

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

CLEANSED, HEALED, AND SAVED

Luke 17:11-19; Proper 23C-Pentecost 18C; October 11-12, 2025

Our whole lives we have heard in Sermons how leprosy made people unclean before God and how people with leprosy were separated from the rest of society unless healed and declared clean again. The ten lepers in the Gospel needed Jesus' help. Leprosy still exists but it is treatable and curable. This could make it hard for us to relate to those in Bible times who suffered with it. This could lead us to think that their situation doesn't apply to us anymore, but we would be wrong. It might not be leprosy that makes people unclean and removes them from society these days, but there are many other things that do.

For example, people defiled by physical or sexual abuse often struggle to feel clean again. They feel shame and embarrassment over what happened; they often blame themselves, as if being victimized was somehow their fault. They fear others will find out their secret and withdraw from others as if their uncleanness were contagious. They feel that they are broken and can never be fixed, that they will never belong with the rest of the "normal" people. They see themselves as unclean and that they won't ever be clean again.

Feeling unclean can also be the result of falling into a sin that ruins our lives. In this case, the sinner brings on him or herself some great shame. It might be a sin that led to a broken marriage and divorce. It might be a moral failure or criminal conviction that marks you as one of the "bad" people in the community, causing you to lose your job or career. Your failures might stalk you for the rest of your life.

Both being a victim and a perpetrator of evil can make us unclean to ourselves and others, and also unclean before God, making us think that we cannot come into His presence anymore.

There are also physical and emotional "leprosy" that exclude and isolate people from their families and community. Having chronic illnesses and weaknesses from old age can isolate us so that we feel like lepers. We can't take care of ourselves; our bodies fail us; we lose mobility and the ability to decide what to do and where to go. We become isolated, feeling useless, excluded, and unwanted. The deaths of loved ones isolates us even more. We are no better than lepers.

Christians suffering from mental illness can feel that they don't belong in the church because they think that their faith is not strong enough. They are anxious and depressed, knowing their minds and hearts are broken and weak. Their faith isn't strong enough to move mountains; some days they don't have the strength or will to get out of bed in the morning, much less accomplish anything worthwhile. They feel worthless. Worthless: that's what people have been saying they are their whole lives; that's what they say to themselves every day. They doubt anyone could love or accept them as they are; certainly, they are not worthy to be considered a child of God! They feel they don't belong; they feel like lepers.

Maybe none of those examples applies to you, yet the account of Jesus cleansing and healing the ten lepers applies to all of us. Didn't we all confess at the beginning of the Service today: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us... We confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned"? Our sinfulness makes us just as unclean before God and one another as those ten lepers, and there is nothing we can do to make ourselves clean. All of us are like the lepers Jesus cleansed and healed. If we don't see ourselves that way, we are deceiving ourselves and calling God a liar for condemning us as sinners in His Word (1 Jn 1:10).

What hope do lepers like us have, except that Jesus might pass by, cleanse, heal, and save us, both physically and spiritually.

On the way to Jerusalem [Jesus] was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as He entered a village, He was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, not for some rest and relaxation, or a sightseeing vacation. Jesus was on His way there to suffer, die on the cross, and rise from the dead, for us and for our salvation. Healing ten lepers along the way highlighted who He was what He was about to do there.

The cries of the lepers for God's mercy in Christ were loud and urgent. Jesus was their last and only chance, and they desperately needed His merciful help. Desperate. Is that what you felt about yourself and your sinful condition when you confessed your sins earlier, and that Jesus was your only hope for salvation?

When [Jesus] saw them He said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving Him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” And He said to him, “Rise and go your way; your faith has saved you.”

Luke describes what Jesus did as: cleansed, healed, and saved (though the Greek word for “saved” (σέσωκεν) is often interpreted and translated in this context as “made well”). Jesus cleansed all ten lepers of their uncleanness. The Samaritan leper, when he realized that he was healed, returned praising God and giving thanks to Jesus, who told him that his faith had saved him. Cleansed, healed, and saved.

The leper was **cleansed** from what had made him unclean before God and his community, his leprosy. With leprosy, he had to stay far away from where God promised to be present among His people, and the leper was excluded from the fellowship of God’s people. Jesus cleansed him so he could come near to God again and enjoy the fellowship of God’s people in the Church.

The Bible describes God as righteous and sinners as unrighteous. The unrighteous cannot stand before the righteous God and live. Jesus came to forgive our sins and share His righteousness with us. When God gives us faith in Jesus, He also credits to us the righteousness of Christ, seeing us as perfectly clean, holy and without any sin at all. The leprosy of our sin, whether committed by us against God and others, or sin committed against us and defiling us, the sin that made us unclean before God and others, is forgiven and the **blood of Jesus, God’s Son, cleanses us from all unrighteousness** (1 Jn 1:8-9).

When we realize that God in Christ has **healed** us in this way, faith brings us back here to praise God and give thanks to Jesus. Jesus’ healing is both spiritual and physical. Our sins are forgiven, and our bodies are healed of sin’s corruption. Sin, which leads to our deaths, is overcome. We are healed to rise from the dead with Jesus.

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I don't know what it's like to suffer the physical effects of chronic and terminal disease like many of our older members do, but my day is coming. It's scary knowing that we can't prevent that downward slide toward death. Medicine can do miraculous things at times, but health care providers cannot cure us from death, only treat the symptoms leading to it and give us temporary relief. But this should not cause us to lose hope. There is One Great Physician who can do more than treat symptoms. Jesus cures us of what kills us. The disease we have is sin, and its result is death for us all. As long as we live in these bodies, we will be plagued by physical and emotional disease that can make living look hopeless to us, but there is hope for us.

We can cry out, **“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”** And He does. He took our sin and sickness to the cross, suffered and died with them, and rose to give us life forever. What we are feeling and thinking does not keep Jesus from healing us, if not in this life, then in the one to come. We might feel we are worthless, but God sees us as most precious to Him. God was willing to purchase and win us from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil by Jesus' holy, precious blood and innocent suffering and death. The blood of Jesus not only cleanses us but heals us from sin and all its deadly effects.

Jesus said to the cleansed and healed Samaritan leper, **“Rise and go your way; your faith has saved you.”** He rose from lying on his face before Jesus and stood on his feet, believing that Jesus would one day raise him from the dead to be eternally saved from sin, sickness, and death. That's the faith we need!

When we doubt our faith or feel that our faith is not strong enough, we are feeling the true effects of sin. Looking into the weakness and darkness of our hearts is depressing and leads to hopelessness. The cure for this is not to measure how strong our faith is, but to trust in Jesus. We put our faith in Jesus who is able to cleanse, heal, and save us from all that ails us. That is the faith that saves. Amen.