

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
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“The Ten Commandments” series

The Second Commandment

“How do you use the Lord’s name?”

All Scripture quotations from the NIV.

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.” Luke 17:11-19

At first glance, they are all the same. Ten men who are afflicted with a nasty disease, an incurable decaying disease that starts on the skin and slowly moves inside the body. They are banished from their homes and their families. They live, not by choice, far outside the walls of any city or village. Their only human contact is with those who share in their misfortune. They even speak as one, combining their weakened voices so that they might be heard. As we hear them cry out, their song is the same, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” Misery loves company; and the men before us all share the same kind of misery.

And as Jesus sees the men, his compassion is the same for each of them. He sees that

they all have the same physical ailment and need for healing. He also knows, more importantly, that they all share the same spiritual ailment and need for healing. And in a fascinating way, Jesus gives them all the same answer to their request for mercy.

Rather than healing them on the spot, he says to them, “**Go, show yourselves to the priests.**” It is a test of confidence. There is no mention of healing in Jesus’ words. There is no sign that their skin is restored. Yet the only reason for a leper to appear before a priest was to show that he was clean. And from the looks of it, these men share the same confidence in Jesus’ ability to heal. As a group, they head off together to follow Jesus’ prescription. And sure enough, they all receive the same healing. As we follow as they move away from Jesus, we see their confidence proved correct as their leprosy suddenly disappears. The same disease, the same banishment, the same cry and the same healing; at first glance, these men are all the same.

But it is at this point of healing that we find out that our eyes have deceived us. These men aren’t the same. Their reaction to this great blessing singles one of the men out as different. Having been healed, the group of men finally breaks apart. We watch as nine of the men continue in the direction they were headed, towards the priests in the city. They each have a bit more bounce in their step now. They are eager to get the priest’s approval and return to the way of life they had left behind. Surely, there will be a great celebration as these men return to their families and friends.

As those men go, we stay with this man who has broken from the group. We are intrigued. Why would he wait to see the priest? Why would he not want to be part of this group that was about to be celebrated? Why would he wait any longer to be reunited with his wife and children? Why would he put off all the joy that awaited him back at his home?

As we follow him, we quickly discover why. He wants to say thank you. He returns to Jesus, shouting praises to God, giving thanks to Jesus for what he had done, worshipping him as the Great Physician. He knew who Jesus truly was. He knew that he was the Son of God and he praised him as such.

And as we see this, we recognize more and more that it wasn't just the reaction of these men that was different, they had been different from the very start. What made them so different from one another was their use of God's name. This man who returned had cried out to Jesus for help, fully confident in who he was and what he could do. He understood what a blessing it was to be able call on Jesus for help. From his reaction after being healed, we see that this man knew that Jesus was more than just a miracle worker. He knew that he was God. And so he called on God's name in his trouble and when God delivered him he used God's name to shout praise and give thanks.

The rest of the group, however, though they shared the same plea for help, called upon Jesus' name in a very different way. Because this story takes place very late in Jesus' ministry and not far from Jerusalem, we can be confident that these men had heard about Jesus' miraculous healing power. So when they saw him, why wouldn't they call out to Jesus? "Might as well give it a try," they might have said to each other, "It sure can't hurt to see if calling out Jesus' name will work." They used Jesus' name as the last resort, hoping that what they had heard about Jesus' power might be true. Their only attraction to Jesus was to find a cure to their earthly problem. Once that problem had been taken care of, they had no use for Jesus any longer. Jesus healed their affliction with the hope that they would then follow him and find out who he truly was, but they quickly forgot about him and hurried off to return to their lives.

The differences between the one leper who returned and the 9 men who did not illustrate the focus of our service today, God's name and its proper use. When God first gave his name to the people of Israel, he simply said that his name was, "I AM." Think about what a powerful statement that is. God wanted his people to know that when they used his name, there was power behind it. It wasn't something to call out meaninglessly. It wasn't to be used carelessly. When God's name was used, the people understood that "I AM" had the power to accomplish whatever they asked. That reverence and care for God's name is a far cry from the ways in which we hear God's name used today, isn't it? Most blatant and obvious are the misuses of God's name that Luther points out in his *Small Catechism*: cursing and swearing needlessly. We hear those misuses every day, so much so, that we've probably dulled our ears to them and maybe even made them a part of our

regular lingo. But there is also a more subtle way that people misuse God's name everyday and the story of the 10 lepers brings that out.

How often do we hear people cry out to God for help? "God, help me," we often hear people say when trouble seems like it is too much to bear. "Please God," is their cry of frustration when things might not be going well and stress of life is building up. "Ohhh, God," is the exclamation when something goes terribly wrong.

Like the group of lepers that all joined in the same cry for mercy, all those cries to God that people express in their lives often sound the same. But the truth is the motives behind their use can be very different.

There are people who call on God's name only as a last ditch effort. Though God is not a regular part of their lives, when trouble comes, the cry goes out. When the weakness of human flesh shows itself, people cry out to God to help them out or spare them from suffering. Like the nine lepers, they only use God's name because they can't think of anything else to do. This is really a selfish use of God's name. Only calling on it when there is a personal need to be fixed.

Others use it in a careless way, simply using the powerful name of God like any other cry of exclamation.

Others however understand the power that is in God's name and the privilege that has been given in the ability to call on God's name in any circumstance. They cry, "God, help me" with a firm belief and trust that he will in fact help. They pray, "Please, God," with the knowledge that he is in control of every situation and can accomplish whatever they ask for.

And when God uses his controlling hand to return things to normal or to provide miraculous help in a terrible situation, once again, the reaction is very different. For those who only called on God's name because it was the last hope, the help that came is soon forgotten. Though God has graciously provided help, with the hope that it will turn people to him, that is often not the case. God's providence, his care over all the world, is so often overlooked in everyday life. People get out of a financial crunch, and there is a sense of relief that a job came at just the right moment. A family is kept safe during a car accident, and there is joy that such a safe car was bought. A miracle has happened and there is no time for thanks, people

are just anxious to celebrate and get back to normal life.

For those who see God's guiding hand in everything, they are quick to give thanks to God just like the leper that returned. They understand that the name that was there to be called upon in trouble is also now there to be praised and thanked. They don't overlook the help that seems to miraculously come at just the right moment. They don't pass it off as luck, but give thanks that God has delivered on his promises once again. When a stressful situation is relieved, they praise God that he heard those quick little prayers. It is amazing to think of the many times that God answers when his name is called in ways that go completely unnoticed, but God holds to his promise. He hears when called.

There are so many ways to use God's name, a final try, a flippant utterance, a trusting cry.

How do you use God's name? Is it your final try or your first confidence? Do you use God's name for the reason it was given? Do you ask for God's help knowing he will answer or just hoping he might hear? Do you call upon your God's name in every trouble? Do you firmly trust in the power of "I AM?" Let us be filled with confidence to always call on God's name in the right way. And when our calls are answered, let us remember to continually praise God for the blessings he gives. As we go through life, it is easy to overlook the many ways in which God watches over us every day. When relief seems to come at just the right moment, it is easy to say, "About time," rather than "Thank you, God!" As we travel through our busy lives, never forget the tremendous blessing that God has given in the simple announcement of a name. When he first announced to the Israelites that his name is "I AM", he was ensuring that his people would always have a name that they could confidently use. God has given us his name to be the first call not the last resort. As Martin Luther encourages us in the 2nd commandment, "Call upon God's name in every trouble. And when he answers, use it to pray, praise, and give thanks!" Amen.