

“ONLY ONE CAME BACK”

Message for the Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

From Pastor Norman Staker

October 12, 2025

2 KINGS 5: 1-3, 7-15C ** 2 TIMOTHY 2: 8-15 ** LUKE 17: 11-19

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR FATHER AND FROM
OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST. AMEN. HE IS RISEN; HE IS
RISEN INDEED!!

ule Huffman is a name synonymous with WSAZ. He was the weatherman there; he was a voice for WSAZ ads; he had a great singing voice, I once heard him sing at Christ the King Lutheran Church in Barboursville but more importantly, to children of all ages, including adults, he was none other than Mr Cartoon and served in that capacity for about 26 years. When I was Cubmaster with Pack 19 at St John, we took the Cub Scouts to Huntington for what would be Jule Huffman's last taping as Mr Cartoon and he didn't let the kids down or my wife and me; we loved the show that day. Every day he would end his episode with a series of instructions for his audience which included specific directions on hygiene, like brushing teeth after meals, saying prayers before going to bed, manners like yes ma'am and yes sir; and courtesy, the magic words like 'please, thank you, and excuse me.' On Friday's episode, he would encourage his viewers and those in the studio audience taping to attend the church or synagogue of their choice with their grown ups. All of that, and I'm sure most of you adults remember Jule Huffman/Mr Cartoon but his magic words, especially 'thank you' shows that a great need exists for the people of God to say thank you but specifically to thank God.

Today we are going to examine some verses in the scripture that contain a very important message. I want to warn you now that not only is the message a very important one, but it is also very strong. It's a message that will make us analyze ourselves and it may very well be that when we are done, we may not like what we have found. It may very well be that what we find is not what we were looking for. Sounds a bit confusing, doesn't it? Today we are going to examine a lesson that all Christians must learn. Today we are going to learn about the need to be thankful.

In our text from Luke 17: “On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’ When he saw them, he said to them, Go and show yourselves to the priests. And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice.” But wait, weren’t there ten men; where are the other nine?

Jesus doesn’t need a calculator to see that one out of ten is not a good showing especially when all ten got the same treatment and were healed. What gives!

How often do you hear someone say, ‘God, please help me!’ Even coming from the most immoral, ungodly person in our society is not all together unfamiliar. We hear people using the name of God all the time, but especially when there is a crisis. It is in these times when even the vilest people turn to God because if He doesn’t help them now, there is no hope for another solution. God is diminished into a convenient bellhop whom people call out for in times of great need. But isn’t God more than that?

In the story of the ten lepers we find a very familiar scene, not because we know people with leprosy, but because we know many people who find themselves in desperate situations crying out to God. As it was custom in those days the lepers were put outside of the city to live outcast because of their disease. Often there were whole communities of lepers and so to find 10 of them together here in this story is nothing out of the ordinary. Theirs was a lonely and rejected existence and so the thought of being healed and freed from this life was great indeed, but Jesus was doing more than healing, He opened their eyes to something far greater than that.

The first thing we see here is that Jesus met these ten men who suffered from leprosy and he met them face to face. I am sure that many of us here have heard about leprosy, that we have read numerous Bible verses about this devastating affliction, but actually we do not really know what this illness really is. When we talk about leprosy we are talking about an illness that was the most feared of illnesses in that era. As we can all very well imagine, this was a terrible illness. This illness begins with small growths in the eye lids and the palms of the hand. Then it starts to spread gradually through out the entire body, causing discoloration of the hair, the growth of scales in the parts of the body that have become affected which cause very painful open sores and inflammation. Look at how terrible this illness is, it starts with the skin, causing open sores and swelling, but it does not

stop there. It then begins eating away the skin, the flesh and the bone; in other words, it rots away the body part by part. During the last stages of this disease body parts just simply and literally fall off.

Leprosy is a disease that is feared around the world. We have tried to dress it up just a little and alleviate some of the fear by giving it a different name. We now call it “Hansen’s Disease.” From 1894 to 1999 one of the greatest treatment centers in the world was located not very far from here at an abandoned and remodeled plantation at Carville, Louisiana. The hospital in Carville closed its doors in 1999 and no longer treats patients for Hansen’s Disease.

Today, we have learned a lot about leprosy and how it is treated. It is not as contagious as many once thought and there are treatments and medications to cure it, usually several rounds of antibiotics and steroids. But for those who are susceptible to catching it, the disease is spread pretty much the same way as the flu or a cold is spread – through sneezing and coughing around other people. The good thing is that the vast majority of people will never catch it because their immune systems prevent it from developing. The sad thing is that there are still a lot of people who contract leprosy every year and most of them are children.

