

Sermon Notes – October 12,, 2025
The Holy Gospel of St. Luke 17: 11-19
Peace Lutheran Church
“Cleaning Up!”

While this week's readings include individuals who are singled out as recipients of dramatic acts and for the attention those acts would elicit, there are common dimensions that weave through each of these texts: the prophet Elisha healing the Syrian Naaman (2 Kings), Paul's statements of being chained while in prison yet encouraging Timothy in his being faithful to the mission of Christ in Ephesus (and for which Timothy too is believed to have been later martyred) (2 Timothy), and Jesus healing the ten lepers, of whom only one – the foreigner – returned to offer gratitude (Luke).

Those who preach the word frequently highlight the individuality of the Samaritan who returns to Jesus. However, Jesus' attendance-taking question after receiving the thanks of the Samaritan (Luke 17: 17, “The other nine, where are they?”) reads like a longing for the fullness of a community of thanksgiving, literally a Eucharistic community. Further, the invocation of the Samaritan's status as a foreigner (v. 18, “Was none of them found to return ...except this foreigner?”) functions in Luke's discourse as advocating for wider boundaries and expanded diversity in Christian community rather than in acclaiming individuality.

Jesus concludes this interaction with “Your faith has made you well” (v. 19). This phrase creates a remarkably small community within Luke's gospel. Jesus addresses this phrase to just four people (in the NRSV two instances are translated “Your faith has *saved you*,” but the Greek is identical in all four instances, each using the verb *sozo*.) Those whose faith has healed/saved them are the woman identified as “a sinner,” who is criticized by the dinner guests when she disrupts the meal at the Pharisee's house and anoints Jesus' feet (7: 50); the woman living with hemorrhages, who reaches out from the crowd to be healed by Jesus (8: 48); the grateful Samaritan man who returns to Jesus after his healing from leprosy, from this week's text (17: 19); and the man with blindness who was begging by the side of the road and called out to Jesus despite attempts by the crowd to silence him (18: 42). Far from simply making individualism a heroic stance, Jesus' bestowal of this honorific both critiques exclusive community, and is part of His mission of bringing into being a new and inclusive community, with these four members as icons of that community.

In the first reading from 2 Kings, Naaman, the Syrian military commander, was angry that his healing from a skin disease could not be

conducted (a) in private and (b) on his home territory. Upon his being healed by the Isreal prophet Elisha, however, he rejoiced with his broadened community included Israel's people, river, land, and God.

This narrative thread is seen also in the New Testament Luke's gospel. Jesus' preaching in His hometown synagogue creates an interesting conversation portrayed in today's texts and in this section of Luke's gospel. Jesus is portrayed as preaching in Nazareth about how God has previously expanded community by healing a foreign man with a skin disease through a water bath (4: 27) and by saving a foreign widow through a bread meal (vv. 25-26). In chapters 17-18, Luke recounts this week's story of the Samaritan man with a skin disease (an echo of Namaan) and next week's parable of the widow seeking justice (an echo of the widow at Zarephath in Sidon). Jesus' opening sermon is being lived out and expanded in His ministry.

The readings today are not a simple urging to individualism but, rather, stories of God reforming relatively closed groups to live broader and more respectful, joyful and diverse lives.