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Text: Luke 17:11-19

Theme: GO!

Parts:

 1) Trusting in Jesus' promises.

 2) Living to praise God.

 TEXT: Luke 17:11-19

11 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 Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, dear brothers and sisters,

 They all strapped on their armor. The clinking of the metal, so reminiscent of the sounds of battles already fought, did not deter them from the combat that lay ahead. Each soldier turned to his neighbor and helped him prepare, looking him dead in the eyes and reminding him of what that one man had done for them. That one man had led them fearlessly in defense of their homeland. They said, "Remember when we were flanked and yet he won the day." They said, "Don't forget how he has fought by our side in every battle, all day and all night." That one man was their king. And while this battle was about to begin, as they sang their battle hymns, they thought of the protection and leadership of the past as sure signs of the victory ahead. Fellow Christians, our good king Jesus has sent us to live our lives as his soldiers, whether we are doctors or mechanics or cooks or lawyers or teachers, to honor God in what we do. JESUS BIDS US, "GO," trusting in His' promises and living to praise God.

 Our gospel lesson for today tells of a very specific time in the 33 years of Jesus' life on earth. The gospel writer Luke writes, "On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee." Jesus was in the middle of the most difficult journey that any human has ever had to take. Jesus was heading for Jerusalem. We know why he was heading there: to suffer and die. But we do not know what that must have been like for Jesus, knowing that soon he would feel the full extent of his humiliation on earth, being betrayed, seized, tried, mocked, beaten, denied, flogged, crucified, and forsaken. And yet one footstep followed the other, and he, the God-man, willed himself to keep walking.

 But Jesus was not just walking. People came to him from the towns and villages, asking for help and seeking to see the greatest Prophet this world has ever seen. Jesus gave from the rich storehouses of his wisdom, power, and love. Like a holy postal carrier, he dispensed without limit, reaching countless people on this one final journey, which, of the 24 chapters in Luke's gospel, comprises 10 of those chapters.

 It is no wonder, then, that Jesus found a group of lepers at one town, shouting for him to cure them from their leprosy. Imagine that sight. Ten men with skin that barely resembled that of humans. The smell of decay. The agonized shouts of desperation. And all from men who no longer knew what it was like to be close to family and friends, as they would have been sent away from their homes long ago. What a miserable sight. And what a miserable life they must have lived, never being able to quite get used to the pain and misery of every excruciating moment. All they could do was beg for help from people who could do nothing to help them, until Jesus came.

 So these ten men shouted from a distance, knowing that it would be foolish to come so close to someone who might finally be able to help them. What if he was disgusted by them? What if he called curses upon them? Surely that would not be out of the question for such an important, holy man to do. So they kept their distance, but raised their voices in unison. "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" Like a child trapped in a well, desperately calling for rescue, they called to the Son of God for a cure from their leprosy. They called to Jesus because they knew that he was a great man, that he was a giving man, and they knew that he had cured others of disease and disability. That was all they needed to know to call out to him.

 The sight of ten lepers calling to him from a distance was all Jesus needed to see in order for his heart to yearn for their physical healing. HE ASKED THE LEPERS TO GO, in trust, to the priests. There the lepers would be able to prove their cleansing to the priests. Yet our lesson does not say that they were immediately healed when Jesus spoke to them. Jesus was saying, "I know you want to be cured, but first you have to trust in my promises. So GO, in trust, to the place where you can prove your healing, though you are not yet healed." Jesus was showing the lepers the value of trusting in Jesus, who was giving them the promise of healing.

 All ten, desperate for the cure of their leprosy, left at once, hoping, anticipating, thirsting for relief. They went to the priests, trusting in Jesus' promise. Before long, while they were walking, they noticed the pain of leprosy leaving their bodies. Could this really be happening? Looking at one another, they saw the visible signs of healing, the new skin, and the absence of the stench of decay. Smiles widened on their faces as they embraced one another in celebration, the tears of relief streaking down the skin of their newly-healed faces. Trusting in Jesus' promise truly was a turning point in their lives.

