

“Want to be blessed and well?” Luke 17:11-19

On the way to Jerusalem he 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.”

When we look at our today's Gospel reading, we can say that it is about ... yes, it is about people just like so many in our community. Yes, it is about situations which happen all around us all the time.

If we tried to translate this story into our context, it could sound something like this. Jesus was passing through the region of Barossa. And as He went through local towns He was met by many who were having different kinds of problems, which they couldn't solve on their own.

“O God, help us, come and fix our problems, we don't know what to do, things are out of our control! Just do something!” And so Jesus did. He helped them to solve their problems and their situations got better. Solutions came. Their life improved and they began to feel that they have again regained control over their lives.

Then one of them, who saw that God had helped him out, turned back, praising God with a loud voice, and he came to Jesus, fell on his face at Jesus feet, giving Him thanks. And by the way, he didn't have a German name and he wasn't even a local.

Then Jesus answered: “Didn't I help all of them? Where are the others? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” And Jesus said to him: “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”

You see, our Gospel reading really is about people like so many around us. I would suggest that today we use this reading to reflect on, first, – when people search for God, second, – how are we respond to God's grace, third, – what makes us well.

When people search for God, *how* are we to respond to God's grace, and *what* really makes us well. First, when do people search for God? You know the answer. Yes, when they are in big, big trouble.

We have often spoken about the fact that this knowledge, that there is something or someone higher, is literary built into us. This is truly universal human experience. But on our own we don't know who and what kind of being this someone is.

And usually we don't even care. Why would we bother ourselves with such hard questions?! How could we know the answers anyway?! Besides, by our nature we prefer to live like we ourselves were like gods.

Deciding on our own what is right and good and what is not. Being in charge, being in control of our fates. Doing things the way we want, and so on. And as long as we succeed, or at least as long as we think that we succeed in being like gods, we don't care about this higher being.

But, from time to time situations come where we are forced to wake up and realize that actually we are not in control of our lives. We all could come up with different examples.

Terminal illnesses, when suddenly we are faced with reality of death. Loss of jobs or our income sources, when all the security about future is gone, and we don't know what to expect, and we have no control on how things will turn out.

Next suicide bomber or shooter takes dozens of lives, and we begin to feel threatened where we used to feel safe. Thunderstorm cutting off power and suddenly leaving entire communities vulnerable to different kind of forces.

I guess each of you could contribute to this list. There is one thing that is common in all these situations – we are not in control. We find ourselves being dependent on external circumstances. On whatever comes next.

What do people often do in these situations, when we face obstacles and threats that we can't possibly overcome? When all our resources and ideas are inefficient, what is left? People are left to do what the 10 lepers did.

Cry to God: "Have mercy!" For the 10 lepers there was nothing they could do to change their situation. They were sick and their sickness meant they were cut off from their communities. There was no life for them. And they couldn't change a thing, except cry to God: "Jesus, have mercy on us!"

Losing control over our lives often helps us to see how dependent on God's grace we really are. And it makes us to look for His help. And our dear Lord graciously provides for us.

It is good to be reminded how much He daily does for us. Remember, how Luther explained the 1st articles of the Apostles' Creed? "I believe that God has made me and all creatures."

We didn't create ourselves. It was gracious will of our loving Creator to give us life, and He keeps giving it to us every minute. We don't possess our life, we keep receiving it. He has given us our bodies and souls, eyes, ears, and all our members, reason and all senses, and still takes care of them.

Yes, what we are we are thanks to our Creator. He has given us our bodies, our reason, and all our talents. We didn't pick them, we received them and we continue to enjoy them only thanks to our gracious God.

That's Him who daily gives us clothing and food, home and family, and all that we have. We tend to imagine that what we have is our achievement. Sure, to some extent it is true, we could use God's gifts or we could waste them.

But we don't determine where we are born, what genes and talents we have, what opportunities come along, all that is given by our gracious Creator. He richly and daily provides us with all that we need to support this body and life.

Even more, and we don't think about this much unless something bad happens, but our loving Creator also daily defends us against all danger and guards and protects us from all evil.

