this message then this morning, I would like us to take a gander at three ways in which we see this here: first in a *Powerful Purification*, second in a *Powerful Presentation*, and third in a *Powerful Posture*. We begin with the first of these three.

2. A Powerful Purification.

The first central theme in this passage is that *Jesus calls forth a Powerful Purification*. Jesus' miracle here, like all of Jesus' miracles, like all of the Apostles' miracles, and even like all the miracles done among us today, all of them focus on setting forth and showcasing who Jesus Christ is: his character as Son of God and Son of Man, the Messiah who is Prophet and Priest and King, who has given everything he had and was in order to save us and who consequently is worthy of all our worship. And this miracle recorded here highlights the salvation that Jesus brings in powerful ways that we need to examine before moving on to our response to his awesome deeds.

Jesus here is in the process of going to his death, as he has been ever since he “set his face towards Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). On the way, he has been engaged in teaching concerning the Kingdom of God, and in the midst of this journey he comes to a tiny, tiny village. Though what he does here in this miracle and its message warrant unique attention, it all occurs within the context of his going to Jerusalem, a mission the purpose of which is to suffer, even unto death.

He is met on this journey by ten lepers who, standing far off, beg him to have mercy upon them. Jesus, according to Luke, “sees” them. He not only notes their voices and from whom the sound comes, but he gazes on them as they stand immersed in the misery of a skin condition which, regardless of race, language, ethnicity, gender, or class had cut them off from the spiritual and communal life of the people of God and, as a result, from any sense of communion with God.

You see, leprosy in the Covenant that God had made with Israel at Mount Sinai had been singled out by God to be the primary visual aid for helping his people understand sin and the condemnation and guilt which spring forth from it. While “leprosy” did not specifically refer to what today is known as Hansen's Disease, the word referred to skin maladies which went more than skin deep, which could not be simply removed by hygiene or treatments. In order to determine whether this was a serious skin disease like leprosy or a mere superficial disease like acne, when a disease emerged in an individual's skin, that person would go to the priests and asked them to pronounce judgment upon him or her. If the sufferer was found to have leprosy, he or she was cast out of fellowship with the community of God's people until the disease had been healed in a way which was confirmed and verified by the priests.

Brothers and sisters, imagine the feeling not only of impurity, uncleanness, and separation, but of the powerlessness that lepers felt! I myself know something of the

desperation that they must have felt. When I was in my last year of seminary, I began to notice a painful, itchy, and quickly spreading rash on my skin which, despite every possible change I tried to make and every medical remedy I tried to employ not only remained but threatened to take over every square inch of me. I changed detergents and diets, I washed incessantly, and I tried creams and ointments to no end: nothing worked. It was without a doubt one of the scariest times of my life as I, medically uninsured, frantically searched for a diagnosis, prognosis, and remedy for what had become a disease beyond my control.

The problem as it turned out was that my illness proved to be far more than skin deep. At long last, by God's grace I was diagnosed with Dermatitis Herpetiformis, a dermatological manifestation of an auto-immune disorder whose principal effect was felt by my intestines. In fact, unbeknownst to me this disease had been raging my bowels for years without my knowledge, triggered exclusively when I ingested gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye, and barley. When I removed the offending protein in all its forms from my diet, the change that came truly seemed like a miracle overnight! Within days of addressing the root problem, my skin condition cleared up, and I felt like a new man, freed to live like I had not been able before!

This is what Jesus did for these ten lepers: when they were powerless to heal and purify themselves, our Lord Jesus Christ stepped into an otherwise hopeless situation and healed the ten of them. He did not even have to touch them (though he could have done so), he did not even need to pronounce the word of healing (it is simply left implied in his command to go get the priests to verify the healing). But his power to heal may be implicit here, this healing came through him, and through him alone.

You can discern the broader meaning of the miracle and what it says about Jesus, can you not? Whereas Jesus had mercy on those who were afflicted with the outward symbol of the sin, corruption, and guilt that we all possess through Adam, it becomes a powerful token that he is the one who is powerful and loving enough to accomplish the purification for our guilt before the throne of God's white-hot justice. Jesus is, after all, on the road to the city of Jerusalem to accomplish once-and-for-all the perfect and sufficient sacrifice for our sins and for the sins of all who come to him in faith!