 There are a lot of medicines available to us today. For almost everything that plagues us there seems to be a pill that you can take that will either take away your illness or at least help you to better get through your day and maybe even the rest of your life with fewer symptoms. Modern health care systems revolve around the world of drugs. Scientists are constantly researching new mixtures of chemicals that can help people deal with acute and chronic problems. While they look for cures and suppressants for every ailment under the Sun, we trust that the medicine prescribed to us by our doctors will actually be of help to us. We dutifully fill our weekly pill boxes, hoping that all those dosages will help us in ways that we cannot help ourselves. Why do we keep filling those pill boxes week after week? Because we know through the diligent research of scientists, the lengthy testing processes, and the approval of the medical community that these pills are the very things that we need for our diagnoses. We trust our prescriptions' effects that have been promised to us.

 These promises are nothing in comparison to the promises made to us by God. Yet we so often do not think of the promises that God has made to us, going about our days ignorant of the peace and security that God wants us to have in our hearts. Instead of relying on God's promises for us, we pretend that whatever we want has been promised to us. We want physical intimacy, so we assume that God wants us to be happy in this way. So why not sleep around? God wants us to feel good anyway, doesn't he? Or we want better health, like those lepers. Therefore, we assume that God wants us to be in peak physical condition. We spend our time and energy on our physical bodies rather than building up the body of Christ with our talents and gifts. Or maybe we want money. Surely God wants us to thrive financially, right? So we set our hearts on work, money, and the things money can buy rather than showing devotion to God by the decisions we make with our time and resources.

 The point cannot be made enough that when we set our hearts on the things of this world rather than trusting in Jesus' promises, we endanger our souls. The Holy Spirit has placed faith in our hearts, but faith that does not act is dead faith. Our holy God wants us to stay connected to Him through reading His Word, through gathering together in His name, through living lives that give Him glory. And yet we sin when we live for physical intimacy, health, and money, in a way that turns our backs to God. These sins can separate us from God's grace.

 However, in the face of these sins God has made trustworthy promises to us. Instead of promising mere physical intimacy, God has promised us His own love. That love blesses us in immeasurable ways. First, God's love blesses us in earthly ways, as God promises to be with us every day and watch over us. God sends His angels to guide our way. God gives to us loved ones and the blessings of family, so that we might be enriched daily by their love. And God's love blesses us by forgiving us of our sins. In spite of our sin, God still loves us and has wiped the slate clean. The record of your wrongs has been erased and re-written with all the holy and righteous acts of Jesus. His blood on the cross is an eraser and His holy life on earth is the new ink. In spite of the times everyday in which we pursue things not promised to us, God has promised to not look at our sin but sees Christ in our place. God's love forgives us.

 God has made trustworthy promises to us. Instead of promising mere physical health, God has promised us a new, glorified body in heaven, where the aches and pains of disease and disability are completely absent. If you take a nap in heaven, you won't wake up with a sore back, or too-dilated eyes for the light, or even with crease marks on your face from the mattress. In fact, you won't need a nap in heaven because God will give you the energy there to glorify Him in worship day in and day out. The bright light of God's glory will shine on your new, glorified body all the time. All of this is ours because of that love of God's that forgives us, taking away the hostility between God and man by the mediating work of Christ, who died on the cross for our sins.

 God has made trustworthy promises to us. Instead of promising mere money, God has promised us the riches of heaven. Though we messed up this world with our sin so that nothing that we have is perfect, there is a heavenly home waiting for each one of God's saints in heaven. And in heaven we won't be hitting our heads trying to figure out how to arrange the furniture to fit in a cramped space. No, the riches that God wants to lavish on us in heaven are endless and space is not an issue. God's forgiving love prompts him to give to his children all that they would ever need in heaven, and you are his children.

 God has made trustworthy promises to us. When the lepers cried to Jesus for healing, HE BID THEM GO, trusting in his promises. HE BIDS US TO GO about our lives, too, trusting in his promises. Promises of God's love, God's gift of a new, glorified body for you, and God's providence of all the riches of heaven.