And, remind me, why does He do all of this? Because we are such wonderful and grateful people, that we are entitled to His gifts? Not at all. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in us.

For all this it is our duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true. And this is what the healed Samaritan, the only one who came back to Jesus, did. He praised God and thanked Jesus.

How often do people act like the nine who just went on their way? They were made well again. They could return to their lives. They were again, or they probably thought that they were again in control.

How often our prayers are sincere only as long as our problems are threatening us? And once they are gone, the need for God is gone with them. Sometimes Christians are ridiculed that their religion is just a crutch for the weak. In fact, the very opposite is true.

People have all sorts of crutches to help them feel like gods. If only we have possessions, money, insurance, some useful connections, some good and well paid skills, friends, family, etc. we feel like we have got our lives under control.

Why would we need God? Right? For all is good. Thus so many just keep walking away from the One to whom they owe everything. Thus they rob themselves of the greatest joys and the most wonderful gifts that our God has prepared for them.

Our second question was, - how are we to respond to God's grace? How are we to respond when God graciously provides for us, not only when we are in danger, but also daily, from day to day, every day.

And the answer is very simple. Coming to Jesus, praising God, and giving thanks to Jesus. Some can object, yes, but where is this Jesus now, how can we go to Him and thank Him?

And again, you know the answer. Where is the only setting where not only Jesus, but also God the Father and the Holy Spirit has promised to be with you, and to bless you? It is right here, in the Divine Service, where the Holy God Himself gathers His people.

And how abundant He is in His grace! He comes here to forgive you, and to cleanse you from all your sins. When you hear the words “I forgive you”, you are assured that God Himself forgives you.

He comes to speak to you, to reveal His loving fatherly heart and what He has done and does for you. When your pastor explains you God’s loving heart, you are assured that it is you, who He loves.

He comes to feed you with His precious Sacrament, the medicine of resurrection and eternal life, He shares His holiness with you, He comes to protect you from all evil and to grant you His peace and rest, regardless of what storms may be threatening your life.

These are His gifts that are difficult to comprehend. You need to use all your imagination if you want to grasp the magnitude of what our God does for you. That’s why we need to come in God’s presence like the healed Samaritan did.

Humble, falling on his face in the presence of the Holy and Almighty God. We need to be clear. If we come to thank our God, this is not something good that we do, or something we can boast about.

It is an incredible privilege to have access to the Holy God through Jesus, and we need to pray that the Holy Spirit helps us to do it properly, with humble and grateful hearts, loving our God and fearing to lose Him more than anything.

Blessed you are if you do this! Not because by that you do something for God, but because by coming in Jesus presence you are able to receive what God does for you.

Thus we come to our last question, – what does really make us well? For the nine who didn’t return to Jesus their health was what made them well. They thought, if only I am healthy, I am OK, I have got it.

For those many and many in our community, who think about God only when something really bad happens, it is something in their lives that makes them well. It means that they really are not looking for God.

For them God is simply means to get the things that they really love the most. As long as their lives go according to their plan, as long as they get what they desire, they are well.

But what does Jesus say what makes us well? Your faith makes you well. Remember, we have often spoken about this. 2KR. It tells what it means to be truly and fully human. That is, to live in two kinds of relationships.

Joyfully receiving everything from our gracious God, and serving people in our lives with all the gifts that God has given to us. When Jesus speaks about our faith, He means loving and trusting relationships with our Father in Heaven.

What He means is – that to have faith is to have received the gift of the Holy Spirit, who then changes our hearts, and minds, and everything in us, and assures us that this God, the Creator of the Universe, the same One who gave up His life on the cross, is your God.

He created you, He saved you, He gives you true faith, He knows your name, He cares for you, and He will have you with Him in His eternal kingdom. This is what Jesus means by being well. It is about the 1st commandment. Having true God as your God, knowing Him and trusting Him, and daily rejoicing in God's love and forgiveness.

As I already said, blessed you are, for that is your God, who has gathered you here to make you well. And the peace of God that surpasses all our understanding keep your minds and hearts in Jesus Christ.

Amen.