Take a moment, beloved, to consider the magnitude of what this means. As the Apostle Paul makes clear in Ephesians, not only were you "separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world" (2:12), you were in fact "dead in your trespasses and sins" (2:1), incapable of repentance, faith, or spiritual life before him. "But God who is rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us ... made us alive together with Christ." (2:4-5) In fact, you "who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace" (2:13-14).

As Paul puts it elsewhere, “In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself ... for he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:19, 21).

Believe me, apart from your own doings, your own efforts, your own provisions, your own talents, your own goodness, or your own merits, God loved you enough to seek you out and redeem you through the death of his own beloved Son. Rather than pour out his well-deserved and painfully just wrath upon you, he poured his wrath upon his beloved Son as he hung cursed upon the cross. And because of the purification wrought by his perfect sacrifice, apart from your own power or works, you are forgiven your sins and stand righteous, perfect, accepted and loved before God despite the fact that you indeed continue to sin in so many ways.

How do we receive all of this? Jesus is clear: it is through faith that we are saved. Just as the lepers trusted that Jesus could heal them, implicitly depending on the word of Jesus who could have mercy on them and make them clean, we are saved by believing, trusting, relying, and resting on Jesus alone to be our Savior, the One who not only died for us but who rose again from the dead to make us his forever. It is by liberating our gaze from ourselves and abandoning ourselves to his grace that we are caught in his hands and kept safe forever. Through faith we receive the forgiveness of our sins, new life in the Holy Spirit, adoption as God’s sons, and the hope of Resurrection in the age to come.

Let me here at this point in the sermon urge you: never let go of Jesus Christ! Cling to him and to that saving work which he reminds you of here and now! Remember the Gospel and stake your very life upon it!

3. A Powerful Presentation.

The second central theme in this passage is that *Jesus calls for a Powerful Presentation*. Unlike other healings, resurrections, and miracles that Jesus did with (apparent) secrecy, this time he sends out the lepers to bear witness to the remarkable healing which he has already decreed to occur as they depart.

Remember, as we noted before, Jesus commands these lepers to present themselves before the priests in conformity to and fulfillment of the Law in the Old Testament. Lepers would be examined under quarantine before being allowed to offer the necessary sacrifices and then to return to the worshipping assembly of Israel. But there is more than simply this brute paperwork going on in the details of this passage.

Jesus’ words to the lepers indicate a kind of commissioning. The language construction here reflects the sending out of emissaries with a message or a task on behalf of another. Jesus uses this language when he sends John’s disciples to report back to the Baptist what they had seen and heard (Luke 7:22), when he sends the

Pharisees to speak defiant words to King Herod (Luke 13:32), when he sends Peter and John to prepare the Passover (Luke 22:8), and when he gives his disciples the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19). This kind of representative language is deliberate, and is reinforced by the use of other words in the context.

We pointed out before in the first verse that the context of the passage is Jesus' "going" to Jerusalem. While in general Luke tends to be relatively creative and florid in his use of travel, motion, and going vocabulary words, he here uses the brutishly simple word of "going" or "walking" (*πορεύομαι*) to describe Jesus' purposeful plodding to Jerusalem. Luke then turns around in context and reuses the same word twice: once as Jesus directs the ten lepers to go to the priests, and again as he bids the thankful Samaritan to arise and depart. What is going on here?

I am convinced that Luke is echoing the intention of Jesus himself to refuse to disconnect healing, whether of purification of skin or purification of guilt, from becoming the act of becoming his disciple in such a way that the life of the disciple becomes conformed to the pattern of *his* sacrificial life. As he himself was sent by his Father on a mission to testify to the truth (John 19:35), a mission which would lead to certain death, he sends these men out to be heralds of his kingdom, bearing witness to the Savior by bearing in their bodies the marks of his salvation. By being sent as he was sent (John 20:21), by going as he went, Jesus calls these men to join him in his Father's mission. He calls them to present him before the world by presenting themselves before the world as co-laborers and co-witnesses of his salvation.

