

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen

Many of you have seen or are familiar with the musical stage play “Fiddler on the Roof.”

- The setting is imperial Russia around 1905.
- Tevye the husband and Golde his wife are Jewish and they are trying to maintain Jewish and cultural traditions in Russia.
- Tevye is a milkman and they are poor.
- They have 5 daughters.
- During the play, the oldest 3 get married.

And what is that marriage to be and how is it to be done?

- Is it to be based on “TRADITION”.....with a matchmaker?
- Are the girls to marry spouses that stays within their religion?
- Or, is it to be based on love?

And, of course, Tevye and Golde are struggling with all this.

- “TRADITION!”

And it leaves Tevye considering that it is a whole new world out there and focusing back on he and Golde and how that was working out for them.

- They had been married by a matchmaker, 25 years ago.

And that leads into the song, “Do you love me?”

- Tevye in the song asks Golde, “Do you love me?”
- And Golde responds, “Do I what?”
- And Tevye again asks, “Do you love me?”

And Golde responds, “Do I love you?” And she continues on.....

- With our daughters getting married, and this trouble in the town.....
- Your upset. Your worn out.
- Go inside, go lie down!
- Maybe it’s indigestion.

But Tevye won’t let go. And he continues on, Golde, I’m asking you a question.

- Do you love me?

Golde responds, “You’re a fool.”

- And Tevye says, “I know.”
- But do you love me?

And Golde responds.....

- Do I love you?
- For 25 years I’ve washed your clothes.
- Cooked your meals. Cleaned your house.
- Given you children, milked the cow.

But Tevye is intent on this.

- And with an arranged marriage Golde says, “the first time I met you was on our wedding day.”
- I was scared. I was shy.
- And Tevye adds in, “I was nervous.”
- And Golde says, “So was I.”
- And Tevye goes on, “But my father and my mother said we would learn to love each other.”
- And now I’m asking Golde, “Do you love me?”

Golde then says, “I’m your wife.”

- And Tevye says, I know. But do you love me?

And the conversation continues on just a little bit longer and finally Golde concludes and responds, “I suppose I do.”

- And Tevye responds, “I suppose I love you too.”
- And that is pretty much how the scene ends.

Our assigned Gospel reading for today, which forms the basis for our meditation, reminds me of the scene just described from the Fiddler on the Roof.

- It is an account I’m sure most all of you are very familiar with.
- It is Jesus’ cleansing of the 10 lepers and yet only 1 of the 10 return to Him to give thanks.

This account is always assigned as our Gospel reading for our thanksgiving service with a focus on thanksgiving.

- But as we look at it today, I would invite our focus to be more on love, which causes the thanksgiving to take place.

As I read this account and prepared our message for today.....

- It was easy for me to see Jesus, after cleansing the 10 and only 1 returning asking, “Do you love Me?”
- And as we think about all this and the 10, it is also easy for me to envision Jesus asking each of us this morning, “Do you love Me.”
- I’ve entitled this message, “Do you really love Me?” The “m” in the title being capitalized, meaning it is a question to us from Jesus.

Recall 3 times on the shore of the Sea of Galilee after Jesus rose from the dead, He asked Peter that question, “Do you love Me?”

- As we look at all this, this morning, I invite you to reflect on what kind of a relationship do you have with Jesus.
- Do you really love Jesus?
- Does your words and actions, and more important your heart, reflect a loving, trusting relationship with Jesus?
- And no matter where you are at today, what direction is that loving, trusting relationship moving?

Our Gospel account begins, with Luke telling us that Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem.

- We love, because He first loved us.
- He is heading to the cross for your and my sins.

And we are told Jesus is met by 10 lepers who stood at a distance.

- That would make sense.
- Lepers were considered contagious and had to be kept separate from the general population.
- It was their job to stay away.
- They are literally outcasts.

And these 10 lepers, weak in voice, cried out to Jesus in unison, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”

- They are using the right words. Wonderful words.
- Here the 10 acknowledge Jesus.
- They acknowledge Him as their Master.

And notice what they call out.

- Not for cleansing, but for mercy.
- It is the same words, the same cry we made in unison a few minutes ago in our liturgy when we sang the Kyrie.

We sang it right after the absolution when forgiveness of sins was pronounced over you.

- Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy.
- Associated with this for both the 10 lepers and us is not just cleansing, but salvation.

And then we are told that Jesus told them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.”

- Other than the important fact that the 10 were still lepers, that makes sense.
- If a person was cleansed of leprosy, according to the Law of Moses, they were to go to the sanctuary and present themselves to the priest on duty.
- There the priest would examine them to certify that they had been cleansed.
- And, the ones cleansed would give sacrifices and offerings in thanksgiving in response to the healing.

But, the catch here is, Jesus sends them to the priest, but they have not yet been cleansed.

- For sure, a display of the power and certainty of Jesus.
- And for the lepers to go.....a display of faith.

And then we are told that on their way they are cleansed.

- Each time I hear this account I am amazed at what this must have been like for the 10.
- Did they talk along the way? Were they all in step? Some more reluctant than others?

And then the cleansing.

- All at once? Gradual? All 10 at the exact same time?
- And the jubilation there must have been with that.
- Sharing. Examining each other. Examining themselves.
- What must their words and actions have been.

I'm sure you remember the account. What happened next.

- Then we are told 1 of the 10 turned back to return to Jesus.
- The other 9 continued towards the sanctuary.

Again, we are not given any details of this.

