Where Are the Other Nine?

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[0:00] Well, we're going to read together from the Scriptures of the New Testament. We're reading in Luke chapter 17, and we're reading from verse 11 to verse 19.

! Let's hear and read together in God's Word. On the way to Jerusalem, he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee.
And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.
When he saw them, he said to them, Go and show yourselves to the priests. And as they went, they were cleansed.
Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks.
[1:02] Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?

Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner? And he said to him, Rise and go your way.
Your faith has made you well. This is the Word of God, and to His name be the praise and the glory. All right.
We are in a summer series called Questions That Jesus Asked. And I'm sure that when we announced that we were going to do this series, nobody thought of the question, Where are the other nine? It's not the most common question you think of when you ask, What are the questions Jesus asked?
But this is a moving story, actually. Not a well-known story, but a moving moment in the Gospels when Jesus encounters these ten lepers. And it's not well-known, but it's so important.
[2:02] And there's a literary frame that Luke gives us in the passage, and it starts in verse 12, and it helps us understand it. Verse 11, I should say, He came to Jerusalem. And then in verse 12, He was met by ten lepers, but they were at a distance.

And there's the word distance. Ten lepers are at a distance physically from Him at the beginning of the story. But when you get down to verse 18 at the end of the story, though they've been cleansed, nine lepers are still at a distance from Him.
Only one has come any closer at all. And so there's a physical distance at the beginning because of leprosy, because of the disease and the separation that was required by law. But even after the leprosy is cleansed, nine out of ten are still very far away from Jesus at the end.
And that means that Luke is trying to do what the Bible does, and that's show us that something like physical leprosy has always been meant to be a sign of a spiritual reality as well, of something going on on the inside, of a relational distance that is still there at the end of the story.
I think every one of us today will know of that colleague at some point where we've worked with them for years, but we still don't really know them. And in the same way, you can sit across from the table, even from family for years, and never really have relational depth connection.
[3:20] So there can be physical distance, but there can be physical closeness, yet relational distance. And you have that distinction from the beginning to the end in this literary frame that we're given. Why? What's the difference?

How can it be that He cleanses them from leprosy, yet they're still far from Him at the end? And Luke is trying to get us to see that that physical distance is representative of a different type of leprosy, not just physical outward leprosy, but I think He wants us to see that there's such a thing as spiritual leprosy.

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And when we realize that, we have to say, do I have it? Is that my disease? Is that my problem? So let's think about that, and we'll find out through looking at three things.
Number one, the one that they're distant from, the person they're distant from. And then secondly, the heart of leprosy. And then finally, the leper priest. So first, who's the one that they're distant from here?
In verse 11, Jesus is traveling. He's on His way to Jerusalem, and He passes between Samaria and Galilee. Now Jesus is going somewhere, and He's going somewhere on purpose.
[4:28] He's going to Jerusalem. And to get there takes not the normal route at all. So if you were to follow Jesus' travels towards Jerusalem at the end of His life, He doesn't make a straight line.

He's kind of all over the place. It's more of a zigzag. And here, He passes between the liminal space, between the territory of the Jews and the territory of the Samaritans, the borderland, the no man's land, really.
A place that nobody normally would go to as a Jew on their way to Jerusalem. And that's because there's deep ethnic animosity, the ethnic partiality.
That's quite a minor way to say it, how thick and deep it is, the hatred, really, between Jews and Samaritans. Different temple, different priests, and pretty much utter separation and normal life segregation.
But here, Luke says He's traveling towards Jerusalem. And that is a significant little moment because it's the third time we've been told He has owned His way to Jerusalem in Luke's gospel since this moment in chapter 9, verse 51, where we're told He set His face towards Jerusalem.
[5:38] So that's a moment of fulfillment from the Old Testament, Isaiah chapter 50, verse 7, where it said the suffering servant, talking about a suffering servant, will one day come and set His face like flint towards Jerusalem.