This is reinforced as he commissions the Samaritan to go right after he comes back. You see, this outsider seems to have come to the realization faster than the other of who Jesus *really* was: the Great High Priest who is able to make him clean. Rather than be validated by the Levitical priests, types and shadows of the Old Covenant, he goes to Jesus to receive *his* pronouncement of cleanliness, and to place himself at *his* service. At this point, Jesus knows that there is no need for this man to show himself to the priests to verify the clean skin of the man. Nevertheless, he commands this man to go! He sends him away with the same word with which he sent away the others. But he gives him the fuller message: that the Messiah has saved him through faith.

The principle being expressed through Jesus' words to the ten lepers and especially to the one who returned is that when Christ brings salvation, he also brings a commission. We are commanded to "Go and make disciples of all nations," as Jesus puts it, "baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all the things that I have commanded" (Matthew 28:19-20). If we are saved in order to reflect the image and glory of the one called "who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9), then we must recognize that "as the Father has sent Christ, so is he sending us." (John 20:19). We

may go as broken, sinful, helpless people, but when he sends us with his commissioning, he sends us with the power of his Holy Spirit. We have nothing to fear.

Of course, while this “going” that we are a part of extends to those with whom we share culture, language, custom, and location, we cannot ignore the “going” in “go”, the crossing of cultural boundaries to bear witness to the death and resurrection of the Son of God. This is highlighted so clearly in this passage by the fact that it is the Samaritan who is the one who most clearly understands the magnitude of the healing and the character of the Healer. A cultural outsider, one who was despised, not only received the Gospel but was commissioned to share it wherever he went.

And this is one of the joys of living at the time that we do now. It is easier than ever for us to be a part of missions through the blessings of modern communications technology which can inform our prayers and express our thanks, distribute resources, and direct people who have a passion to serve God. And it is not simply rich countries sending missionaries to poor countries anymore. I have met missionaries sent from Argentina to Spain, from Nigeria to the United States, and even from Kenya to New Zealand to head up a missions society sending missionaries from New Zealand to Southeast Asia. God’s heart for sinners is igniting a passion for the Gospel and missions around the world for the glory of his Name!

I have felt the call of God in this regard; the question is, have you? Are you willing to wash the feet of others as he has washed yours, to forgive others as you have been forgiven, to love others as you have been loved, and to go to others as he has come to you? I call you, here and now, to present yourself powerfully to him for service and to present yourself powerfully to a watching world so that they can see in you the incredible riches of his glorious grace!

4. A Powerful Posture.

The third central theme in this passage is that *Jesus calls us to assume a Powerful Position of worship*. In the last point, we were focusing on the similarity between the mission of Jesus and his commissioning of these former lepers, but in this third point we are drawing a contrast and distinction between the ten lepers who initially confronted Jesus along the road, nine of whom did not change at all on the inside, and the one leper who returned to glorify God and give thanks to Jesus. We can set forth the contrast simply by looking at the posture of these men.

At the beginning of the narrative the ten lepers confront Jesus, lifting up their voice to him that he might heal them. Luke records two aspects of their approach to Jesus. First of all, they were quite a far distance away. They could not come close because of the curse of uncleanness, but for whatever the reason, they kept away from Jesus, and could not assume a relationship of intimacy or closeness with him. Second, they were

standing, assuming a position of parity and equality with Jesus. Though they greeted Jesus as “Masters” (literally, “the one who stands/has a status above”), their erect posture does not communicate the submission that their words would appear.

Behold, what an incredible change this purification brought to the leper who returned! Before, he lifted up his voice to Jesus for mercy, but now he cries out with a loud voice and gives glory to God: you can imagine the incredible joy that he contagiously felt! But the change in his posture is even more remarkable. This man falls on his face at the feet of the one whom he called Master, and thanks him from the bottom of his heart. Not only is he completely submitted in worship to the one who saved him, the distance that once existed between him and Jesus is removed at the feet of this Master in a new measure of intimacy through worship.

Intimacy through worship. In that position, the one from among the ten finds life. Jesus commands him to “Arise!” to rise up and stand. This is not just a sign of acceptance and good standing as the Master bids him get up, nor a rejection of the obeisance owed to Jesus as Savior and Lord. Rather, the word here is a word that regularly is used in the New Testament to refer to the act of being raised up, rising again, both of Christ’s own resurrection and of ours as well. As he humbly worshipped and thanked the Lord, this man was given the promise and power of a new and unending life from the very Giver of Life.

