

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
21st Sunday after Pentecost
LWML Sunday
13 October 2013
Grace and Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Ruth 1:1-19a; Lk 17.11-19

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

The Lord is known by His giving gifts to us.
He gives; we receive.

He gives life and health, food and drink, body and soul—in a word: everything.
Everything we have and everything we are is marked by Him giving and us receiving.

And while everything He gives is for our good,
it doesn't always seem to be that way.

We don't like it when He gives us suffering and the cross,
whether it's illness, disease—or, in the case of Naomi, even famine and death.

We don't like His gifts of loneliness, rejection, or brokenness.
We don't like the nursing homes, or the overwhelming debt.
We don't like guilt or shame or fear.
We don't like being a leper, or a foreigner.

A foreigner is always on the outside, never at ease, never at peace.
Everything she does is wrong, or out of order, or offensive.
She's lonely, suffers from hatred and rejection,
and no matter how hard she tries to fit in, "she's not one of us."

A leper is one who bears in his body a repulsive disease.
He's rejected by family, friends, and society as a whole;
he's lonely, in tremendous pain, and can't do anything to fix it.

Both seek help—just a little reprieve from a hard life—but there's none to be found.

The truth is, we're all lepers; we're all foreigners—outsiders with a nasty disease.
You were born that way. It's in your DNA.
You can blame your parents, but that won't get rid of it.
You can deny it all you want, pretend to fit in, cover the marks or the scabs, change your accent.
You're still who you are, whether you like it or not—
you don't belong here; at least, you don't belong here on your own.

Ruth didn't deserve to go to Israel—
let alone to glean the fields of Boaz,
or seek him as her kinsman redeemer,
or be the great-grandmother of King David,
or be found in the lineage of Jesus.

And the lepers didn't deserve mercy or pity or even a pittance of help.
They didn't deserve to be healed,
and the one who turned back, didn't deserve to be saved.

And you're no different.
You don't deserve help either to the body or the soul.

Yet that's precisely what seems to plague us today: a sense of entitlement.
We see it in the government, and in the schools, with our young, and even at the Lord's Table.
Everyone shouts for their rights and what they deserve.
But not our Lord.

In fact, He takes up just the opposite refrain.
He pleads to the Father to get what He doesn't deserve.
So that you would receive what you've got no right to have.

We seem to forget this.
We forget that everything we have is a gift: grace.

You've all heard the difference between grace and mercy before:
grace is when you get what you don't deserve;
mercy is when you don't get what you do deserve.
With Christ, there's always grace and mercy.

But if we don't see ourselves as the foreigners and lepers that we are,
then grace and mercy go out the window—
and we're back to talking about what we've got a right to.

And if we never noticed our disease, we'd have no desire for its cure.
Every missionary knows that the Gospel makes little sense without the Law.
A cure does no good without a disease.

So we thank our Lord for His word of Law for this very reason: it shows us our leprosy.

We thank Him for famines and cancers, debt and disease, for pain, suffering, even the cross—
for without these, without seeing our leprosy,
we'd have no desire for its cure.

In today's Gospel there are 10 who recognize their leprosy.
10 have felt their rejection, their loneliness, their inability to make things right.
10, who, when they see Jesus, recognize the One with something to *give*.

So all 10 cry out: "*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!*" *Kyrie Eleison!* (Lk 17:13)
And He does.
All 10 are healed, freed from their leprosy.
All 10 receive mercy, life, and restoration.

But the story turns.
 In fact, 1 turns, shouting the praises of this man Jesus.
 1 comes back, kneels, and adores Jesus.

What happened to the other 9?
 I don't know. Presumably they went to the priest as directed.

But the story isn't about the other 9.
 Just like the story of Ruth and Naomi isn't about Orpah.
 It's about the 1—the 1 who lays at the feet of Jesus.
 And this 1 is a Samaritan, an outsider, a reject—
 just like Ruth, the *Moabitess woman*.

Neither Ruth nor the leper deserved what they got.
 And yet through the gifts of their foreignness, their leprosy, the crosses they bore,
 our Lord delivered his gift of life.

And more than healing for his skin, this leper is given the gift of faith, salvation.
 So also Ruth: she's given more than a new home; she's given to be in the lineage of her Savior.
 And so have you.

Not because you've done anything to persuade Him;
 and certainly not because you've been obedient—which you haven't been;
 it was pure grace, pure mercy—all Jesus.

Like Ruth, you've been brought into the line of Christ.
 Like the Leper, you've been healed both in body and in soul.
 Your rejection, loneliness, brokenness, and pain is a gift—
 not because they're good things in and of themselves,
 but because they unite you to Christ.

That's the goal: to be with Jesus.
 And it comes by the Gospel: the preaching of the forgiveness of sins through Christ alone.
 The missionary breaks through self-deception and narcissism, showing the reality of the disease;
 and then, binds up what broke by delivering Jesus.

That's what the LWML excels in: they help make it possible for missionaries to deliver Jesus.
 They've recognized what it means to receive all they have from Christ as gift.
 Like Ruth, the Moabitess woman who confessed Naomi's God and people to be hers as well;
 like the Samaritan Leper who returned with thanks,
 these ladies give everything they have for the service of Christ and His Church.

Let us learn from this faith and the example of their service.
 Let us receive from Christ what we don't deserve—all as a gift.
 Let's cling to His promise, even though suffering marks the way.
 Let's turn back in thanks with the Leper, adoring Jesus as He gives Himself in the Sacrament.

We're all a bunch of lepers, foreigners, outcasts and rejects, sinners from birth—
it's good for us to admit it.

Because it just so happens that Christ came to have mercy on sinners.
And for you His grace abounds!

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