

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
August 25, 2013**

Luke 17:11-19

Follow Thankfully

1. Question #1
2. Question #2

Hymns: 224 – 610 – 288

Closing: 331

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" ¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

¹⁵ One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well." Luke 17:11-19

All summer long, we have been looking at what it means to be a follower of Christ. Through many Biblical examples, we have looked at ways that we can grow in our discipleship of Jesus our Savior. Today, on this last Sunday that we are focusing on our lives of discipleship, our attention turns to a fairly simple and straightforward account from Jesus' life: The healing of the 10 Lepers. What we are going to do with this story today is to divide it into two sections and as we look at those sections, we will find two questions that we need to ask ourselves as followers of Christ.

We will read verses 11-14 first: There Luke says, ***"Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" ¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed."***

Why follow Jesus?

As we look through the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we hear about people following Jesus. Generally, we hear about tremendous crowds, thousands and thousands of people, who followed Jesus wherever he went: through towns, out into the wilderness, up on mountains. Thanks to those four Gospel writers, we also get to hear specifically about people who followed Jesus. We hear about followers who were demon-possessed, who had incurable illnesses, who were born with physical disabilities, and on and on; thousands of people, some who we know much about, some who we know only as part of a multitude.

However, there is one thing that we can be sure of: Those people followed Jesus for many different reasons. Some surely followed Jesus for pure entertainment, hoping to see something spectacular. Others followed Jesus out of curiosity, hoping to hear something new or thought provoking. We also know of many who followed to find solutions to their physical problems. Finally, we hear about Jewish leaders who followed Jesus for the purpose of building a case against him.

For all those people who followed for many different reasons, Jesus actually provided what they were looking for. For the entertainment-seekers, Jesus performed miracles that left people in awe. For those piqued by curiosity, Jesus delivered a message that was much different than anything they had grown up hearing from other teachers. For those needing physical help, Jesus often gave life-changing help. Even for those with an evil agenda, Jesus made jaw-dropping claims which added fuel to their burning fire of anger. All those people

followed Jesus for different reasons and found what they were looking for.

However, they also missed out completely, because they never found the correct answer to that question, “Why follow Jesus?” -- so many followers, so many who missed the point of following.

This a point that we see clearly in the account of the ten lepers. While we probably wouldn't label these men as followers of Jesus, it is certainly what they were doing. Though they had an incurable disease of the skin which kept them from being among the crowd that accompanied Jesus wherever he went, they were followers of Jesus in a different way. It is clear from Luke's words that they had been informed about Jesus and his healing power and that they kept tabs on his travels throughout the country. No doubt, these men had been waiting eagerly for the news that Jesus would be passing by their Leper colony. And when he finally did, Luke tells us that they went to meet him. The reason that they followed Jesus is obvious: They wanted help in regards to their physical ailment. They wanted Jesus to restore what disease had taken from them. They came after Jesus to get their lives back.

And what they had followed Jesus looking for, they received. With a simple reply, Jesus gave these men a life-changing directive, **“Go, show yourselves to the priests.”** Those were words which they thought they would never hear, because the only reason a leper would show himself to a priest is if his incurable disease was cured. With that, they left Jesus. Their time spent following Jesus was over. They got what they needed and that was that.

However, although these men received exactly what they were looking for from Jesus, they didn't get all that Jesus had to offer. And what is so sad, is how close they were.

Were you listening closely to what those men cried out to Jesus? Their cry to Jesus contained familiar words, “Elieson.” That is a word that is a part of almost every one of our services. It means, “Have mercy.” These men cried out to the Savior of the world, “Lord, have mercy,” but it was to receive the help they

wanted, not the help they needed. Jesus was there to give them healing for all of their sins, but they were focused on finding healing for their bodies. They didn't know the most important reason as to why they should follow Jesus. And that happened often among those who followed Jesus, people didn't get all that he offered, because they were only interested in following Jesus while he could give them what they wanted. It shouldn't surprise us that for so many, their desire to follow Jesus eventually waned, and then finally died out completely.

As we look through the Gospels and see so many who followed Jesus looking for the wrong thing, and then as we see how it ended, it should make every one of us pause to consider, “Why do I follow Jesus?”

As we think about those who follow Jesus today, we can be sure that many follow for different reasons just as they did during Jesus' time on this earth. Jesus can give people who follow him many different things. Jesus can be entertaining. He can give community. He can satisfy curiosity. He can provide relief from the troubles of daily earthly life. And there are plenty of people in this world who follow Jesus for those very reasons; there are plenty of churches who build a following by offering those things. But what happens? You end up with people who only follow Jesus when they need help. You end up with people who fade away once Jesus stops being entertaining. You end up with people who give up when life continues to be hard. And they go and continue their search for those things in other places. They miss getting what they need - a solution to their sin, a Savior who is able to give eternal joy and relief.

As you answer that question, “Why do I follow Jesus?” consider what you are looking for; don't follow Jesus to find friends, or to receive earthly blessings, or to find purpose in this life; focus on following Jesus for the one thing that he can give to you that nothing else in this world can give. Why follow Jesus? Because he brings the love of God into lives

infected by sin and brings healing that can only be found through his blood.

Being reminded of why we follow Jesus, we can now turn to the 2nd question that this text brings up and it is found in the reaction of the ten lepers.

“One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”

It is always a reaction that is hard to believe, isn't it? Ten men who were given life-changing healing and only one returned to say, “Thanks?” And it is easy for us to label those nine who didn't return as ingrates as we shake our heads at their lack of gratitude.

Yet, do you really think they were unthankful? Nowhere in Scripture does it say that those nine men weren't thankful. In fact, I'm sure that they were very thankful; there is no way that they could go through this life-changing event and not be thankful. I'm sure that they told their family and friends all about what had happened to them. But all that we hear about is the one man who returned to show his thanks.

Every one of those men who were healed by Jesus had their lives changed, but only one was willing to use his life to thank Jesus for what he had done. When the nine received what they needed from Jesus, they quickly moved on from him, hurrying to get back to the normal lives they had. They might have been thankful, but they didn't take time to show their thanks. This one man who returned, he showed his thanks. Before he went back to his family and his friends, before he even went to the priests, he wanted to show Jesus how he felt. And in that way, this man showed himself to be a true follower of Jesus. He didn't just follow when he needed something, instead he would use his life as a way to show his thanks for all that Jesus did.

So what is that supposed to mean to us? Maybe instead of just being a lesson on saying,

“Thanks!” this account is supposed to have us consider how we show, “Thanks?”

Jesus commended the man who showed he was thankful. It is easy for us to say thanks to Jesus. We do it all the time in our worship and in our prayers. But do we show our thanks like the one leper who returned? With our lives, Jesus gives us ample opportunity to show our thanks to him. He does that by giving us opportunities to live as his disciples. When we live as Jesus disciples, we show our thanks for what Jesus has already done for us. Amen.