This is why worship is so important in the life of the Church as it seeks to be obedient to the Great Commission that Christ gave us as he returned to his Father. It has become fashionable of late to say that the Church, at the core of its identity, is fundamentally defined by mission: what we do in the world for God. But in this vignette here, it is the nine lepers who fail at discipleship who are associated with a purely mission-oriented perspective. It is the one leper who, though sent, turned himself around to give thanks to Christ and who glorified God. This man was able to be sent as the effective witness to Christ the Savior. Going as a group, the nine could have returned with the one, but they were too intent on obeying Christ that they had no use for worshipping him.

In this sense, author and pastor John Piper is right: worship leads to missions at the same time that the goal of missions is to increase the worship of God. We can only serve God as his witnesses, martyrs, or saints insofar as we spend time with him, enjoy his presence, call upon his Name, sing praise to him, and thank him for his goodness and steadfast love to us.

I will never forget the counsel which Archbishop Greg Venables of Argentina gave me over two years ago on a rainy night on the way to dinner. I had very little time with Archbishop Greg: he was headed out very soon to a small little conference called the Lambeth Conference, and this was one of my only times to speak with him during

the time that I was on a break from seminary, serving as an intern at a church in Buenos Aires. In the process I was desperately trying to keep the water off his head with the umbrella and failing miserably at it, but he was gracious enough to let me ask him a few questions despite my incompetence with the umbrella.

I decided to ask him what advice he would give to me, a young candidate for ordained ministry, in our age of chaotic church politics and cultural struggles. Without missing a beat, he replied, “Be faithful in the disciples that only God sees.” In other words, spend time with him in prayer, reading Scripture, and simply being with him. There will be no accolades, praises, or pats on the back, but it will empower a person for ministry to be with the God on behalf of whom he is ministering. And so I was reminded that I would and will be an effective minister of the Gospel as God himself desires only when I cultivate a relationship with him, pursuing intimacy with him in the Holy Spirit.

Extending this principle to our corporate mission as a church, we will have passion, force, and effect in our mission in the world to which God calls us only to the degree that we draw close to him in worship: through meeting him in Christ through Word, Sacraments, Prayer, and Song. This time of worship is not just the climax of a week of service: it is what sends us forth and fills us up for that service in the coming week.

In a posture of worship, thanksgiving, and humility, we find ourselves precisely where God desires, and as a result strengthened and empowered more to serve him. There is no alternative to submission to and intimacy with our Savior and our God!

5. Conclusion.

The contemporary church in the United States tends to suffer from what I like to call “spiritual pneumonia” (if that is not in fact a little redundant). Pneumonia tends to discourage a person from either exhaling or inhaling, or both. Yet, as we know, in order to exhale one has to engage in both, or engage in none at all.

Churches can tend to focus foolishly on mission or on worship to the exclusion of other. They throw themselves into mission, deemphasizing worship and communion with God, or they throw themselves into experiencing God in worship, teaching, and fellowship while neglecting outreach, evangelism, or cross-cultural missions in the process. But, if we are truly filled with and constituted as the Church of Jesus Christ by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, we must resist the temptation to throw ourselves into merely one of those, choosing rather both to exhale and inhale rather than limit ourselves to one, or we risk suffocating ourselves and the life of our churches in the process.

The answer to this problem, the treatment for spiritual pneumonia, is to come back again and again to the Good News of Jesus Christ. By repeatedly marveling at his holy

Incarnation and righteous Life, his blessed Passion and horrendous Death, his mighty Resurrection and glorious Ascension, we find a ground for hope, a reason for thanksgiving, and a push toward mission such as they will *never* go out!

It is good news because we, like these ten men in our story this morning, were spiritual lepers, rotting away in sin, and Jesus has brought us healing. Let us give glory to God, let us lift our voices and bow our bodies to him who lifted his body to the Father and bowed his corpse to the grace for you and me. Let us be grateful for having received from his nail-marked hands a kingdom not made with human hands and which can never and will never be shaken. Let us wait eagerly for him, knowing that he is the hope of nations, and that he will resurrection and transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body forever.

So now, O Bride of Christ, to this Jesus Christ be glory and honor, power and dominion, the nations and ourselves, forever and ever. Amen.

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