A weird metaphor for modern people, to set your face like flint towards something. But for an ancient person, flint is this quartz-like material that basically is unbreakable. And so He's locked in to Jerusalem.
In other words, the reason this is the third mention, He's on His way to Jerusalem, is because Luke wants you to read this story, understanding that it's in the shadow of the cross. He is set on going to die for the sins of humanity.
This happens in the shadow of the cross. It's the story of the cross, really, that this is leading to.
And along that way, Luke has this travel motif. We saw it in the road to Emmaus.
But part of his journey to Jerusalem and to the cross is this continual stopping along the way to make people who you expect to be outsiders into insiders.
[6:42] And the people that you think are supposed to be insiders, you find out are actually outsiders. So as soon as He says in chapter 9, verse 51, I've got my face set to Jerusalem, the next chapter is the parable of the Good Samaritan.

You know, who's a good neighbor? And nobody expects Him to say, it's the Samaritan that's the good neighbor, that shows people how to love. He's constantly showing how outsiders are insiders.
And that means that on His way to the cross, in the shadow of the cross, He wants you to see that the kingdom of God is different than the world expected. And the kingdom of God is upside down. It's not normal to human expectation.
And He wants to bring outsiders in. There's nobody more outside than a leper. They are the outsiders of all the outsiders. The king is on his way to be thrown out of the city gate.
And on his way, he wants to bring to himself people who are the most thrown out in all of the culture. And that is the Samaritan leper, the most thrown out person, the most excommunicated person in the whole culture.
[7:48] So in verse 12, there's a leper colony on this borderland between Samaria and the territory of Jews in Galilee. And there's 10 lepers. And they're Jews and Samaritans because even though Jews and Samaritans are separated in normal life, when you are a leper, all ethnic animosity goes away.

You're cast out from society. You band together. And so these Jews and Samaritans are here together, not thinking any more about racism or ethnic partiality or anything like that. And it's because they're excommunicated.
So Leviticus 13 and 14 is the background to their excommunication. It's Levitical law in the Old Testament that requires them to be cast out of the city.

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There's a hundred verses on leprosy in those two chapters, nearly a hundred verses. And it's important to know that leprosy is a category more than a disease in the Bible.
So we think of leprosy as a disease. Leprosy is more of a category. The first house I ever lived in, in Edinburgh, had biblical leprosy. You would wipe mold off the walls in the morning.
[8:59] You would go to work, you would come home and the mold would be right back streaked across the walls. And in Leviticus 13, that's a house of leprosy because it's got mold.

And it was to be, Leviticus 14, 45, it is to be knocked down within the camp of God in the Old Testament because of its leprosy. And the bag that I purchased because I was moving to Scotland to study and you move internationally, you buy a bag, right?
A new backpack and it got leprosy. And I had to throw it away because of the first house I lived in in Scotland. So leprosy is a skin disease, different types of skin diseases, but it's also moldy houses and all sorts of things in the Bible.
And that's because leprosy in the Levitical code, the God's law is like everything else in the ritual laws of Leviticus, an outward sign of an invisible reality.
So leprosy is cast out of the city of God's camp. Why? Because it was symbolic, somebody literally wearing it, a house having it that says this mold, this death, this problem cannot be a part of Edenic life, the life you were made for.
[10:16] So in the Old Testament, the people living in the promised land were a sign of the land that was one day to come, life in the new Eden. And that meant that dead bodies couldn't be inside God's city and mold couldn't be in God's city and decay couldn't be in God's city.

And that means that these lepers, it's not that they did some sin in order to get leprosy. Never. We don't believe in karma. There's no karma here. It's that leprosy is one of the chosen signs in the Old Testament of what it means as representative humanity to be in Adam, as David was talking about early.
In other words, lepers stand for all of us. So spiritual leprosy, physical leprosy is a sign of the truth that all of humanity has spiritual leprosy. And so spiritual leprosy represented in physical leprosy has to be sent outside of the camp, outside of the city, outside of the village.
And so these guys are excommunicated and it is a triple excommunication. As one scholar put it, it is living death. So religious excommunication, there's no temple worship.
You cannot go to church. It is relational excommunication. Imagine being outside the city and seeing your family travel by, but you can never get near to them.
[11:37] Never a hug. They could leave food for you, but you could never cross the street to see them. And it's civic excommunication. You know, you can never go home. You can't be a part of the people that you would come from.

And so in the first century rabbinic culture, leprosy had become something even more than Levitical law. It becomes such an excommunication in every way. And rabbis were famous for echoing 2 Kings 5, verse 7, where Naaman, the Syrian, comes to Israel to get healed of his leprosy.
And the king, he says, oh, king of Israel, tell me how to be healed from my leprosy. And the king says, who do you think I am? God? Only God can heal people from leprosy.
In other words, there's nothing we can do about this. And once you go to a leper colony, the skin diseases are obviously going to spread. And so it's typically a lifetime sentence. And it was a horrific life.
What do they ask for to Jesus, of Jesus? Verse 13, they say, they see him, they say, Jesus, master, give us mercy.
[12:45] Send us your mercy. What are they asking for when they say this word mercy? They say master. Clearly they know this guy is something different. He's a prophet. He's a master. That's kind of like saying a rabbi, a great teacher.

And when they say mercy, normally a leper had to go around in the first century saying, leper, leper, unclean, unclean. So if you were to get near them, they would say unclean.
And that was the signal. Get away. I can't be, I can't be talked to or communicated with or got near to. But here, when they see the master, they say, mercy, mercy.
And what are they asking for? And it's clear, I think, from the context and the commentators all agree on this, that they're not saying, have mercy on me, Jesus, because I need forgiveness of sins because I'm a sinner.

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They're saying, give me my life back. I want to go back to my family. I want to go back to the people that I love. And that means that alienation is the wound they're crying out for.
[13:47] Alienation is the wound from which they say, mercy, mercy. Now, that might not be the most important thing to ask Jesus for. But, who is this one that they cry out to in mercy?

I want to point out to you before we move to the main idea here. Jesus Christ is the kind of redeemer who does want to give them that kind of mercy. He is the kind of redeemer who does want to give them relief from their skin disease.
He is. He does. He does want to give them their family back. He does want to put them back into the city. He does not despise that prayer, that request.
No, not at all. Jesus offers cleansing deeper than skin. Absolutely. And that's very important. But, he is on his way to the cross announcing that he is indeed bringing a kingdom where there will be no skin diseases and where people will not be separated from their families because of leprosy and people will not starve anymore.
And, that means that Christianity is not just concerned with your soul and it is very importantly so. But, the Christianity of Jesus Christ, your redeemer is as Sinclair Ferguson put it, the kind of redeemer that wants to give this kind of mercy to people.
[15:11] And so, in verse 14, he says, go show yourself to the priests and while they were going to see the priest, they were healed along the way.

Now, the story should end there. It was a very, it's a very nice story. It's a, it's a great ending. He sent them even before they were ever healed, which means they had some measure of faith. This, this prophet can heal me and I'm going to go see the priest and have my, my cleanliness announced. This man is powerful over diseases. He can heal skin disease and that would have been a perfect ending.
And yet, it's not the end because that's not the end of what actually happened in history and Luke doesn't want you to think that that's the end because there's something more here, something deeper to deal with here.
And so, he leads us then, this leads us to the meat of the story and that's the heart of leprosy secondly in verses 15 to 18. Now, you'll see this in the passage.
[16:13] The word in the Bible most often used for healing leprosy is not the word healing. It's not that they were healed. It does use that word sometimes, but most often, it takes up the Old Testament language of cleansing.

And so, in this passage, we're told they were cleansed. Why? Because this is ritual language from Leviticus that a priest had to cleanse his hands to enter God's presence. the word cleansing for healing of skin disease is connecting us to the religious realities that are present in it.
There's a sort of idea of there's a baptism that needs to take place. And that's because the text, like all of the Bible, is pointing us to see that the leprosy on the outside is not just about the leprosy on the outside.
It's about something deeper than that, about the healing, the cleansing, the baptism that humanity needs deeper on the inside. External problems are a revelation of internal problems all throughout the Bible.
And so, cleansing is the word that we really need. And so, in verse 15 and 16, you'll see that one of the nine, when he was cleansed, healed, he praises God with a loud voice, he turns back.
[17:22] The word, the language gets used, he turns back. It's almost a physical word for an inner type of repentance even. You can see how much the physical was pointing to the spiritual.

