

St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)
Trinity 14 – September 1, 2024
Luke 17:11-19 – Justification and Sanctification
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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Last week, a man was on the road down from Jerusalem to Jericho, away from the church. Along the way he was attacked by robbers and left for dead, desperately needing salvation. Today, Jesus is on his way up to Jerusalem, where he will be stripped and mocked and killed by violent men, all to save you and establish the church.

Last week, a Good Samaritan did the saving. He had mercy on a man lying in the road, stripped and wounded. Today, the Samaritan is saved. His leprosy has turned him into a walking dead man, standing at the side of the road. But the only man who is truly good has mercy on him.

Last week, two Jews, a priest and a Levite, passed by on the other side, not wanting to touch an unclean dying man. Today, nine Jews, unclean lepers, pass by Jesus on their way to show themselves to the priests. And so they fail to render thanks to the one who is on his way to Jerusalem to die and make them clean.

Everything is turned upside down, because today we are looking at the other side of the coin. Last week was about justification, this week teaches sanctification.

Justification and sanctification. Justification is how God makes sinners just and righteous. He counts righteousness to sinners by faith, faith in the righteous, atoning blood of Jesus. The innocent Son of God bore all your sin, he paid the death penalty for the sins of the world. And in exchange, Jesus clothed you in his own righteousness, so you might be declared not guilty. That is justification.

In justification, you are totally passive. Like the man in the story of the Good Samaritan, lying half dead in the road, you contribute nothing to your own salvation. You were just lying there, helplessly, until Jesus the Good Samaritan came to bind up your wounds and pour on oil and wine and lift you and take you to the inn, the church, to nurture you back to health. It's all a picture of how Jesus works justification for you, without any contribution of your own.

But in sanctification, you are not entirely passive. For the God who justifies sinners also teaches you to live in holiness and righteousness. He sends you the Holy Spirit here in the church to work in you, to sanctify you, to give you a new heart and teach you to live a holy life. So now, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, you actually begin to do what is pleasing to God. You are raised to walk before God in newness of life. You love and thank God for everything he's done for you in justification, by walking in obedience to him.

Of course, you do not love God perfectly. You sin daily and always need his forgiveness. And sanctification is not your own doing; it is the gift of God by grace. God sends the Holy Spirit to give you a heart that loves him and wants to do good things. You have nothing to boast about.

Neither does sanctification obtain forgiveness. Only the blood of Jesus does that. No, the sanctified life is the evidence and fruit of faith. It demonstrates that you have received the justification of Jesus, fruit of the Holy Spirit now at work in you. So in Romans 6, when Paul writes about sanctification, he says, "Now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life."

So today, in the miracle of the ten lepers, everything is teaching justification and sanctification.

All ten lepers were horribly corrupted and disfigured in their bodies. Their terrible disease of leprosy is a picture of the corruption in us all. Apart from God, we are walking dead men, dying in our sin. But all ten were healed by faith. They all believed Jesus could help them. They cried to Jesus, and when Jesus told them to go show themselves to the priests, even though nothing happened right away, they all listened to his word and started on their way. So for their faith, as they went, they all were healed. It's a picture of justification by faith. Jesus made them outwardly clean, in a picture of how he counts righteousness to sinners by faith alone.

So when Jesus said, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well," or really, a much better translation, "Your faith has saved you," he was speaking about justification. It was true for all ten, at least, externally. None of them could do anything to save themselves. They were only saved, justified, by faith alone.

But what about the one leper, the Samaritan, who returned to Jesus? If all ten are a picture of justification by faith, then what can we learn from the one who returned to give thanks?

The one leper is a picture of sanctification. Returning to Jesus and thanking him doesn't earn him salvation, but it does reveal his faith. His sanctification flows out of justification, and leads him back into justification. Back to Jesus, the justifier. The Holy Spirit has opened his heart to see Jesus for who he is, God himself. He understands that the man who sent him to the priests is the saving God.

So the Holy Spirit works in the Samaritan's heart by faith to create in him the greatest good work, worshipping and praising Jesus. He runs back to Jesus, thanking and praising God with a loud voice, falling at his feet to worship him. For worshipping Jesus as God is the highest, purest, holiest, work of sanctification. No one can say that Jesus is Lord and worship him, except by the Holy Spirit.

As you see, last week, our Good Samaritan, Jesus Christ, justified us by grace. And now this week, the Samaritan who was justified by Jesus returns to thank and praise him, bearing fruit of sanctification, evidence of saving faith.

Therefore, our readings today focus on sanctification. In the Old Testament reading from Proverbs, Solomon teaches us to walk before God in the way of wisdom, the sanctified path of life. "Hear, my son, and accept my words," says King Solomon, "That the years of your life may be many. I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness. When you walk, your step will not be hampered, and if you run, you will not stumble. Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life. Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on."

Paul also in Galatians teaches us how to walk, bearing fruit of sanctification by the Holy Spirit. "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." So he warns against the evil ways of the flesh. "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

Walking in the way of evil, embracing sin, is turning away from the justification of Jesus. It reveals a lack of faith. But the fruit of the spirit, the fruit of sanctification, is beautiful and pleasing to God. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

So what does the sanctified life look like? It means crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires. It means loving God and our neighbor with all our heart. Not like the misguided lawyer last week, who thought he could obtain eternal life by loving God and his neighbor. No, sanctification is worshipping God and thanking him forever, obeying him and serving others, purely out of gratitude for everything he's done to save us.

Therefore, Lord Jesus, since you have justified us with your blood, send us now your Holy Spirit in the church. Crucify our flesh, that we may rise to walk before you in the way we should go. Never let us stray from your side, away from your church, but teach us always to walk with you.

For you were grieved, Lord Jesus, when the nine lepers ran away from you, not returning to give you thanks. You told them to go to the priests, but they failed to see you for who you are, the true high priest, the true living temple, the true sacrifice for the sins of the world. They went in the wrong direction, away from you, toward earthly priests and an earthly temple.

So send us your Holy Spirit, Lord Jesus, to guide us back to you and your church. Sanctify us by your Word, for your Word is truth. Send your Holy Spirit, to teach us worship you by faith, to stay with you and follow wherever you lead. For your yoke is easy and your burden is light. Though you lead us on the way to Jerusalem, to the cross, though you tell us take up our crosses daily and follow you, following you is pure joy and everlasting life. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.