

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Our Gospel text must be about “giving thanks,” after all, it’s the assigned Gospel text for Thanksgiving Day. And, indeed, how appropriate for today, as we have invited confirmation classes of years past to join us, and some have been able to come and join us in giving thanks for God’s goodness back then—75, 70, 65, 60, 50, 25 years ago—for the Lord’s washing that brought us into His Church, for hearts filled with faith in Christ Jesus, and for tongues that confess His holy Name.

Dr. Art Just, who wrote the *Concordia Commentary* on Luke, described this scene in Luke as comprising “two different groups of catechumens”: “the Samaritan and the nine Jewish lepers” (Just, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 655). How providential this text on this day. Therefore, we give thanks for these “ones” who have returned to give thanks—though we’re not castigating the others not able to be with us today, as if they are part of the ungrateful “nine.” If you consider the crosses beside many of the names, you know why they’re not here at this Zion. The heavenly Zion has beckoned them to their “*house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*” (2 Cor. 5:1).

Certainly giving thanks is a good thing. We teach our children to say thanks, after all, and children need to be taught that. Still, it’s not really something that we proclaim in the church. We do it...we give thanks; we encourage it and teach it; “*Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!*” (Ps. 118:1); but we don’t proclaim it. It’s not really a thing to proclaim. I doubt anyone will leave from here with that message on his lips. “Hey, everybody! I gave thanks today in church!” And that message surely wouldn’t resonate as a Gospel motivation to come to church! Rather, it would probably be received with a roll of the eyes.

Surely we have given thanks today, and we will some more, but giving thanks is a response, usually to some kindness, or gift, or grace. Therefore, a focus on the response and not on the gift seems just all wrong. It puts the focus on me and not on the Lord.

Indeed, prior to the one Samaritan returning to give thanks in our text, there’s a lot going on. Remember, Jesus’ focus was on the salvation of the world. That’s why He came, and that’s why He had “*set His face to go to Jerusalem*” (Luke 9:51): to accomplish our salvation by cross and death. Still, His path to Jerusalem was not a straight line there. His peripatetic ministry took Him sometimes near and other times far away from Jerusalem. Our Gospel affirms that Jesus was “*On the way to Jerusalem,*” yet today we find Jesus along the border between Galilee and Samaria.

And entering a village, Jesus encountered ten lepers. He encountered them, but they could not come near. The religious rules regarding this dread skin disease

prohibited them from coming near (Lev. 13). So they “*stood at a distance*” and called out to Jesus: “*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.*” They had likely heard of the One who could heal many “*of their infirmities*”—even leprosy, for “*the report about him [had been spread] abroad*” (Luke 5:15).

They had come to the right place, for Jesus did have mastery over all things, but not only of the body—also of the soul. In fact, Jesus demonstrates His concern today for both body and soul; that is, for the wellness of the whole person.

Perhaps today we might turn that around and say, Jesus was concerned not just about the soul, but also about the body, for in some ways, Christians have emphasized the soul at the expense of the body. Happily, some of our Synod’s professors are encouraging a corrective.

One way is in the reemphasis on the resurrection. This may seem obvious, but it has not been. Oh, to be sure, our Synod never stopped confessing that “on the third day [Jesus] rose again from the dead,” nor did we stop confessing “the resurrection of the body” (Apostles’ Creed), but pastors stopped preaching it—especially at funerals. I’ve heard it, or perhaps I should say, I noticed its absence at funerals I’ve attended. Brothers and sisters in Christ, Jesus redeemed us by His blood, body and soul; and we confess that on the last day, Jesus “will raise me and all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.” (Luther, Small Catechism, AC, 3rd Article).

Another way the body is being reemphasized is in our post-communion dismissal. Prior to the advent of *Lutheran Service Book* in 2006, the dismissal went like this: “The body and blood of our Lord strengthen and preserve you *steadfast in the true faith* to life everlasting.” That’s not wrong, but consider the LSB’s new emphasis. “The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you *in body and soul* to life everlasting.” Body and soul!

I submit that this emphasis is found in our Gospel, too; and I submit it’s found in three words in our text: first, in the word translated “healed or cured.” This word clearly refers to the bodily healing that the ten received as they headed toward Jerusalem. The leprosy that covered their bodies was gone; they were cured.

The second word is the word for cleansing. The lepers were also cleansed, and this was not just physical. When a person was found to have leprosy, he was pronounced to be unclean (Lev. 13). “*He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp,*” the Lord instructed the people (Lev. 13:46). Lepers were cut off from family, from society, from the temple, from God’s grace.

But should the leprosy be physically cured, the leper was also cleansed, and he had to go to the priest to be declared unclean, just as Jesus sent the ten. Then he

could return to his home and work, and to the temple for grace. This cleansing, therefore, affected the soul!

The third word is the word translated *“has made you well.”* That translation is okay, but you should know that this word could have just as well been translated *“has saved you,”* as it was earlier in Luke with the sinful woman who entered the Pharisee’s house and anointed Jesus’ feet, wiping them with her tears. It’s the same word, but there translated, *“Your faith has saved you”* (Luke 7:50).

In fact, I submit that this word brings in both sides of the salvation coin. Jesus saves both body and soul, and here, whether you translate it, “made you well” or “saved you,” Jesus is referring to both body and soul. This one man, a Samaritan at that, was not just cured, and not just cleansed, but he was made well, body and soul. And recognizing this brought this man back to Jesus to fall on his face before Him and give Him thanks.

Dear friends, so it is for us. The corruption of sin certainly affects us in body. It’s the root cause of all disease: cancer, heart disease, diabetes, addictions, pain—and ultimately death. And it affects us in soul—apart from Christ we are spiritually dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1).

Thus, Jesus’ sacrifice was not just a healing for our souls. It was for our bodies, too. Jesus’ death atoned for sin and destroyed the power of death, and because of Jesus’ resurrection, even though we die, yet shall we, who look to Jesus and believe in Him, live (John 11:25). The mortal shall put on the immortal; the corrupted shall put on incorruption (1 Cor. 15:53). *“Death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away”* (Rev. 21:4).

Moreover, in Christ, we have been made wholly new creations, recreated, restored, ready for resurrection. To be sure, the sacrifice that Jesus made was the sacrifice that atones for our sin, but Jesus’ shed blood also cleanses us from our sins (1 John 2:2; 1:7). Therefore, we have access, says St. Paul. Trusting in *“Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification,”* we have been given access to *“this grace in which we stand”* (Rom. 5:2)—to a baptism that we remember daily, to forgiveness freely bestowed for the sake of Christ, to Christ’s body and blood that strengthens and preserves us body and soul to life everlasting. In this way, *“the God of peace himself ... [sanctifies us] completely, and [keeps our] whole spirit and soul and body ... blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Thess. 5:23).

This is the faith that makes us well, body and soul, as it did the Samaritan. So then, how do you respond? It’s obvious, isn’t it? With thanks! God grant it ...

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.