

“The Faith of the Lepers, the Love of Christ”

Based on Luke 17:11-19

Preached on Sept. 1, 2024

Grace, mercy and peace are yours from God our Father, and from His Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Fellow baptized saints, it's a very simple history St. Luke records for us this morning. And yet one of the greatest. Ten Lepers. One Lord and Master. Ten beggars. One gracious giver. But what does it give us? What does it teach us?

Last week Jesus was teaching us all about grace, this week He's teaching us all about faith. We're not going to focus on the returning leper who thanks Jesus this morning. We'll save that for Thanksgiving Sunday when we'll get this text again. Instead, we're going to focus on the incredible examples we're given leading up to that. What is faith Lord? And what is it not? How mighty is this trust that clings to nothing but Christ? And what grows out of it?

Faith and love. These are the two things our Gospel teaches us about this morning. In the lepers it teaches us faith. In Christ it teaches us love. And this is the beginning of the Christian life, dear ones, faith and love, they always go together. Faith receives. Love gives. Faith brings you to God. Love brings you to your neighbour. Through faith you permit God to do you good. Through love you do good to your fellow man. For whoever believes has everything from God, and is happy and rich. The believer needs nothing more, having received the entire kingdom as a gift, and so orders their entire life for the good and benefit of their neighbour, and through love does to neighbour as God did to them through faith. Receive all good from above through faith. Give all good out through love. Simple. Beautiful. Let's take a look.

The lepers show us three important attributes of true faith, and they are absolutely incredible. Are you ready? Number One: Faith doesn't doubt. No, it presumes to trust God's grace. Yes, you heard that right. Faith allows no room for fear. It boldly counts on God's grace. Dares to believe and presume that God is so good and gracious He will never forsake faith.

Now, this is not to say we don't doubt. Each of us is wrestling with the old Adam and his unbelief. Of course we doubt. But faith does not. Faith is our bold defense against fear. Faith has the audacity to throw itself at God and expect nothing but good. Faith doesn't wonder whether God is good. It takes the liberty to count on His eternal goodness. It is brave. Bold. Almost rude. And that's the way God wants it.

For where there is no such vision and confidence, there is no true faith, and there is also no true prayer nor any seeking after God. But where true faith exists it makes us bold, makes us want to bring our troubles to God, and ask for His help. It is not enough for you to believe there is a God. Look at the lepers! They have such a good opinion of Christ and are so certain He would be gracious to them, that they are moved to cry out to Him with a loud voice from the bottom of their hearts. There is no wavering or unwillingness here. Our weak, powerless doubt doesn't do this. Doubt does not go forth, nor stand, nor cry out, as these lepers do to Christ. No, doubt turns and twists and hangs its head. It clutches its own hands. Opens its mouth only to stammer, “oh, who

knows? Who knows? What if? What if?” Unbelief and doubt have no favourable view or thought of God, nor do they expect anything from Him.

But faith, faith does not doubt the good and gracious will of God. Do you see it? Do you see this good inclination, this comforting trust, this free presumption toward Him, or whatever you want to call it? In the Scriptures it is called Christian faith and a good conscience. It is salvation. And it is not obtained, not in any way by human works, for without such a pure heart and faith in God no work is good. In this way you see what a living and powerful thing faith is. It creates a whole new heart, a new man Paul says, who expects all grace from God, and takes every trouble to Him.

That's attribute number one: faith doesn't doubt. It presumes. But the lepers show us more about faith. Number two: faith doesn't want to know if its worthy, but focuses only on Christ. It doesn't ask whether or not it will be heard, but looks only to Christ's goodness. Oh, the old Adam wants to know if he's worthy. Unbelief questions whether it will be heard. But not faith. Look at the lepers! Which of the ten had a letter and seal that Christ would hear them? Where have they had any experience or feeling of His grace? They've certainly heard of His goodness from others, but have they known it themselves? They haven't. Then what do they have? A true surrender to the depths of His uncharted, untried and unknown goodness. They have no idea what He will do, nor do they need to know. They count only on His goodness, which fills them with such courage that they believe He will not forsake them. And He did not. He gave them more than they could possibly have expected. Cleansing and healing of body. Confirming and strengthening of faith. Restoration to their families and communities and life of worship. Faith needs no assurances ahead of time. It simply sees Christ and believes in His goodness.

Alright, attribute number one: faith doesn't doubt. It presumes. Attribute number two: Faith doesn't want to know if its worthy, but focuses only on Christ. The lepers have one last attribute of faith to show us. Number three: faith allows no merit, but depends only on the unmerited favour of God. I'll tell you, if faith wasn't incredible before, this is where it rises all the way to heaven. For faith doesn't try to purchase the grace of God with works, like the hypocritical old Adam tries to do, but instead it brings with it pure unworthiness. It clings to and relies only on grace. Faith will not tolerate works and merit in its company. It hopes in a goodness so great, and surrenders so fully, that it must go up alone to receive it. A goodness so high, that all good works are nothing but sin when compared to it. No, faith finds only unworthiness in itself, in comparison to what it seeks, and doesn't bother to deny it, but freely confesses it, for the sake of the grace it trusts it is to receive. Look at the lepers! What good have they ever done to Christ? They have never even seen Him before, how could they have served Him? And have we acknowledged that they are lepers, that is people with a visible, contagious skin disease, that the Law in Leviticus 13 would justly tell others to avoid? If any of this is based on worthiness, Jesus should have nothing to do with them. But it does not. Not for our gracious Lord, and not for the faith of these lepers. The dynamic is incredible. Faith stands far from God, yet it goes to meet Him and cries out to Him, for though it knows it is unworthy on its own merits, it all the more fully depends on His highly renowned and loudly praised goodness. A soul with faith seeks Christ's favour, while it is humble and empty. For it cannot allow any of its own goodness to get in the way, but desires to be filled with the highest good alone – the grace of God. True faith will not have it any other way.

Dear ones, do you realize what this means about us? It means no matter who we are, we meet together and find unity in this faith that lives only by the grace of God. In true faith and grace the battle is over. There is perfect agreement. Gone are the selfish desires. Free is God's love and favour. And free are all those who receive it from Him, to also give it freely to others. For it is never decreased, reduced or lost from the one who gives, but instead grace abounds all the more, as has been happening since it was first proclaimed.

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Faith and love. The lepers have instructed us how to believe. It is Christ who teaches us to love. Love does to our neighbour as it sees Christ has done to us, as He said, "I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." It is as if He said, "Through me – in faith – you now have everything that I am and have. I am yours. And you are now rich and satisfied through me. I haven't done any of this for myself, but only for your sake, and I think only how to be useful and helpful to you. Therefore, consider this example, to do to each other as I have done to you, and only consider how to be useful to your neighbour, and do what is useful and necessary for him. Your faith has enough in my love and grace, so your love shall also give enough to others."

Faith and love. The Christian life. Free and joyful. A kingdom within us. Created and sustained by God, by His Word and Spirit. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.