

Luke 17:11-19 When [Jesus] saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. (v14)

Dear Christian Friends,

Lutherans are not exactly known for our willingness to change. But I'll tell what, change is at the very heart of who we are in Christ Jesus. Because in hearing of the miraculous change in the life of the leper, we too are invited to **"Come to Jesus for a change."** And as we consider...

Scientists today have determined that diseases of the skin can occur in varying degrees of severity and are individually identified. But back in the first century, it was all just kind of lumped together. Basically, all skin disease was labeled leprosy and considered both highly contagious and incurable. The mild kind showed up as a skin rash accompanied by a few days of fever. The rash ran its course and disappeared on its own within anywhere from a couple weeks to a couple years. The more severe cases resulted in ulcerous tumors on the face and limbs, cut off circulation to the extremities, and sometimes caused fingers, toes, or the tip of the nose to rot and fall off. Infected people were shunned to separate camps outside of town. And whenever anyone passed nearby, lepers had to shout, "Unclean! Unclean!" - warning travelers not to get too close.

"Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him."

(11,12a). You might expect the lepers to shout, "Unclean! Unclean!" Instead, ***"they stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"*** (12b,13).

Rather bold, don't you think? I mean, they were lepers - the outcasts of society. How dare *they* come to Jesus! But if you know your Savior, you know that that is exactly what Jesus wanted them to do, to

dare to ***come to him for a change*** in their lives - and the lepers knew it, too!

You see, the Bible writers tell us on more than one occasion that after a miracle by Jesus, ***"News about him [would] spread throughout the surrounding area"*** (Lk 4:37). The lepers would have heard how Jesus had healed the servant of those despised Roman soldiers at Capernaum. They would have heard how Jesus had traveled north beyond the borders of Israel and, while there, helped a Canaanite, a non-Israelite! They would have heard how Jesus had crossed the Sea of Galilee to the region of the Gadarenes and healed a person possessed by a demon, banished from the local town. They would have heard how Jesus cared about outsiders and outcasts, and how he had the power to cure and change their situation. So they called out, ***"Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"*** (13).

Leprosy today, also known as Hansen's disease, is rare in our American society. We've come to find out that it isn't particularly contagious and there are medicines, cures, and preventions. But today we face much worse. And I'm not talking about cancer or zika or ebola. I'm talking about a disease of the soul that has infected us all. And you know what I'm talking about, don't you? **The spiritual disease that infects us is the leprosy called sin.** Like it or not, we've all tested positive. And that's not good! Cancer may have the potential to put us in a coffin, but sin can put us in hell.

But now don't go thinking that we're just victims here. Unlike those lepers who wished to rid their bodies of disease, we often embrace our disease of sin. We often times seek it out to immerse ourselves more and more in it. We invite it into our homes. We pass it along to our children. We make excuses for it. And before we know it, its contagious affect has infected everything we touch. With that kind of spiritual disease we ought to walk down the street shouting, ***"Unclean! Unclean!"***

So, what gives us confidence to ***come to Jesus for a change***? Two things. And it's the same two things which the lepers had heard. **1) Jesus has the love to care about spiritual outcasts like us! 2) He has the power**

to cure spiritual outcasts like us. And it is evidence of this caring and curing change that invites us to come in the first place: the evidence of his caring and his curing change found wrapped up in strips of cloth in a manger outside of Bethlehem; the evidence of his caring and his curing change found in the drops of blood on a cross stuck into a hill called Calvary; the evidence of his caring and his curing change found as we stare into an empty tomb outside of Jerusalem, the evidence of his caring and his curing change found in the gospel message of Jesus Christ himself.

Paul described it when he spoke out in confidence, *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. (Romans 1:16)* Talk about change! We were outcasts, leprous with sin, enemies of God on our way to eternal death in hell, when Jesus' caring and curing hand changed us for eternity so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring [us] eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 5:21)

Sir Isaac Newton's First Law of Motion reads: *Everything continues in a state of rest unless it is compelled to change by forces impressed upon it.* We heard it two weeks ago and again today, Paul explained the change in us. He wrote, *Christ's love compels us. (2 Corinthians 5:14)* We have come to Jesus for a change and we have been blessed to be able to mark that change in our hearts and lives.

Many homes have them, that spot on the door frame or wall where children mark their growth in height. I have to admit that there was time in 6th grade when I was checking that spot on the wall almost once a week. I hit my growth spurt and hit this height as I was heading into 7th grade. Extrapolating out my growth rate, holding myself up to the wall, I had a vision (and empirical data to back it) of, by age 16, being 6'6" tall. Oh, growth has continued...but not how I would have liked, at least physically.

Two weeks ago, your Savior invited you to grow, Grow in Christian Character. If you haven't already, go ahead and take a look at

yourself. Hold yourself up to the spot on the wall and check for growth. Are you loving the lost like Christ? Are you doing your Christian duty? Are you living a life of thanksgiving? And all of it more than you were before? Go ahead, hold yourself up to the measuring spot, the Word of God and see who you once were - a leprous sinner. But don't be disappointed. Own it. Admit it. Acknowledge it. And then *Come to Jesus for a Change* and see who you are and still can be in Jesus Christ - a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) created to be like God in righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24), created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). Christ's love compels us to make this change in who we are and how we live, and what is most important, and how we spend our time, and how we spend our money, and who we spend time with, and what activities we engage in, and on and on and on! We have *come to Jesus for a change* and look at how his caring and curing hand has done it!

Jesus said to the lepers, *"Go show yourselves to the priests"* - to fulfill God's law - and *"As they went, they were cleansed"*. They had come to Jesus for a change, and as they went on their way, they found it. But one recognized more than a change of skin. He recognized a change of heart and returned to say thanks. Jesus himself identified the change. He said to the man *"Your faith has made you well."*

Here is faith. Here is confidence of the heart. Here is a vivid understanding of helplessness and a realization that there's only one way out - Jesus!" As we recognize the change in our lives accomplished by him, as we have put on the new self through the water and Word of baptism, we daily rise to go and live a new life, a life of thanksgiving, by the power of the gospel in Word and sacrament, free from the leprosy of sin, welcomed into the family of God, rejoicing in the change brought to you through faith in Christ Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:17) So, *rise and go*, changed people of God, to live lives of thanksgiving. Amen.