

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

Luke 17:11-19

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Years A, B, and C - Thanksgiving, Text: Luke 17:11-19
Year A - Thanksgiving, Text: Luke 17:11-19

Note: This same Gospel text is also appointed to be read at in Year C, for Proper 23. In the commentary below, Dr. Wendt focuses on the Thanksgiving theme.

The narrative of Jesus healing the ten lepers is recorded only in Luke.

Back in Luke 9:51, we read of Jesus leaving Galilee and setting out for Jerusalem. He sent messengers ahead of Him to a Samaritan village to prepare for His reception there. However, the Samaritans refused to receive Jesus or to permit Him to pass through their territory. Why? They insisted that the only valid place for offering sacrifice to God was on the summit of Mt. Gerizim in Samaria — not Mt. Zion in Jerusalem. When James and John became aware of this, they suggested to Jesus that they call down fire from heaven to consume them. However, Jesus rebuked the two brothers, and the group moved on to another village.

In the travel narrative that follows, Luke makes few references to where Jesus ministered — whether in Samaritan or Jewish territory. However, in the passage being surveyed, the journey narrative has advanced rather close to Jericho and Jerusalem.

Verses 17:11-12: Jesus and His disciples travel through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As Jesus enters a village, He meets ten lepers who keep their distance from Him and His followers. After all, lepers were looked on as unclean outcasts.

Verse 17:13: The lepers call out to Jesus, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” These outcasts know who Jesus is and come to Him for healing.

Verse 17:14: When Jesus sees and hears them, He says, “Go and show yourselves to the priests,” which they do. Along the way to their priests, the ten are healed. Jesus was not sending the lepers for treatment; they were not doctors or healers. Under the law they served as “inspectors” determining whether a person was clean or unclean.

Most likely, the nine Jewish lepers would have shown their healed bodies to a local priest, who had the authority to declare when people were healed from diseases such as leprosy. In Jesus’ day, priests served in the Jerusalem Temple for one week twice each year, but they lived in their own community during the other 50 weeks of the year. Perhaps the lepers did not go back to Jesus because they knew that He was a marked man in the eyes of the Temple elite. Perhaps they were eager to get back to their families with whom they had not been able to live while afflicted.

Verse 17:15: When the other leper sees that he has been cured and healed, he (alone!) returns to Jesus, praising God with a loud voice along the way. Although the “Jewish nine” were also cured, they certainly were less grateful, even though the name of the region in which they lived was Judah, which means praise.

Verse 17:16: When he comes into Jesus’ presence, he falls flat on his face at Jesus’ feet and thanks Him. Luke then states, “And he was a Samaritan.” In the eyes of religious Jews — such as the Pharisees — Samaritans were seen as despicable creatures.

To which priests did the Samaritan go? He would not have gone to those in the Jerusalem Temple. He might have begun walking to the Samaritan holy mountain, Mt. Gerizim. However, it seems unlikely he would have walked all the way there and then all the way back to Jesus. He possibly returned to Jesus immediately after seeing that he had been healed.

Verses 17:17–18: Jesus poses questions that point out that although He had healed nine Jews and one Samaritan, only the Samaritan (“this foreigner”) returned to Jesus to thank Him for what He had done for him.

Verse 17:19: The incident comes to a close with Jesus telling the Samaritan to go on his way, and that his faith had made him well. Remarkable! The Samaritan had never sat at the feet of a Jewish rabbi, had never

studied any sacred writing other than the Samaritan version of the Torah (Genesis–Deuteronomy), and had never offered a sacrifice in the Jerusalem Temple. Yet Jesus commended him for his faith in the God that Jesus revealed in word and deed. So, Jesus welcomed a non-Jew into His eternal family.

We as God’s children would do well to ask, “How grateful am I for what God provides throughout life?” — things such as every mouthful of food that we consume, every breath of air we inhale, every note of music we hear, every smile on the face of a friend, a child, a spouse. God provides these and a thousand more things, day by day. God would have us embrace an old spiritual discipline of listing our “blessings” daily, naming them before God, and thanking Him for them.

Sad to say, we live in a world in which many assume that they have an absolute right to health, happiness, and every possible creature comfort. May God inspire each and every one of us to learn about gratitude from the Samaritan leper!