

# CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH

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## Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15; Psalm 111; 2 Timothy 2:8-15; Saint Luke 17: 11-19

*In nomine Jesu!*

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Oh, good! You remember!

Luke wants us to remember that.

Luke wants us to remember that of Jesus' death and resurrection, death has no power over us.

Luke wants us to see that Jesus' resurrection means not just life on the other side of the grave, but new life for us now, on this side of the grave.

Luke wants us to know that our faith in the God who raised Jesus from death is effective and useful as we experience "little deaths" – the disasters, disappointments, defeats of life and find ourselves at the point of despair or self-conscious torment; what Luther called *Anfechtung*.

Luke wants us to use our faith – our trust – in a God who destroys the power of death and the grave and be raised again from those "little deaths" too.

New life for us now. Resurrection useful to us now, that's what today's readings and Gospel are all about.

In today's readings we encounter several people with leprosy who, as far as they and their society were concerned, were as good as dead. While a diagnosis of leprosy in their time might have been as non-threatening as a bad case of acne or as deadly

as what we now call Hansen's disease, the treatment of those labeled "lepers" is indisputable. They were cast out, ostracized, driven away from every form of social interaction. Their families disowned them, their friends deserted them, their society detested them. The law said they could be killed -- and their society encouraged those who encountered them to forcibly turn them away, turn them in, or if they came too close stone them to death. If you were labeled a leper because of your skin disease, you were, for all intents and purposes, dead. For victorious Syrian general Naaman, it was even worse. Sent hat in hand into the territory of his despised enemy Israel, he wanted to drop dead from sheer humiliation.

For the Samaritan, accompanying nine others with leprosy, it was even worse. Ostracized by his own family and his own people, he was now forced to exist on the margins of Samaria and Galilee in the hostile company of Judeans labeled lepers who detested him, a Samaritan, too. Even Jesus' instruction to "go show yourself to a priest" would have felt deadly to this Samaritan, no Judean priest could ever declare a hated Samaritan "clean." Dead to the world, there was no way for this Samaritan to be undead. No way to return to his old life, as presumably, the other nine cured lepers could and did. The other nine could be declared clean by their priest and go right back to their 'same old same old;' same relationships, same prejudices, same deathward drifting life. Not so simple for Naaman. Not so easy for the Samaritan.

But Naaman and the Samaritan leper recognized something different. How, we're not told, but I'd guess it was the work of the Holy Spirit, because that's God's answer to everything. Each recognized that God had not just raised them back to their old life but had given them new life. No long leprous, no longer humiliated, Naaman gave up his Syrian superiority and anti-Jewish prejudice and enthusiastically embraced and praised Israel's God. No longer leprous and no longer marginalized, the Samaritan gave up his sense of inferiority and enthusiastically embraced -- and was embraced by Jesus and his disciples.

Each began their new life in the only way possible, by giving God thanks and becoming, and doing, something new; something they recognized as God's gift to them, not just a return to their old life, but new life and a new way of living, not deathward but lifeward; a life animated by faith. Just like Christ, they were filled with the Spirit. Just like Christ, they were raised to life anew.

So are we.

Everyone of us has experienced a little death: a devastating diagnosis; rejection by the high school or college we wished to attend; the death of a loved one that crushes us; the loss of a desired job; a divorce; the denial of our right to authentic life; deportation; loss of freedom, we each can name more. Defeat, despair – *Anfechtung*. We know it when we experience it, even if we cannot, or will not, name it.

God's Promise of new life is proclaimed to us, Christ's Church exists for us, Spirit-giving water and faith-strengthening food are continuously here for us, not just to save us for life after death, but to enable us to live our new life – Christ's life – after each and every little death so that we can daily rise from those little deaths and live our new life just as surely as we will rise after our last breath to a new life that, like Christ's, cannot die again.

It is for life in Christ *this side of the grave*, it is for claiming the power of Christ's resurrection to rise from our little deaths *this side of the grave*, that the apostle reminds us (as we just sang) to "keep in mind that Jesus Christ has died for us and is risen from the dead." That's the real reason for our "Alleluias;" Christ is risen! So are we! Amen.

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