

The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity
18 September, Anno Domini 2022
St. Luke 17:11-19

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Children of the heavenly Father,

Have you ever knelt down to pray only to find no words to speak? Your heart longs to cry out to your Father but you just don't know what to say? Outside of the Lord's Prayer there is no simpler, more all-encompassing prayer than that prayed by the lepers, the same prayer that we pray every Divine Service "Lord, have mercy upon us!" Isn't that really the sum and substance of everything we need - God's mercy? We need our Creator to look upon us with pure compassion and pity our sorry condition. We need Jesus to act and deliver us from our sorrow and our misery so that they don't overcome us. We need Him to provide favorable weather, good government, good neighbors, faithful spouses, obedient children, abundant harvests. We need Him to put our Old Adam to death, to fight against those who fight against us, to defend us in the hour of temptation, to lead us in the paths of righteousness. We need literally everything from His gracious hand. If there is anything good or beneficial for us, we can only come to have it from Him.

And we dare not ask God to deal with us according to the goodness of our life - our love of Him or those around us. We need mercy. We need what we know we don't deserve. It is this mercy that gathers you again and again to this temple, this house of God, not because God is here dwelling in a cloud of smoke but because the real temple, the true place of God's presence is here, the temple not made with human hands. You are here because Jesus is here and in Him dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily with the fullness of all God's mercy and compassion. Here Jesus speaks and heals. Here Jesus comforts and wipes away tears. Here Jesus forgives. Here Jesus casts away sin and guilt. Here Jesus raises sinners from the depths of hell and gives them a place at the heavenly

banquet of His compassion and love. Here Jesus has mercy by speaking, by washing, by feeding.

Certainly, the reasons why each of us cries out for God's mercy are not always the same. Satan attacks on countless fronts at different times. We are all under assault from sin, death, and the devil though never in exactly the same way. For some, death has struck another blow and robbed them of the one they loved so dearly. For some, their flesh has betrayed them again into the very sins that they hate. For some their lives or marriages or families have been ripped apart by anger and hurt. For others, their bodies are plagued with pain and disease, like the lepers. Some lack the means to put bread on the table. Some are forced to stare at piles of rubble where their homes once were because they have been destroyed by tornados and earthquakes and floods. Still others live under the constant threat of death from famine, corrupt governments, disease, civil war, terrorists, and persecution.

Your own particular need may be weighing heavily on you this very moment. Or perhaps, by God's good grace you have been granted a brief reprieve. But we are all in need. We are all suffering the destruction of sin. From the time of our conception we are under attack. What sin has unleashed on the world affects every facet of life, not just your soul. Like leprosy or cancer it spreads everywhere and infects everything. Beginning with the unbelief of our souls and moving out to our flesh, sin causes visible and invisible rotting and death. Our uncleanness has meant being cast out of the Eden of God's presence and into the wasteland of guilt and shame and sorrow where there is need and pain and death.

And nothing in all creation is spared sin's wretched curse. As St. Paul writes "All creation has been groaning together" because it "was subjected to futility, not willingly but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." (Romans 8:20-22) Our souls, bodies, and minds; the winds and waves and tectonic plates; nations and

neighbors; plants and animals - all of them together suffer under sin's impossible weight.

Our enemies surround us everyday and they, unlike God, know nothing of mercy. In fact, they absolutely despise mercy. They know only hatred. They prefer justice. They want everyone to get exactly what they deserve. They desire our death now and for all of eternity. The more you suffer, the more you are filled with worries and anxieties, the more you are filled with fear and doubt, the more pleased they are. Our enemies are real and they have only one goal, to steal you away from Christ by stealing Christ's comfort and promises from you. The means may look different on the surface, but fundamentally they are always the same. If they can steal the proclamation of Jesus from your ears, they know that it won't be long before faith is extinguished.

Our enemies know what we so often forget - we live on promises. We don't have now the fullness of our redemption. Your best life is not now, thanks be to God. We still live in and amongst sin and death. What we will be, has not yet been revealed to us other than through a promise. We are people of hope, people who are looking forward to the fulfillment of our faith and the full revelation of what we will be.

Were it not for Christ and the promises of God to save and redeem us, to have mercy on us and deliver us, we would simply drown in despair. But through those promises we have hope. Because God Himself has come to us, not just in some ethereal, ghostly, or spiritual way, but in the very real flesh that we bear, the holy band of lepers which we know as the Holy Christian Church boldly raises our voices and cries out in the midst of all our sorrows "Kyrie, eleison! Lord, have mercy upon us!" And we pray it precisely because God will and already has heard it and answered it with a resounding "Yes" and points you to Jesus lying in the manger and hanging on the cross. "There is my mercy for you. There I have overcome every enemy that seeks to overwhelm you. There I have consumed your death in my own death."

Whatever your need, the help of God is always the same, mercy - in all of its forms. He forgives you all your sins that you no longer need to despair and fear His wrath. He strengthens weak hands and hearts by proclaiming in both yours and the devil's ears that the Blood of Jesus has made full satisfaction for you and so Satan gets to make no claim on you. He marches the victory banner of His cross before all of creation and sends your enemies fleeing like cockroaches back into all their dark corners. He binds up your wounded heart and conscience. He reminds you of the Name you have been given and spot-treats with His Blood the white robe of His righteousness that you wear. He draws your eyes away from the darkness of this world to the golden shores of eternal life where one day you will rest because sin will have been destroyed and your enemies cast forever into the lake of fire where they can no longer harass or torment you. He provides friends and neighbors to give you your daily bread. He gives doctors and nurses to bring healing to your body, though only for a time.

Mercy may seem like such a small and insignificant word and we pass over it all the time as though it were little more than an empty promise. But mercy is absolutely everything. It is the mercy of God that stayed His hand when Adam and Eve rebelled against His command. It was mercy that preserved believing Noah and his family, eight souls in all, as the unbelieving world was condemned in the flood. It was mercy that preserved the faithful remnant of God's children even as they were captured and taken into exile among the Babylonians and Assyrians. It was God's mercy that sent His only Son from heaven to humble Himself, to become our brother and suffer with us and bear the full leprosy of our sin in his pure flesh. It was mercy that led Jesus from these lepers on to Jerusalem to face the blasphemy, the torture, the cross, and finally, the full and unmitigated wrath of God against your sin. It was mercy that drew you to the font where your Old Adam was put to death and a New Man filled with the Holy Spirit was given birth. It is mercy that feeds your hungry soul with manna from heaven, the Body and Blood of God's Son for the forgiveness of all your sins.

You cannot meditate on your heavenly Father's mercy enough, beloved children of God. It is your life and your Father has spared none of it that He might call you His own. He gladly pours it forth to in abundance in every hour of your need. So if you aren't sure what to pray, take up this most Christian and God-pleasing of prayers "Lord, have mercy upon me." And rest assured that He will, indeed, He already has.

Pr. Kurt Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God, which passes all human understanding keeps your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord.