

Trinity XIV Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

By the Right Reverend Michael W. Hawkins

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It is not enough to talk the talk, you must walk the walk. “Walk in the Spirit,” we are told by Paul two Sundays in a row, in readings from Galatians. But what does Paul mean by walking in step with the Spirit? That means a walk which is led by the Holy Spirit, something very different than the walk of the world, which is proud and selfish. And it is a walk that is empowered by the Holy Spirit. It means not doing it or walking it **my way**, it means not doing it or walking on **my own steam**. “I did it my way” or “I did it all on my own,” these are not Christian sentiments. It is the will of God and the power of God that we seek, and which become our will and our power, by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

These two Sundays, the Church calls us, by recalling the words of St. Paul, to walk in the Spirit. And these two Sundays, the Church puts before us Samaritans, recalling the words of Jesus. The Good

Trinity XIV Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

Samaritan and the Samaritan leper are before us. And these remind us at least of two things:

1. That we need to learn things from our enemies.
2. That we need to love our enemies.

But also, these two have complimentary lessons, the Good Samaritan about the love of neighbour, and the Samaritan leper about the love of God. And these two teach us where we belong. Where we will find life and wholeness, where we will find salvation, where we belong, is in worship at the feet of Jesus, giving thanks and glory to God, and in the ditches, helping and healing, caring and sharing. To walk in the Spirit, we need to bow down and get on our knees - get on our knees to praise God, and get on our knees to help others. As we learn today, to walk in the Spirit is to be led to Jesus by knowing our need and his power. It is to be led to fall down at the

Trinity XIV Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

feet of Jesus in thanks. I hope and pray that you have had that experience of being overwhelmed with gratitude. “Lost in wonder, love and praise” is how Charles Wesley described it in his hymn. And it is in that gratitude, that we, too, know and find our salvation and wholeness, at the feet of Jesus, giving him thanks and giving glory to God. That is our common destination, today and in eternity.

Now I want to spend a few minutes thinking with you about that gospel, the story of Jesus and the Ten Lepers. Whenever we hear a Gospel story like this, a good thing to do is ask, “Where am I in this story? Who am I? How am I described?”

So who are we? I want to say that you and I are ungrateful lepers! Now, I know that it is not the most complimentary thing you’ve ever heard, but you and I are ungrateful lepers. We are all of us unclean. Leprosy was a disease, showing itself in the skin, which made people in the Old Testament unclean. A leper could not go to the

Trinity XIV Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

Temple and could not go home. You were cut off from God and from neighbour. Our leprosy is our sin, yours and mine, which breaks our relationship with God and with one another, and makes us unclean. Throughout the New Testament, the lepers stand for sinners, and throughout the New Testament, Jesus has contact with them and heals and restores them. He touches the untouchable, he forgives sinners, he restores the fallen.

But more than that, I want to tell you that we are one of the nine lepers. We are someone who gets healed and never says thanks. How many people here have been healed? How many here have experienced healing in their body, wonderful, life-saving and life-restoring healing? (I've had appendicitis with emergency surgery less than two hours from my first visit to the doctor's office to being under the knife; otherwise I would have died. I had pneumonia about five years ago, it was taking over my chest, and without the gifts of medicine, I would have died. I have a herniated disc that popped out

Trinity XIV Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

fifteen years ago and I was home-bound in excruciating pain for more than ten weeks. I almost went crazy, surgery was scheduled but it healed and I have not felt a pain from it in the past year!) Did I return to give thanks? Do we?

How many here have experienced healing in your life, healing from a deep hurt, healing of your heart, healing of a relationship? Did we return to give thanks? Like the nine, like spoiled children, we are happy to get the gift, but we forget to say thanks. We are interested in the gifts but not the giver!

So what is the Good News for Ungrateful Lepers? The Good News is that God is kind to the unthankful and to the evil. The Good News is that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all our sins, that God is gracious and generous. The Good News is that God's mercy is greater than our sin, that God's generosity is greater than our ingratitude.

Trinity XIV Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

In the Gospel, the ten call out to Jesus for cleansing, just as we do, “Have mercy upon us.” They know their need and they turn to him for help. Jesus gives them a simple but odd command: “Go to the priest.” Perhaps they had expected some great big miracle, with TV cameras and microphones and spotlights, perhaps like old Naaman, they were offended by the simplicity of what he commanded. But they obeyed.

Now, this was not an easy command to obey. The priest in those days acted like the public health nurse, decided who was infected and who was not, who had to live in isolation and who could return to the community. They didn’t want to go and see a priest, to be told again they were unclean. But they went. And as they went, they were cleansed. It was only in obedience to Jesus, trusting and obeying him, that they were cleansed. They came to Jesus looking for a promise, and what he gave them, as he so often does, is a

Trinity XIV Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

command. So they teach us that to obtain his promise, we must love his command. As they went they were cleansed.

Here, of course, the ten part company. All ten are healed, but only one is saved. All ten are cleansed, but only one is made whole. It is the one despised, doubly cursed Samaritan leper, that turns back to Jesus. Now it's hard to blame the others for doing what Jesus commanded, but maybe the Samaritan leper knew something in Jesus the others didn't recognize. Maybe he knew that Jesus was the real priest, the true priest who could make and pronounce him clean and whole. That one leper turns back to Jesus, not to get something from him, but for Jesus himself. All ten were grateful for the gift, but only one was grateful to the giver.

When Saint Paul sums up the sin of the whole world, he lets loose and gives us lists of a ton of things, including sexual immorality, murder, nastiness, and backstabbing, but he sums the whole thing

Trinity XIV Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

up, your sins and mine in this way: “When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful.” Romans 1.21. All sin is ingratitude. It is a failure to give and show and live our thanks to God, our creator and our redeemer. All sin is ingratitude, and this is especially true for the Christian. It is not guilt or fear that is to motivate us, but love and gratitude. Christian living is grateful living, the response of gratitude to the gift of God through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit. For God’s grace makes us gracious, God’s love makes us loving, and God’s generosity makes us generous.

The Good news is that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. The Good News is that God is kind to the unthankful, his mercy and grace save us and change us.

We come here needing the same gifts as the lepers, seeking the cleansing, healing and wholeness which are the gifts of God’s

Trinity XIV Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

salvation. What sins do you bring today to Christ? What healing do you need in your life, in your home, in your work, in your heart and in your soul? It is here and now, and always and everywhere, giving glory to God at the feet of Jesus, and giving him thanks, that we too may find wholeness and salvation. Amen.