St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)
Trinity 14 – September 6, 2026
Luke 17:11-19 – The Words of Life and Healing
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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

King Solomon wrote in the Old Testament reading, from Proverbs 4: "My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh."

You can hear the urgency in these words of Solomon. He repeats himself again and again, because this is a matter of life and death. Keep away from the path of evil. Walk in the path of light. Take hold of instruction, learn from discipline, and treasure the word of truth in your heart. Pay attention to these words, if you value your eternal salvation.

Pay attention, because Solomon is speaking as a prophet. Through Solomon, God himself is addressing all his children, he's speaking to all of us. He's pointing us to the Messiah, the new and greater Solomon, the true King of wisdom, Jesus Christ.

The words of Christ are a lamp to your feet and a light to your path. For as Solomon wrote, "They are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh."

Healing and life. Isn't that what we need? Isn't that why we come to church? We come into the presence of Christ in the congregation to find life and healing in his word.

That's why the ten lepers came to Jesus. They cried out to him for help. "Jesus, Master, have mercy!" Help us! Heal our rotting flesh! Give us the life which you alone can give!

Because of their leprosy, their flesh was literally rotting from off their bodies. They weren't just outcasts, they were walking dead men. The zombies of their day, if you will. Everyone fled from them in terror. Everyone considered them cut off by God, and accursed.

It's hard to imagine anyone in a more desperate situation. Yet in their desperate need, they cried out to the One who alone can help, to him who heals all our diseases, who redeems our life from the pit. They cried out to Jesus.

Oh that each one of us would do the same, that we would cry out to Jesus for help!

The problem is, we seldom realize our desperate need. We tend to think in our hearts that we are doing pretty well. That we're walking in the way of wisdom, just like Solomon taught. We don't think we need help. And so we fail to cry to Jesus.

It's easy to think that we've made good progress as Christians, that we're living righteously, as if we've fully crucified the old sinful flesh with all its passions and desires.

And we want to walk by the Spirit, but the reality is, we come up short. We still daily fall back into sin, gratifying the desires of the flesh. Especially in the secret thoughts of our hearts, much evil remains.

The apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians, "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."

Now perhaps we don't openly engage in all these evil things. Perhaps we don't practice sorcery and orgies. That's good. But have we ever been caught up in enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, and envy? Yes we have, to our shame. And Paul lists these right alongside all the rest.

The truth is, our old sinful nature still attacks us daily. We haven't gotten rid of it, we keep straying from the path of righteousness, we fail to follow Solomon's wise instructions. We fail to bear all the good fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

So we desperately need to cry to Jesus for help.

We need to become like the ten lepers, every single day. In their poverty and anguish, with nowhere left to turn, they cried to him, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

Blessed are those who feel the weight of their sin, who know that they need help.

Rarely do we realize the seriousness of our situation, rarely do we remember that we are worse than lepers, worse than walking dead men. The lepers were ugly on the outside, covered in rotting flesh. But we are ugly on the inside. Our hearts are like whitewashed tombs, clean on the exterior, yet rotten within.

That's the diagnosis, that's what God's word says. God says to us in Jeremiah 30:12, "Thus says the Lord: 'Your wound is incurable, your injury beyond healing.'"

And God says to us in Romans 3, "None is righteous, no, not one. No one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes."

That's us, our spiritual leprosy. Lord, have mercy! Our disease is terminal, worse than we ever knew. So we need to believe these words, if we ever cry to Jesus for help.

But here's the good news. In the Gospel reading, the ten lepers stood at a distance and lifted up their voices. But it didn't matter how far away they stood. Jesus would have heard them from any distance. He knows our need before we cry. He knows that we need forgiveness, and he is glad to help. Before we ever called to him, he already gave himself in our place. He already took all our sins upon his flesh, so might be healed.

So when Jesus saw the lepers, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And praise God! They believed his word. Amazingly, even though they weren't healed right away, they began to do as they were told, by faith. They followed the ancient Levitical instructions, that if a leper was ever somehow healed, then he should present himself to the priests, so they might declare him clean.

Even though these lepers weren't clean yet, they believed the words of Jesus. They believed that by the time they got to the temple to show themselves to the priests, somehow they would be clean. That was faith. They trusted the word of Christ, the words which are a fountain of life, healing to all flesh.

And we should do the same. We should trust the words of Jesus, the words of healing and life. For in just the same way, Jesus has also told you to go show yourself to the priests, so that the priests might declare you clean.

I mean that Jesus has told you to go confess your sins to your pastor, so that he can pronounce forgiveness. Because Christ has given authority to heal and forgive to the church, and he has established the office of the holy ministry to exercise that authority. As Jesus said to the apostles, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

So trust these words, the words of Jesus. Go and show yourself to the priests. Confess your sins to your pastor. And believe that as you go, you will be healed. For Jesus has promised that your rotten heart will become clean. Not just clean on the outside, but all the way through.

Go, confess your sins, and you will be healed, by faith in Jesus and his word. For when the called ministers of Christ pronounce you clean, when a pastor says your sins are forgiven, this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ your dear Lord dealt with you himself.

One last thing. In the Gospel reading, as the ten lepers all went, all ten were cleansed. But only one of them, when he saw that he was healed, only one turned back, praising God with a loud voice. And he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. And he was a Samaritan.

Only this one man, the lowest of the low, the outcast among outcasts, the Samaritan leper, only he recognized Jesus as his true High Priest. The others ran off toward the temple, looking for earthly priests to declare them clean. But they failed to see that Jesus is the heavenly High Priest, the perfect priest. Jesus is the priest who offered himself as the once-for-all sacrifice for sins, the sacrifice of his own flesh, to redeem our fallen flesh, and declare us righteous.

May we always be like this one leper, the one who returned to Jesus. Having received forgiveness and healing and life from Christ, let us respond with joyful thanks and praise.

Return to Jesus, come before the heavenly High Priest, the true Son of God, praise him with your prayers and hymns. Rejoice and praise him with a loud voice. Fall on your faces at his feet, at his altar, to worship him forever. Amen.

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