

Dear children of God given their glory, grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

Are you a person of faith? That question is fashionable in today's culture. It is acceptable to ask about "faith" and to talk about "faith". In fact, the word "faith" is a large component of the current political campaigning. If one of the candidates were to begin saying, "No, I don't have faith – I see no need for faith" poll numbers for that individual could be expected to go south in a hurry. In politics, the word "faith" is in play, whatever is meant by the word. In daily life, the word "faith" is common and considered important. In crisis circumstances you are well aware of statements such as "my faith carried me through" or "you just have to have faith".

But faith by itself is nothing! The value, the worth, the benefit of faith comes from its object. "You have to have faith" in what, in whom? Some academics have faith in science – it is their idol. Some Hollywood sophisticates have faith in scientology and sincerely believe in aliens from outer space. Some people have faith in the pagan practice of voodoo, because it works – things happen. Some have faith in meditation – if it changes feelings or blood pressure. Some have faith in prayer wheels or prayer beads seeking help from other mediators than Christ. Some have faith in nature, the wind or trees or animals or stars. Some have faith in Allah and his prophet, Mohammed. Some have faith in God and country, whoever that god might be. Some have faith in themselves, their learning, their good works, and their wealth. One major magazine said that over 90% of Americans believe in god, but that more and more of them are inclined to make up the god in whom they believe. Not so with the leper on the border between Samaria and Galilee!

The ten lepers literally shouted or screamed "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." They were supposed to be yelling "Unclean! Unclean!" so that no one came too close to them. Their disease isolated them from friends and family. Their disease forecast a hopeless future and painful death. Therefore lepers were sometimes known as "walking dead men". But instead of shouting out "unclean", these ten cried out for mercy to be cured. They wanted to be cleansed. They wanted to be held close again by those who loved them. Word of Jesus had reached their ears even in their leper colony and somehow they had located Him.

From a distance they were yelling, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." These men were not asking for forgiveness of sins nor do we when we sing the Kyrie, "Lord have mercy upon us! Christ have mercy upon us! Lord have mercy upon us!"

The Kyrie is not a cry for forgiveness but a cry of total need to one who has total power to help. Like the lepers we are always in a fix in this sin-poisoned world. When we pray "Lord have mercy" our prayer is as wide as the world and as deep as our need. We are asking God for help with our culture and with schooling and with sinful

cravings and with our crumbling bodies and with the cruel pressures and with the hidden pains of life. “Lord have mercy”. We are praying for the aging and the unborn and the starving and the addicted and the sick and the dying and even for our enemies. “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”

“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” Jesus didn’t touch them. He didn’t even pray for them. When he saw them he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” In His mercy Jesus could have healed them on the spot, but He didn’t! The law said that those cleansed of leprosy were to have the priest make a sacrifice for them and be declared ritually clean. The priests would kill a bird over a basin of fresh water and dip cedar wood, scarlet yarn, hyssop, and another live bird in the blood-stained water. The priest would then sprinkle the bloody water on the cleansed leper and release the living bird. It was testimony to a new life – a life cleansed from leprosy.

So it happened, as they went they were cleansed. They were all healed at the same time and in the same way! Ten “walking dead men” suddenly had a whole new life open up before them. They were now as free as a bird! No imprisoning isolation in a leper colony. No imprisoning pain and decay of body. No imprisoning depression of heart and mind. It is hard to overestimate the joy and the thrill as they looked at one another and saw skin that was clean and whole.

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. The nine continued to journey to the temple in Jerusalem to follow a law that Jesus came to fulfill. The one returned to the Temple of Jesus’ body, a flesh and blood temple before which he fell in worship. He recognized the giver of God’s healing and cleansing! He thanked God for the mercy He had received by laying that thanks at the feet of Jesus. Dear Christians, “that is faith”!

When Jesus said, “your faith has made you well” He was not saying that the Samaritan had worked up “faith” within himself. He was not saying that this leper’s personal confidence had secured God’s help. He was not saying in some generic way, “faith works”. Rather, by Christ’s person and word, this man was given faith in the only one who can bring healing and release from leprosy of the body and from the leprosy of sin.

“Rise and journey, your faith has made you well”. Jesus is saying, you believed that I have the power to shower you with mercy. You trusted my word of cleansing and now you are clean. In preaching on this text Dr. Martin Luther said that we should look to God for all of our needs and know that He is our only source of help. Luther counsels patiently expecting what we pray for in God’s own time and in His own way, not doubting that God hears and answers.

“Rise and journey, your faith has made you well”. Jesus had sent the lepers off without any obvious healing of their condition. All they had to go on was His spoken word. They acted on the promise contained in Jesus’ command even though they could not initially see it. Fellow-redeemed, Jesus’ words were true all along. He didn’t cleanse them because they had enough faith. He cleansed them because He is a gracious and merciful Master and Lord.

One of them recognized His grace and mercy. One of them recognized that Jesus is the LORD. That is faith! The Samaritan recognized that there could be nothing greater in the Jerusalem temple than this merciful healer. In faith He recognized that Jesus is the Temple and the High Priest, the place where worship is to be offered and the one through whom God’s gifts are to be received. He is the flesh and blood temple conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. He is the flesh and blood Temple who was Himself journeying up to Jerusalem where His body would be destroyed and rebuilt in three days. He is the flesh and blood Temple that rose from the grave on the morning of the third day and comes into your midst on the morning of this day with gifts of healing and release.

Beloved, true faith doesn’t just happen. It is the gift of God’s grace by which you trust in Jesus Christ. It comes through hearing and hearing through the speaking of Christ. It comes through water included with God’s command and combined with God’s word. And true thankfulness doesn’t just happen either. It proceeds from recognition of our need for God’s mercy and flows back to God through Jesus Christ.

Where are the nine? Jesus asked. Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner? Jesus recognized the praise and thanksgiving laid at His feet as praise and thanksgiving to God. The nine had a whole new life as a gift from Jesus, our faithful and merciful Lord. “If we are faithless, he remains faithful” (2 Tim 2:13) Their list of possibilities had just exploded. But Jesus expressed disappointment that they were not thankful to God. Unlike the one, the nine did not have faith that worshipped at Jesus’ feet, faith that saved them.

Are you a person of faith? There is a reason the church has confessed the historic creeds in worship down through the ages. They lead us to confess who the one true God is and how He comes to us in Jesus Christ. Receiving Him is faith, the faith once delivered to the saints, the faith through which salvation is given to you.

The word “faith” itself can mean a thousand different things to thousands of different people. It is a fashionable word today. It is a political positive today thrown about with gusto by candidates for office. But the faith the Heavenly Father gives you through the Holy Spirit is faith in Jesus Christ and His Word. It won’t get you elected in some political office. It won’t insulate you from the struggles of this life. But it is the God-given

channel for receiving God's gracious forgiveness and His mercy in your struggles. It is the God-given channel for eternal life.

Where are the nine? God help us to lovingly bear witness to all whom we know of Him who pierces the darkness of death in this sinful world. God help us lovingly to invite them to receive the healing Jesus continues to give and to lay their thanks to God at His feet.

The value, the worth, the benefit of faith comes from its object. The object of your faith is the Son of God, Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. As He speaks to you and feeds you and cleanses you today His word to you is the same as to the healed leper. "Rise, journey, your faith has made you well." Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.