 But that is not all that JESUS BIDS US to do as we GO about our lives. JESUS ALSO ASKS US TO GO, living to praise God. In our gospel lesson for today, we learn of one of the now-healed lepers who did exactly that. The gospel writer writes, "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." The implication with the statement "and he was a Samaritan" is that the other lepers were not Samaritans, but Jews, those who held themselves to be God's chosen people. Sometimes those who think much of themselves without realizing their status before God make the same mistake that the nine lepers made when they did not return to Jesus.

 But let's rewind to the moment when the lepers realized that they were healed. Imagine their conversation. "Can you believe that we are healed?" "Am I dreaming?" "Did Jesus really do this?" "What does this mean about that man, Jesus?" Regardless of what their exact questions were, we know that nine of them did not understand what had really just happened. Sure, they had been healed of their leprosy, but something even more important was happening as they began their obedient walk to the priests. Jesus, as he healed them, was proving to them that he is God and that he has the power to cleanse them from more than just leprosy.

 One of the ten got it. He had a new faith in Jesus. More than just trusting in Jesus' promises to heal him of leprosy, the Samaritan now trusted that Jesus was the one prophesied long ago, the one who would save all people from the guilt and power of their sin. So he wanted to turn back. The Samaritan's desire to return to Jesus was a natural fruit of his faith in Jesus as the Savior of the world. So nine healed lepers continued to the priests, trusting in Jesus' power to heal leprosy and one wanted to return to Jesus, trusting in him as the praiseworthy Son of God.

 Have you ever been in an argument with a group of people? You know that you are looking at the situation from the right point of view, even though everyone else is looking at it the wrong way. It is like being in a jury room. You are only one of twelve people on that jury. All the other jurors have come to a verdict that does not honor the evidence. So you have to convince the others one by one. That is what that Samaritan leper had to go through, trying to convince the others regarding what he now understood about Jesus.

 Unfortunately, nine of the ten healed lepers in our gospel lesson didn't take Jesus' ultimate message to heart. Even after the Samaritan pointed out that it would be worthwhile to return to Jesus, the other lepers continued in their ignorance. So only one healed leper returned to Jesus his Savior.

 And what did that newly-restored man do once he was again with Jesus? He proclaimed Jesus' miraculous power. He fell before Jesus in humility. And he thanked Jesus for healing him.

 You see, friends, this is the model of worship that Jesus wants us to emulate as we realize what he has done for us: proclaim, praise, and thank. We do this in public worship every Sunday, as we gather to hear of what Jesus has done in the words of Scripture -- Proclamation! As we sing glory to God in the highest and peace to His people on earth -- Praise! As we give back to him from what he has given us in the weekly offering -- Thanksgiving!

 As you know, we can do this in our daily lives outside of a church building. We sing praise to Jesus by showing love to our neighbors and dutifully caring for our families. We give praise to Jesus when we read His Word, find comfort, and do what he asks us to do, even if it is not easy. We praise Jesus when we live our lives for him instead of turning our backs on him, as the world around us wants us to do. Even some of those who are close to us have not given Jesus the time of day. Instead of falling into the same lifestyles as them, we praise Jesus by following him, like that tenth leper.

 Why follow and praise Jesus? Because he is our righteous and holy God. And yet we show that we are like the ten lepers in our gospel lesson, as we stand before our righteous and holy God with the disease of sin in our hearts. We show the symptoms of that disease when we do not worship God with holy living. On the one hand, the kind of sinful heart that we all have seems like the sort of thing which God would push away. But we can praise Jesus because he is God and he has cleansed us from our sin. The bloody cross and empty tomb bid us, "GO!"

 So LET'S GO ABOUT OUR LIVES, AS JESUS BIDS US. Why? Because we trust in the promises that Jesus gives to us. And how does Jesus want us to go? Living to praise him. Amen.