The Jews saw this disease as a curse from God, therefore, only God could heal people suffering from this affliction. It was a horrible disease! It’s no wonder that the Jewish people had such strict laws when it came to the people who were suffering from this affliction. The leper was considered as an unclean person both spiritually and physically. They were not allowed to come near any persons; they had to keep a distance of a minimum of six feet from other people including their wives or husbands, their children, and any other family members.

Lepers were not allowed to live within the walls of any city. They were cast out and completely rebuked by everyone. Let’s imagine this for a second or two. Imagine how these people must have felt. I am sure that their hearts were completely full of sorrow having been banished from society and particularly from their families.

Then, here we have Jesus on His way to Jerusalem and He meets these people who are suffering from this terrible affliction. These people were desperate. Jesus tells them, “Hey guys, go and show yourselves to the priests.” And before they even got to the priests, they were made clean. All traces of leprosy had disappeared!

All the lepers in this verse were greatly blessed and should have been thankful. They should have all come back to thank Him for the blessing, thank Him for His mercy. They were all blessed by Christ, but not all returned to Him. Only one returned, the rest just continued on their way and overlooked what God had done for them. This is not too different from what happens now a days. Let me put it this way. If we start to analyze what a church really is, I think that all of us here would more or less agree that it is just like a hospital. How is that? Easy, let's think about it, let's think about a hospital's function. I am sure that none of us here have ever admitted ourselves to a hospital without having something seriously wrong, without suffering from an illness that weakened us in such a way that we needed immediate help and medical attention. Correct? I am not sure what everyone here thinks of hospitals, but I can tell you that for me to be admitted to one it has to be that I am very seriously ill. Then, what happens after we receive the treatment? We begin to feel better, we start regaining our strength or we are healed, until finally the day comes when we are discharged and we go back home. Can you see what I am talking about? In other words, what happens is that we leave the hospital and we continue on our way. We have been healed, therefore, we no longer think about the doctors or all the other members of the staff that labored so diligently and arduously for us to be healed.

Can you see the similarity between a hospital and the church now? I tell you that there is not too much of a difference, just like ill people are admitted to hospitals, we were admitted into the church gravely ill. We did not come to church because we were strong, it wasn't because we had no needs. It was because our spirits were sick, we found ourselves in situations that we could not resolve. In other words, we came to the church with spiritual leprosy. We arrived before the presence of our Lord full of open sores and deep wounds, we came to our Lord pretty much in the same way that these ten men did. We came asking for His mercy and grace, asking to be healed. We came before the feet of our Lord asking Him to free us from our sufferings. Just like these men, we then receive instructions of what we need to do. I say this because these men received specific instructions of what they had to do when the Lord told them: "Go show yourselves to the priests." We have also received specific instructions, we have been called to repentance, to be baptized, to have faith, trusting that God will take care of it all. What happened next? "And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed." Folks, we too have been cleansed, have been blessed, the Lord in His great and divine mercy has liberated us from what oppressed us.

But the sad part about all of this is that it is at this point that we begin to see the ungratefulness of men. All ten were healed, all ten were blessed, but only one

returned to thank Him. Only one returned to recognize what He had done, only one gave the glory to God. It is for this reason that Jesus said: "And Jesus answering said, Were not ten made clean? But the other nine; where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner? And he said unto him, Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.

Folks, this is something that we should always have in mind, we can't be people with a short memory. I am talking about all of those people who having received the blessings did the same as those nine in this passage. They did not return to thank and glorify God. They did not return to recognize that it was only by His grace and mercy that they received the blessings, that only by His grace and love they received salvation.

Can you imagine the excitement they felt as they began to notice the leprosy was leaving? As they walked toward the priest in obedience to Jesus' command, every one of them was healed of his leprosy! Though they still had to be pronounced clean, they knew the miracle had already happened. The rest was only a ceremonial formality.

Ten lepers were healed that day, all at the same time and in the same manner, but only one turned back, before he ever reached the temple, to go back and thank the Lord for the miracle in his life.

I wonder what excuses the other nine had for not going back to give God the glory and giving thanks for their miracle?

Bottom line, we have to maintain this piece of scripture very much in mind at all times. We simply can't be like the nine that we have read about in our Gospel today. We can't stop showing our gratitude to our Lord and Savior. Now then, I want you all to humor me and in the spirit of Mr Cartoon/Jule Huffman and his memory, I want everybody to wave like mad and say 'Bye Cartooners!'

AMEN!!