- Did they discuss what they should do?
- Did the 9 coax the 1 to continue on?
- Did the 1 give rationale and urge the 9 to turn back with him?
- We don't know. But what we do know is that 1 turned back to return to Jesus and 9 continued on.

The irony here is this.

- The 10 lepers were happy to journey to the sanctuary with the expectations that they would be cleansed; but only 1 leper after the cleansing was willing to return to give glory to God.

If the 9 were not all caught up in themselves, and if they even took the time to hear Jesus calling to them, it is almost as if we can hear them, similar to Golde in the Fiddler on the Roof saying back to Jesus.....

- Do I love You?
- I called out to You as Jesus, my Master.
- I cried out to You for mercy.
- I am going to the sanctuary as the Law prescribed.
- I will make the sacrifices at the sanctuary.
- Do I love You?

And Jesus again asks, "Do you love Me?"

- Do you really have a loving, trusting relationship with Me that you want to be with Me?
- Do you love me.....or, are you just going through the motions?
- Do you desire to be with Me; including giving thanksgiving and praise for what I have done?

We are told the 1 turned back, praising God with a loud voice.

- And he fell at Jesus' feet giving thanks.

And we are told he was a Samaritan.

- He was the outcast.
- He didn't fit the part. He wasn't the 1 who was supposed to turn back.
- He didn't follow worldly thinking and rules.
- It is implied that 9 were Jews and they continued on to what would be to follow the norm and look the part.

One came back.

- One desired more to be in the presence of Jesus than all the other choices.
- One chose to be in a more intimate relationship with God versus the obligation and routine of checking the box on what the Law said they were supposed to do.
- The focus of the 1 had shifted from the sanctuary and everything else to the very person and body of Christ.

And we are told Jesus said to the 1, where are the 9?

- Was no one found to return and give praise to God except the foreigner.
- The apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians chapter 13.....
- If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.
- It is as if Jesus here is looking up towards the 9 that are continuing to walk away from Him and asking, “Do you love Me?”

And Jesus said to the one, rise and go your way, your faith has made you well.

- Notice what Jesus said has made him well.
- His faith. His loving trusting relationship with his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
- This is the true worship of God, to come back, to praise God with a loud voice.
- This is the greatest work we can do, to love and praise God.

And Jesus told the man, “Rise and go your way.”

- Where was he to go?
- Remember Jesus is making His way to Jerusalem.
- We love because He first loved us.
- This man desired to be in the presence of Jesus.
- Perhaps he joined the group and made his way to Jerusalem with Him.

Today, Jesus is asking the 10, asking Peter, asking us, Do you love Me?

- He asked Peter 3 times.
- This is Peter who had been with Jesus for most of His public earthly ministry.
- This is Peter who had confessed, “You are the Messiah. The Son of the living God.”
- This is the Peter who walked on water.
- This is the Peter who drew his sword in Gethsemane and cut off the servant’s ear.

And Jesus literally asked him not once, but 3 times, Do you love Me?

- Peter was rebuked. He needed to be to turn back to Jesus.
- Peter became upset.
- But then Jesus reinstated him and told him to, “Follow Me.”
- And Peter became a pillar and leader of the New Testament church.

And Jesus asks us, “Do you love Me? And on the one hand we can answer.....

- Yes Lord, I’m here today.
- Yes Lord, as much as I was able I’ve sang the hymns.
- Yes Lord, I cried out for mercy.
- Yes Lord, I’ve given my offering.

And again Jesus says, “Do you love Me?” Let me ask you some questions to reflect on all this.

- Are you here this morning out of love for our Lord and a desire to be with Him or out of routine and obligation.
- Are you more focused in on the walls and furnishings of this beautiful sanctuary or are you cherishing and embracing that Jesus Christ Himself is here with you.
- When you received absolution earlier, did you rejoice and give thanks that literally all of your sins have been forgiven. They are gone.
- When you partake of Holy Communion in just a little bit, will you take in what this really means? Have it in your heart that you are partaking of the very body and blood of Christ.
- That Christ dwells in you and with you when you leave here.

Oh dear friends and visitors, dear members of Hope.....

- I pray that this is all very real to you.
- I pray that you are in a real, loving and trusting relationship with Jesus.
- I pray that your relationship is ever growing.

I have told the students in our confirmation class.....

- Your learning facts and doctrine is important.
- But more important is that you have a loving and trusting relationship with Christ.
- I would trade all the book knowledge you have when you to finish the confirmation program for a loving and trusting relationship with Christ for your entire life.....and for all eternity.

We began with Jesus heading to Jerusalem to the cross.

- Nothing would stop Him.
- Not 9 cleansed lepers who continued on in tradition and regulation versus a real relationship with Him.

- Not Pharisees who were looking to trip Him up at any chance they had.
- Not all of broken, sinful mankind could stop Him.

No matter where you are at, Christ died for you.

- No matter where you are at, Christ is calling and welcoming you. Grow closer to Him.
- Turn back. Only 1 did; but that doesn't mean the other 9 still could not also.
- Jesus welcomes you with open arms wherever you are at in your relationship with Him.

You have more reason for joy than a leper crying for mercy that discovers along the road that he has been cleansed.

- For in fact, that is you. Forgiveness of sins and salvation is offered to you.
- Which direction will you go?
- Amen.

(Please stand) And now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Having heard the Word of God we now prepare our hearts and minds to confess together the words of the Nicene Creed as found on page 206 in your hymnal.