



## **I Got Dirty and Liked It!**

**Pastor John Klawiter**

**October 9, 2022**

**Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost**

**Luke 17:11-19**

Grace and peace to you my siblings in Christ,

On Labor Day weekend, our family went for a hike. We decided to go to Wild River State Park, one of our favorites, just north of Almelund.

It was a beautiful, hot, day. One of the last days before school started.

We hadn't decided where to go until we started driving and so, we weren't fully prepared. When we got down to the St Croix River and found our favorite sandbar, there wasn't anyone else there.

After walking around in the sand for a few minutes, it was clear that the kids were not going to be able to resist the temptation.

They were gonna go into the water... fully clothed and without any towels.

The results were catastrophic. (SLIDE of dirty)

They emerged from the river and dove head-first onto the beach.

Sand ended up in every possible crevice it could find (Sully and Phin). Getting clean was hopeless.

When it was time to go, they couldn't go like that. ... so they all jumped back into the river (picture in water), like a full immersion baptism in the Jordan, and did their best to rinse off all the sand they'd be rolling around in.

This helped... until they had to get back out of the water to do the half mile walk back to the van.

Sand was everywhere. In their shoes, in their hair, in their ears.

When we got home, a layer of sand covered the bottom of the van. After marching straight up to take a bath, sand filled the bottom of the tubs.

Sand even ended up in the laundry; a film covered the lint screen after each load. They were all "sort of" clean.



I could look in the van and still see reminders of that adventure.

Have you ever been so dirty that even after cleaning up, you weren't fully clean?

If I sent my kids to school covered in mud, they'd get sent back home. Try showing up to a formal wedding covered in sand. You wouldn't be let in.

Take it a step further... have you ever smelled someone who clearly was living in the clothes that they were wearing? How did you react when that odor hit your nose?

It's hard to avoid our biases. We form stereotypes and make assumptions. We often struggle to see our unclean neighbors without a negative opinion.

Conversely, what is the first adjective that comes to mind when you hear the word church?

It's probably not messy. Dirty. Stinky.

Why is that? Church is usually the place we get cleaned up for. We wear our "Sunday best", don't we?

It's why I wear this white robe, not only because I look fashionable in a long white robe, but as a reminder of your baptism... when sin was washed away and you were made clean.

It's an awkward mix when the sterile, clean environment of church comes into direct contact with the messy, dirty reality of the world. It's what we aspire for, but when it happens, we're not always ready for it.

Like when 10 guys with a skin disease, separated from society, have to form their own community. Jew, Samaritan, Roman... who knows. It doesn't matter. They're all on equal footing together through their exclusion from the groups they came from.

What happened when they saw Jesus?

Ten lepers approached Jesus (SLIDE). Keeping their distance, (SOCIAL DISTANCING)... we know what that looks like. We will feel the effects of Covid for a long time—that feeling of needing to stay apart. Not wanting to infect or be infected.

These lepers are well aware of the expectation that they can't get too close to Jesus. But their voices carry. They ask:

They called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

And Jesus shows them mercy. He sees them.

When Jesus saw the lepers, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests."



He knows that they are unclean and closed off from society and he boldly declares to them to go and see the priests.

What would happen if they saw the priests in their unclean state? Same thing as they did with Jesus—keep their distance.

And as they went, they were made clean.

A miracle. They're healed.

Then what?

One of the 10, an outsider, a Samaritan—and remember, being from Samaria was the place that a few of the disciples suggest God rains fire down from heaven to destroy earlier in Luke's story—and yet, we know about the "good Samaritan", but what about the "grateful Samaritan"?

He stops. He turns back and praises God.

Hallelujah!! Jesus praises him for praising him. Thanks for saying thanks!

So, is this a moral tale? Is this a story to shame the other 9 who don't thank Jesus immediately? Or is there something larger at work here? Does only one of them have faith to make them well?

My colleague, Pastor Brian, writes "I'm certain that all ten former-lepers believed something about their healing. We see the faith in the one whose beliefs made a difference in the way he acted.

I find it ironic that for him to return and glorify God by thanking Jesus, he had to disobey the command from Jesus to go show himself to the priest! When might our thanksgivings to Jesus mean going against what is deemed good and proper?"

Let that line sink in—the other 9 formerly unclean men are actually being obedient to the word of Jesus. They do as they're told!

Much like the world around us, trying to say that there's one conclusion to draw from this story is a bit short-sighted.

Yes, the Samaritan is commended and lifted up. But that doesn't disregard the power of the other 9 being healed. Perhaps they appear to the priests and declare that Jesus has healed them and they praise God in that time and place. We don't know.

The Bible is many things, but it's rarely convenient. It's not been my experience to read a passage and say "wow, that's easy."



Jesus is at an intersection of clean and unclean. Belonging and isolation. One of the most amazing and overlooked parts of this passage is that those who once were separated, now have the opportunity to return to community. They get to belong. This Samaritan—a foreigner AND a leper—has a DOUBLE opportunity to belong.

Faith Lutheran knows a thing or two about stepping into the intersection of clean and unclean. The year before Covid, we spent time intentionally getting to know our neighbors who were unsheltered.

Friends like David and Laura. Alex. Our brothers and sisters who were often overlooked.

It was sparked by the idea of building tiny houses that would be joined in a Sacred Settlement with people who had never experienced homelessness to create community. Togetherness. Hope.

As much work as Faith injected into this ministry, many barriers existed—and still do exist—to make it happen on our own church land. However, because of the work our congregation and other churches in the Twin Cities did, the first Sacred Settlement is finally able to open.

The Saint Paul City Council authorized the occupancy of the 6 tiny houses at Mosaic Christian Community. Many people were skeptical this would happen. There were times that it didn't look good.

Last Sunday night, they invited hundreds of supporters—people who've walked alongside the organization known as Settled—to celebrate the intersection of these communities of people. People who witness the mercy that Jesus has for his neighbor and said, "I want to be more like that."

Thanks to the financial donation of Chuck Tollefsrud and the Meg Maurer memorial, Faith was able to build this house for David, a veteran. Volunteers from our church built this home (slide of work day). There's a sign outside the door that reads "this home will lift one person off the street because of the faithfulness of Faith Lutheran Church."

We did that, Faith. We opened our eyes. We overcame the biases and fears and said yes. There is more to come... there is more to do. But today, it's time to celebrate.

Our neighbors have a place to call home, to clean up each day. And we... we've found a way to get our hands dirty and to experience the world as it is. We've broken free from the safe and sterile boundaries and moved beyond our walls, out where Jesus is extending grace and mercy to those who least expect it.



Could the biggest take away from today's story not be about our efforts to get clean... but the life changing difference it makes when we risk getting dirty? Amen.