

*St. John Lutheran Church*

*The Sermon*

*Rev. Andy Rutrough*

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Sermon, October 9, 2022

Luke 17:11-19

Well, the Center for Disease Control still has us here in Jefferson County in the green zone with regard to Covid-19. This is wonderful. I am so thankful to be able to worship without a mask, and to see all of your faces clearly.

Of course, it is likely we will have another surge, as we have for the last two years, here in fall and winter, with Thanksgiving and Christmas gatherings coming up. Then, if CDC puts us back in the red zone, we will go back to masks, not just because we are trying to look out for our own safety, but rather because there are people with immune deficiency from medical conditions or age, both in this congregation and our community, that will be put at higher risk if we don't wear a mask.

Indeed, one of our own people, Merle Dahl, died of Covid. Some of you remember Merle. He was in his nineties. Even though he and his wife, Alice had suffered great tragedy in their lives, the lost a son when he was a teenager, nevertheless, they both showed a thankfulness, a good-hearted, good-humored gratitude that was contagious. Merle had received his vaccine and he was at a party with two other friends. One of his friends said, "I've had my vaccine, I don't need to wear a mask, so he took off his mask. All three of them got Covid. Two of them died, and one of those two was Merle.

So, vaccines matter just like measles and smallpox vaccines matter. And masks matter, especially when we are in the red zone.

I think, right now, we are traveling through a boundary land, a border-zone. Covid-19 does not have the hold on us that it used to. We are not stopped dead in our tracks. We have vaccines. We have treatments, thanks be to God. We are not in the depth

of the pandemic. But on the other hand, it's not over yet. We may be sick and tired and done with covid, but Covid is not sick and tired and done with us.

We are in an in between time. A borderland.

In the Gospel lesson for today, Jesus and his disciples find themselves in an in-between place, a borderland. They are passing between the territory of Galilee and Samaria. Galilee, where Jesus grew up, was primarily Jewish. Samaria was Samaritan. The two religions were very similar. They both worshipped God. They both held the first five books of the Bible to be Scripture. But they had bad history with each other. And the Jews worshipped at the temple in Jerusalem, while the Samaritans worshipped at Mt. Gerazim.

Jesus was in a borderland.

Sometimes I think we are in a borderland in our congregation, with regard to politics as well as Covid-19. It's election season. Whoopee. In our congregation, we have some folks who might call themselves conservative, and some folks who might call themselves liberal, although I hate using those terms because they have changed so much over the years I don't know what they mean any more. But we are in an in between place.

Now, the thing about an in-between place is that it's kind of hard to tell who you are. If you are a Jew in Galilee, that's fine. You belong. Everybody else is Jewish. You know who you are. If you are a Jew in Samaria, you know who you are as well. You are the outsider, the one who doesn't belong. The Jew among Samaritans.

In a borderland, not so easy to say. Who are we?

Then, ten men come to Jesus. They have some kind of horrible skin disease. Our translation calls it leprosy, but it's probably not leprosy as we know it today. Something that makes them look like walking corpses, the walking dead. And they say "Jesus, Master, have mercy." The word for "master" in Greek is "Kyrios," Lord. "Lord, have mercy," is what they are saying. "Lord, have mercy." Where have we heard that before? From our own lips.

The pandemic has pointed out to us some other diseases that are a lot more destructive than just a virus that can kill us. It has pointed out diseases that are worse

than death. Diseases of the soul. Pride, selfishness, resentment, hate, laziness, dishonesty.

The pandemic has pointed out vast disparities in wealth, between rich and poor, both in our nation and in the world. Which, there is nothing particularly wrong with wealth. In fact, wealth can be kind of cool. We might say, "I would like to save up and purchase a boat, so that I can go out on the lake with my family and sit with the sun shining off the water and fish, and maybe go swimming." Wealth can be a cool thing.

The problem comes when we hoard our wealth while other people starve. That's not okay.

We're working on it. We're working on issues of hunger and poverty. We've made some progress but conflict and climate change have slowed us down. That's a wholly different sermon there.

It's just, you can't have wealth and not care. We can disagree about how to deal with poverty. But you still have to care about poverty. You can't be Christian and not care.

The pandemic has pointed out vast differences of wealth and poverty, about which we are required to care. The pandemic has pointed out differences between the quality of health care you will get if you are White or Asian, versus if you are Black or Latino or Indian. Vast differences in education, in housing, all kinds of things.

These are symptoms of disease, diseases in our souls. We call those diseases sin. We may walk around looking fine. All our medical tests may come back healthy at the doctor. But when the angels look at us, they can see our souls. And to the angels, we look like the walking dead.

"Lord, have mercy."

So, we come to church. We kneel down and we ask God for forgiveness. And then we stand up, and what do we do after that? We sing.

The men with leprosy come to Jesus, "Lord, have mercy," they say. Jesus tells them to go, show themselves to the priests in the temple.

Notice, by the way, Jesus does not specify which priests at which temple they should go to. He does not specify whether they should go to the Jewish temple in Jerusalem or the Samaritan temple at Mt. Gerazim. No, he doesn't. Maybe Jesus is not quite so concerned with our differences as we might think.

Jesus says, "Go." And they go. Jesus has not cured them yet. They have no evidence that they will be freed from their disease. They have no proof, but they go. And as they go, they are healed.

We come to church because we believe there might be a beauty, a power, a life, a hope out there that is deeper than we are, that loves us. Already, when we come to church, we are thinking about something greater than just us. Already, Jesus has begun to heal us.

That healing doesn't happen all at once. Our whole lives are a journey of healing, we are not perfect We do not have all the answers. We are always learning and growing.

But that healing is real, because Jesus saves.

So, immediately after we kneel down and ask forgiveness, and hear God's forgiveness for us, we stand up, and we sing.

In the Gospel lesson for today, one of the ten men with leprosy comes back and he gives thanks for his healing. He's a Samaritan, a foreigner.

In some ways, so are we. We do not have Jewish heritage, most of us. We are foreigners too.

But Jesus says to the man, "Go, your faith has saved you." Greek word is "Sodzo," It means healed, made whole, or saved.

This is who we are. On our journey of healing, we come back also and give thanks. In the borderland, in the in between times, we are the people of hope, the people of the cross, the people of gratitude.

We are grateful for the breath in our lungs, the love in our relationships. We are grateful for this bright earth around us. We are grateful that the love of God is at

work in our world and in us, that there is hope. So, we make our lives an expression of that gratitude. We try to love ourselves and our neighbors. We try to care of the creation, stand up for justice, celebrate life. We stand up, and we sing. And we hear the word of God. Then we sing again. And we share communion, which is called the Eucharist, which means, literally, "Thanksgiving." Then we sing again. This is what we do here. This is what God does in us and through us again and again in our everyday lives out there, as well. A people of thanksgiving.

Thanks be to God.