

In Nomine Iesu

The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity 2024 Who serves whom in the divine service? – Luke 17:11-19

“On the way to Jerusalem [Jesus] was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.’ When he saw them he said to them, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests. And as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, ‘Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?’ And he said to him, ‘Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.’”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the friend of sinners. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

We use the word “worship” to describe what happens on a Sunday morning when we gather as the people of God, disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. We say that we go to church to worship God. The word “worship” is an old English word that literally means worth-ship. When we worship we ascribe worth to God. We worship God by glorifying Him for who He is and for what He does. Worship is an expression of faith. The First Commandment commands us to worship God. “I am the LORD your God who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.”

I

Faith and worship are bound together. Indeed, faith is worship. Faith believes what God says. It relies on every promise God makes. It depends on God for every good thing. It expects God to provide every need. Faith is a living and daring confidence that God cannot forsake us or deny us any good thing. Faith is the purest and holiest form of worship. The very essence of worship is faith. In this sense worship remains unseen by human eyes and unheard by human ears. It takes place within us, in our heart and mind. Only God can see faith and, so, only God can see true worship.

Now fruits of faith, that which faith produces, can be seen and heard. When we gather in Jesus’ name to worship God we are bound together as one. We give words to what is inside us: “I believe in the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints ...” While we cannot see the faith that joins us together in communion with our Lord and Savior, we can see and hear the fruit of that faith as we glorify God with one voice. We usually think that orthodox means right teaching, but literally it refers to the right way of glorifying or worshipping God. And there is something very important about the way we worship God, that it be in the right way. More about that later.

We glorify God for who He is. Jesus cleansed and cured ten lepers. Only one returned to glorify God. He returned to Jesus, fell at His feet glorifying God. We also glorify God by worshipping God in the flesh, worshipping Jesus. Jesus said that everyone who honors the Father must honor the Son. So, we see that there is no true worship of God apart from giving glory to His only begotten Son.

We don't know what the other lepers who were cleansed believed and then did after they were declared free of leprosy by the priests. We certainly would think that they were thankful to God. How could they not be? But notice how we are quick to fault them for failing to return to Jesus to give thanks. We are quick to assume the worst about them. But even as we do that, we should consider that in doing so we exhibit more about our own thinking than theirs. We show that, like all people, we are quick to assign motive to others, quick to judge. True, only one of the ten, a Samaritan, returned to glorify God, falling at Jesus' feet, giving Him thanks. It is true that Jesus commended his faith and noted that faith is what saved the Samaritan. That is Jesus' whole point, the faith of this stranger and foreigner. But what Jesus said about the faithful Samaritan tells us nothing about the other nine, whose religion was centered in the promise of the coming Messiah.

II

The other nine lepers surely continued on their way to the priests to be examined and declared clean, free of leprosy. In other words, they did exactly what Jesus told them to do: "Go, show yourselves to the priests." They trusted what He said to them. When we hear this text, we forget that the Samaritan could not go to the priests of Israel. He who was a Samaritan could not go to an Israelite priest, a descendent of Aaron. In his excitement and joy he took off running with the others, but then he stopped. It must have struck him who had healed him, a Jew, the One many were calling the Messiah, the promised Savior. For the Samaritans also knew of the promised Savior.

It mattered that Jesus had cleansed him. Who but the promised Messiah, the Savior, God's only begotten Son, could, by a mere word, heal a man from leprosy? And who but God Himself could have mercy on both Jews and Samaritans? We say that misery loves company. When these ten men had shared the horror of leprosy, the differences between them seemed without importance. But under the normal circumstances that would now prevail once all ten were healed, that would no longer be true. Jews did not socialize with Samaritans, who were known for their adherence to false doctrine and false worship, as Jesus clearly said when He spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well. (John 4:21-24) But now, suddenly, this Samaritan understood what true doctrine and worship were. He, who was a Samaritan, recognized Israel's promised One, who had shown mercy to him, a Samaritan. And, so, he returned to Jesus and fell at His feet, and glorified the God of Israel, the living God, for showing mercy to him. That is the essence of true worship.

The Samaritan shows us something about the direction of that we call "worship." He recognized that "right worship," orthodox worship, can occur only where the Savior, the Christ is, only where the Christ is present to bless, show mercy, and forgive.

The church service is not primarily a worship service. Yes, we gather here to glorify God and to confess our faith in Him. But we can and should also do that at home, at work, or with the neighbor. What happens here is **primarily** Divine Service. It is all about what Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man has done and has promised. It is where we come to fall at the feet of our High Priest who still makes intercession for us at the right hand of His Father. It is where we gather to hear the gospel and receive the sacraments, the means through which our Lord heals our sickness, the sickness that is sin. Through the words of Jesus and His holy sacraments He serves us in our need. Through Him we receive the forgiveness of our sins, life, and salvation. We receive such wondrous gifts every time we come, for this is what our Savior promised

to give to those who observe all that He commanded, that is, to all who believe His words and promises, who believe that in the preached Gospel and in the sacraments Christ is here among to heal and save. We come here, standing far from God, covered with the leprosy of our sin and guilt, calling out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." As we do, He doesn't leave us sick and impure. No, He speaks to us the words of life through the ministry He commanded and instituted for this very purpose; and then He sends us on our way home pure, clean, holy, and righteous. And then He looks for us, His dearly loved lepers and Samaritans, to return to Him, glorifying God and seeking once more that which we need from Him: forgiveness and life.

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So, you see how important it is to recognize the direction of worship, to recognize **who comes to whom, who does what for whom**. Christ our Lord came into the world to save sinners. He gave His life to atone for all the evil we have done. And He still comes to us here and now in word and sacrament to give us all the good He has earned with His bitter suffering and death. What happens here is Divine Service, the great and eternal God deigns to come to us poor sinners and serve us in our great need, serve us who are only Samaritans and lepers. He has made us His own peculiar people, holy priests and kings, citizens of heaven. He has made us acceptable not just to other people, but to God Himself. And it is He who serves us in the Divine Service who enables us to glorify Him in the right way, the orthodox way, in the way of the Samaritan. And so we do. Glory be to God in Jesus' name. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria