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“Rise and Go!”

Text: Luke 17:11-19

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

“And Jesus said to him, ‘Rise and go your way; your faith has saved you.’ ”

Rise and go. No sweeter words had ever been spoken to this Samaritan leper. He was free. Cleansed and free from his leprosy. Forgiven and free from his sin. He was free to go. . . . How sweet and welcome were those words! Like a man on trial, when the charges are dismissed, or the verdict of *not guilty* is announced, and the judge says, “You are free to go.” He is free from his captivity. Free from his fear. Free from his burden. Absolutely free.

Rise and go. We take that for granted, because we do it everyday. We rise and go to work or school. We rise and go run errands. This morning you arose and came to church. . . . But lepers couldn’t do that. They couldn’t just up and go wherever they wanted. They were outcasts. There were rules and restrictions. They couldn’t go too close to other people, lest they spread their infection. They couldn’t go to church, to the Temple, because they were unclean. They couldn’t be with their spouses or families. The only people they could be with, that they had for companionship, was each other. Fellow lepers. And that wasn’t much comfort, because what they did was watch each other die. Little by little. It was an inevitable fate. Leprosy was a death sentence.

And so rise and go – that was a big deal! It meant not only freedom, but a new life.

So when this ten-man leper colony saw Jesus approaching one day, they call out to Him (from the appropriate distance): ***“Jesus, master, mercy us!”*** They seem to know who He is. Perhaps they had heard of His teaching and miracles. Perhaps they had heard He was a prophet, and they knew the story of Elijah and the healing of the leprous Naaman. In any case, they ask for mercy, because they know that here is the one who can provide such mercy. This is a cry not just of hope, but of faith. And Jesus does not disappoint. ***“Go and show yourselves to the priests”*** at first sounds like a brush-off. As if Jesus is saying, *“They are the ones who can declare you clean; not me. Go show yourselves to them.”* But there was something more. Because they *weren’t* clean. He knew it. They knew it. And so if Jesus is directing them to go and show themselves . . . So at His Word and command, they go. What’s going to happen, how, when? They don’t know. But faith hears the Word, and trusts. Mercy doesn’t always come as we expect it!

So they begin on their way, and they don’t get very far (it seems) before they are

cleansed. And when the one leper sees and realizes what has happened to him, he begins yelling and screaming, with a loud voice praising God, and he runs back to Jesus and falls on his face at His feet. Giving thanks, yes, but not only that. He prostrates himself, for this is the posture of worship. His praising God and giving thanks to Jesus are really not two separate acts, but one. For here is God in the flesh. God, whose Word does what it says. God, who gives mercy, even to Samaritans like him.

The other nine, we're not told what they did. Perhaps they ran too, to the Temple. But only the Samaritan realized that there was a new Temple in town. A new dwelling place of God on earth with His people. Not in a Temple of stone, but in a Temple of flesh and bone. And to *this* Temple He runs. And so he is the only one who receives more – for this is what happens when we come to God. He gives; we receive. And so all were healed, but only one was saved. ***“Rise and go,”*** Jesus says, ***“your faith has saved you.”***

Rise and go. He finally could. He was free. He had been given a new life.

You know, lots of people today ask God for all kinds of things. For mercy, for physical healing, and lots more. And like with these ten lepers, God gives many of these things for which we ask! He showers blessings on believers and unbelievers alike. *“Clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all that I have. He daily and richly provides me with all that I need to support this body and life.”* (Small Catechism, explanation of the First Article) And He wants to! He wants to give. It's who God is, and what He does. And He doesn't begrudge us and seek to take back from us when we, like the nine lepers, do not return to give Him thanks. They were healed and I'm sure they stayed healed. And we receive much even though we too often forget to give thanks.

But the physical blessings are not the main point here. And when Jesus asks, ***“Where are the nine?”*** it is not because He wants the thanks that He has coming, and He's angry that He's not getting it! No, He's really *sad*. For He wants to give more than just physical healing. He wants to give them forgiveness, life, and salvation. He wants to set them free from all their bondage – including their bondage to sin, Satan, death, and hell. He wants to *keep giving* . . . but the nine, presumably Jews, His own countrymen, don't return. Only the one, the foreigner, the Samaritan, comes to receive. It is what will also happen in Jerusalem. Jesus will be rejected by many of His own. Even though He has come to give to them. Even though He has come to die for them.

“Rise and go . . . your faith has saved you.” How *sad* that only one leper got to hear those incredible words! And yet how *wonderful* that one leper got to hear those words! Those words spoken from the lips of God Himself. By God, who so loved this world of lepers, that He came in the flesh, not only to speak those words, but to make them true. To make them true by hanging on the cross for the sin of the world, for the life of the world.

And those are the words that are spoken to you today. The words of the greater gift. The gift greater than the things of this world. The gift greater than physical health and well being. The words of eternal life. And so we lepers of sin have once again gathered in our colony here that we call St. Athanasius. And we cry the prayer of faith, ***“Jesus, master, mercy us!”*** We are unclean. We are filled with sin. The sins of deeds done and left undone; of evil thoughts, impure desires, and hurtful and angry words. We have not loved God with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We’re dying in our sins.

But Jesus is here. For He has promised to be here. ***“Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”*** (Mt 18:20) He is here in the flesh. And He is here for us. He doesn’t stay afar off, but comes to us right here. For He is the God of the unclean, the Saviour of the sinner, the cleanser of lepers. And here, in heart and mind, we fall on our faces at His feet. At His cross. At His altar. We fall before Him in repentance and worship – not two separate acts, but one and the same. And from Him we hear those same wonderful words of release: *“I forgive you all your sins. . . . Take eat; take drink. This is my body, this is my blood. Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.”* ***“Rise and go, your faith has saved you.”***

And do you see? We’re free! His Word does what it says! We are forgiven. We are free to go. Free to go and live, not fearing punishment, not fearing our sins, not fearing our failures, not fearing the accusations of Satan – but confident that I have been released from my sin, from my bondage, from my burden, and free to live (like Ruth) where God has put me. As a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, worker, friend, or neighbor. I need not worry, I don’t have to look over my shoulder! I can’t go back to the old life. I have been set free. Rise and go, He said. So I will rise and go. And live. His Word does what it says.

For, in fact, this is what Jesus Himself did. He rose to life. This is why He was on His way to Jerusalem. He went to die, but He died to rise. He laid down His life for me on the cross, but He took up His life from death. He died with my sins, but rose without them. He rose from the grave, and so I know that I too will rise. Even as I now rise. Rising from the waters of my baptism. Rising from the knees of my confession. Didn’t we hear that in the Epistle? ***“If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him.”*** (2 Tim 2:11) His Word does what it says.

Rise and go. Perhaps we take that for granted. We hear it every week. We receive Holy Communion every week. We hear it in God’s Word every day. But remember who you are, O fellow lepers! Remember who you are without God and His Word. Remember the misery you would still be in if Christ had not set you free. Remember that apart from Him, you could not rise and go. But your Saviour has come to you, and had mercy on you. He is here for you, just as real as that day on the border of Samaria and Galilee. And

He is here to give to you, all that you need. So come and receive Him. His body hung on the cross for you. His blood poured out to wash away your sin. You are not worthy. But that's why He is here. To cleanse you, to forgive you, to give you eternal life. And with those gifts, given to you, rise and go. What else do you need? Rise and go, you are a child of God. Rise and go, you are free!

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.