It says, when he saw his outward skin was healed, he turned around. And he goes back to Jesus, praising God. And he, we learn at the end of the story, Jesus points out, he's a foreigner, he's a Samaritan.
He is the very one of the ten you do not expect to do this. He's not Jewish. He's an outsider in the community, yet the outsider is so far away from being distant to Jesus Christ that now he's laying on his face at his feet.
The outsider has become the insider and you see Jesus under the shadow of the cross saying, I'm here to make lepers clean and to bring outsiders, those with a deeper problem, spiritual leprosy, all the way in, all the way to me.
And it's this one, this Samaritan that sees it and pronounces it. it's him that repents in his physical action and turns around and goes back to Jesus and the exegetical key in all of it is in verses 15

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and 16 and then down in verse 18.
[18:37] What does he say when he turns around? It says he turns back and he praised God with a loud voice and then when he falls on his face before Jesus' feet, he gives him thanks and Jesus answered, where are the nine?

There's the question. Was no one found to return, was no one found to return and give praise to God except this one Samaritan, this foreigner?
Now you might pass by this but it's so important because if you were to go across the street to New College, to any of the academic divinity departments across the UK, the places where many of our church members have studied, in the biblical studies department, in the New Testament department, you would be told that Jesus never identifies himself as God in the Gospels and instead, Paul identifies Jesus as God.
Decades later, he creates that and then we read that back into the Gospels because we've read Paul and that's the normal thesis of the New Testament departments across the land, across the academy.
But did you catch it? What's the exegetical key? What's the key in this man's life in turning around the one of the ten? It's that he turned back, he went toward Jesus praising God and then you say, well, who is this God?
[20:06] And then as he laid on his face at Jesus' feet, Jesus said, where are the rest? Did no one else come back to praise God? And that means that Jesus is saying, he's God in this moment.

Did nobody else come back to get on their knees and praise God? And who is that? Well, it's whoever the person is that you're laying on your face in front of. That's who the one you're worshiping is. You see, Jesus self-consciously in this moment on his way to Jerusalem identifies himself as God.
And that's the real key to understand the issue in the heart that's going on in the other nine. And you see, 10 men received physical healing from Jesus, healing from their lepers.
They received a wonderful benefit from a great master, a great rabbi. One man, one man among the 10 had an encounter of worship with his God.
You see, 10 men got a great benefit from him, a great master. Boy, was he powerful. But only one person had an encounter not only with a great master but his God.
[21:16] And so, when he realized that he turned back, he came back and he fell on his face praising God, praising God and giving thanks before him. And so, Jesus said, where are the other nine? In other words, they came for the benefits.

Luke is trying to get us to see that leprosy on the outside points us to spiritual leprosy on the inside. And spiritual leprosy in this story has two aspects to it. The first is this.
It's when we have one of the most common and respectable forms of unbelief. And that's to believe God exists, to be a religious insider, to be interested chiefly in the benefits of belief rather than any sense of a living relationship with my God, our God.
God. And that's the beginning of the revelation of spiritual leprosy deep in the heart. The difference in the nine and the one is the nine got a benefit, the ten did, but only one realized that this is my God and I want a living relationship with him.
And Jesus, he said something really similar in John's gospel after feeding the 5,000 in John 6. He turned to a group of people that came to him and he said, you seek me because you ate the loaves of bread and were filled.
[22:39] So you're chasing after me because I filled your belly last week. And it's important to say Jesus wants to fill bellies. And Jesus wants to heal skin diseases.

And Jesus wants to restore people to their family. And Jesus wants to put us back into the city we were made for. And he also saying, but the real heart of living faith is to want him and to come back because you want him more than any benefit.
And so that leads to the second and deeper aspect of spiritual leprosy here. And that's this, the one, the Samaritan, he came back and it says he got on his knees, he got on his face and he gave thanks.
And Jesus asked where the rest to come and give thanks to me. Spiritual leprosy is a problem humanity has and it is in this passage I think being implicitly taught to us that it is a heart of ingratitude to God.

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It's living a life of ingratitude. Where does unbelief start? You know, unbelief does not begin with atheism. It's striking that in Paul's most important definition of unbelief in the book of Romans, Romans chapter one, the way he begins it all, Romans 1 21, he says, although humanity knew God, they didn't honor him as a God.
[23:59] nor did they give thanks. So when you asked Paul, what is unbelief? And he said, to not come and honor God or give thanks to him.

And so when we think about ingratitude in our lives, you know, I think when I think about it at first, I think I chalk this up to an issue of manners. You know, that's not a very, my kids aren't being grateful enough.
And I think you need to learn your manners. But the Bible takes in gratitude and says it's not just manners, it's spiritual leprosy. A lack of gratitude to God and to other people and all the things we've been given.
You know, you think about it, no one tonight would ever say, you know, I want to live with ungrateful people. We know how important gratitude of the heart is to being a healthy human.
And how do you diagnose spiritual leprosy? How do you know? Well, spiritual leprosy manifests in the modern world in a newer phrase we have, and that's just a sense of entitlement, of being owed things.
[25:07] How do you know? How do you know the places in your life where you've got that disease, where you've got entitlement, where I've got entitlement? I was thinking about this, and it's not by making a list of the things you're thankful for and then asking what's not here.

These are the things I'm not very grateful for. I think it's far more can be diagnosed by addressing your irritations and asking what irritates me the most. So when you're at work, when I'm at work, when I'm here downstairs and the Wi-Fi goes out, I get this lump down in my stomach, my chest that says I cannot believe that I'm going to lose hours here.
I can't. The Wi-Fi went out. Or when you're Amazon Prime delivery does not come because it said Amazon Prime is next day delivery and you think, can you believe this?
The Amazon Prime delivery package did not come the next day. Well, it's silly, but what's actually happening is what's being expressed is that our irritations show us far more our sense of entitlement than making a list of things we're grateful for and looking, what have I not listed here?
You've got to look at your irritations. And friends, modern people, people of 2026, with me, we are far more prone to this spiritual leprosy than any other era of human history because we are customers.
[26:30] We are perpetual customers. We live in an age of being a customer at all times, and customers paid, and therefore they're entitled. And, you know, the customer's never grateful.

The customer is always, always owed. I was thinking about this through the lens of imagining, and I have to hustle here. In 18th century, Edinburgh, I've heard that word a couple times, so I'm going to use it, Edinburgh, an Edinburgh a citizen in the 18th century, living out here on Victoria Street, where the poorest of the poor lived in the 18th and 19th century.
And there were 50 people to a flat at times when Thomas Guthrie planted this church and visited those poor. And the disease was rampant, and once Thomas Guthrie found a whole pig living, a couple pigs living inside one of the flats that he visited.
That's where you kept your animals too. And imagine showing them a tap of water that never stops right here in our little kitchen hut.
And then imagine turning and taking them a step further, taking them to Waitrose. Boy. And then imagine taking that 18th century Edinburgh poor living in 50 in a room across the street and pulling out your phone and saying, I have every song that's ever been recorded in this device right here.
[27:50] And you know, if my phone doesn't play my podcast on the way to work on Monday, I want to throw it. I'm so, you know, why? Because what happens in a customer culture is that what was once a gift becomes a norm.

And what was once a norm becomes an expectation. And what was once an expectation becomes something that we're entitled to. And because we live in a customer culture, boy, we live in a world where people publish Google reviews for worship services.
We live in a customer world, and that means that we struggle with entitlement, rights, more than any other in human history. And the Bible says, ingratitude and not seeing everything as a gift of God, we don't deserve anything, is spiritual leprosy.

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There's two ways to come before the Lord. One is to say, I love your benefits and I'll take your goods. And the other is to say, this is my Lord and my Savior, and I want to get on my knees and say, Lord, thank you, I don't deserve anything.
Now, how do we fix it as we finish? Very briefly, thirdly, the leper priest. This requires self-examination in our lives. Of course, the question as we close has to be, do I struggle with ingratitude?
[29:09] Do I have spiritual leprosy in my life? Am I an ungrateful person? And am I entitled? And the answer is yes. Yes.

And that is why Jesus' face is set like Flint towards Jerusalem. And here in verse 14, as we close, we can ask, why did Jesus send them to the priest in the first place?
He said, go to the priest, because the priest in the first century in the ancient Near East is the public health official, the public health officer. And so you got to go to the priest, and once you're healed, you have to show that to the priest, and then the priest pronounces that you can come back, you're not excommunicated anymore.
Where is Jesus sending them to? He's sending them to the priest, and who is the priest? The priest is the most important official in the culture that reads the law, and then declares the law over someone.
He takes Leviticus, he says, have the rules of Leviticus been followed in this person's situation? And if it has, he says, now you can come back. But it's very important to know the priest could never make anybody clean.
[30:25] The priest could only declare somebody clean. All they could do was look at the law and ask, is this enough? And I think in the same way, as it's been pointed out by others, when Jesus sends them to the priest, he's sending them to the law of the old covenant.

And when you diagnose in yourself, I do have spiritual leprosy, I am a person who struggles with ingratitude, I do have a sense of entitlement, I'm not grateful to God for so much. If you say, how am I going to deal with it, and you go to the law, you go to the priest, and you read the Bible, and you will find this, that the law is a perfect mirror, but a useless medicine.
It can show you what you should be, but it will not make you clean, it will not help you, and if you say, today I'm going to practice gratitude, and I'm going to keep a gratitude journal, and I'm going to talk to the Lord every day about all the things I'm thankful for, do that, absolutely, but the problem already, it's too late.
The spiritual leprosy is already there. The ingratitude has already been established, the rebellion has already been, and so you can try, we can try our hardest, but even if we do it so well tonight, by tomorrow, well, we have been grateful enough, and when he sends them to the priest, what is he doing?
There's a moment, I think it's in verse 15 and 16, when the one of the ten sees his arms cleansed, his body cleansed, and then as soon as the cleansing comes, he turns back, and he goes the other way.
[32:00] Why? It's like he realized, guys, he told us to go to the priest, and we've been cleansed, the priest is behind us, the priest is the one that sent us.

He turned around, why? Because he knew that the priest of the old covenant could not do anything for him. This is the declaration of the end of the law, and now in this moment, the one of the ten, the Samaritan, the outsider realizes Jesus Christ is the true and better priest.
I need a priest that's not just going to declare me clean, maybe, according to Leviticus, I need a priest who can make me clean. And he comes back because he realizes that this is not only my master, not only my rabbi, not only my God, but he is also my priest.
And Jesus just so happens to be set with his face like Flint towards Jerusalem, where the true priest will become the supreme leper in all of history.
The true priest who is God also became leprous for you. And the way to deal with the problem of our ingratitude is to come and say, the law can't cleanse me and my gratitude can't cleanse me and I can be as grateful as possible for the rest of my days and that will not help me.
[33:19] Instead, we've got to say that he was stricken at the cross for my entitlement. He was crushed because of my life of ingratitude. He was excommunicated ultimately because of my spiritual leprosy.

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And only on that basis then can he turn to you in faith, in your faith, because that's what you're saying. And he says, rise up and go on your way. And so in verse 18, the last word here in verse 18, rise and go your way.
Your faith has made you well. And I have to point out the footnote in the ESV, if you have a Bible in front of you, which says that it could also be translated, your faith has saved you.
And I think it should read, rise, your faith has saved you. He was one amongst the ten who said, this is my priest, he will be stricken for my ingratitude.
If you say that tonight on that basis, now go, now go and practice gratitude. Gratitude has to be shown to God. And to protect ourselves from ingratitude, it's got to be shown every day, that's the practice of gratitude we're called to.
[34:30] So in verse 15, gratitude, what does it look like? It looks like a man, a woman who daily gets on their face, on their knees before the Lord Jesus and says, thank you, thank you, morning and evening, thank you, Lord, I don't deserve it.

That's the practice of gratitude. Let's pray. Father, we ask that you would teach us to be grateful. We know that we're not, so we come before you, declaring our spiritual leprosy and our need and needing your forgiveness.
And we look to the true leper, the Christ who was made supremely leprous for us in the middle of history. And now we ask, Lord, that on the basis of being cleansed by him, you would give us fresh gratitude.
Gratitude brings joy to us, and so we want it this week even. So forgive us, Lord, change us, send us in a new direction, help us to be like the Samaritan who turned back and got on his face and worshipped you.
And so, Lord, we say thank you as we sing the final hymn. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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