

Paul says in 2 Corinthians that "we walk by faith and not by sight." And what he means by that is that sometimes faith means following after God when we can't see what's going to happen, following after God when we're just not sure where he's going. Noah, for example, built the ark without having any evidence that the flood was on its way. And Abraham left behind everything--his home, his family, everything that he had ever known--to go to a place that he didn't even know where it was. And Abraham also was willing to sacrifice Isaac without ever asking God why. And so are we willing to do the same, Christians? Are we willing to walk by faith? Are we willing to trust God when we can't see what's going to happen? That's the question that we need to wrestle with as we look at our Gospel reading for today.

Luke tells us that Jesus was going down to Jerusalem, and he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And he came to a certain village--which one it was doesn't actually ultimately matter. But when he came to that village, we're told that ten lepers met him at a distance. Now these ten lepers didn't actually live in the town. Lepers were required by the Law of God to be separated from everyone else. They had to live separate from the rest of society. Leviticus chapter 13 says very clearly: "The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.' He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp." So as long as he was sick, as long as he had this disease, he was unclean. And being unclean meant that he couldn't participate in the life of the rest of the community. He had to be separate until he was healed. Of course, this had a very practical application. It prevented his disease from spreading. But the more important part of it was that God was teaching them through this to remain separated from all kinds of uncleanness: physical, spiritual, moral, whatever it might be. They weren't supposed to mix with these things, and so this was meant to teach.

But that didn't change the fact that it was a difficult way to live. The leprous person couldn't even go home to visit his family as long as he was separated. And so you can imagine that these ten lepers want to go home. They don't want to be unclean anymore. They want to be clean so they can go back to their families. And they've at least heard of Jesus, and they've heard what he can do. And so they come to him, asking him to heal them, crying out with a loud voice: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

But Jesus does a very remarkable thing at this point. He could've just said, "Be healed," and that would've been the end of it. He certainly had the power to do that. In fact, he's done it before. And that's probably why they've come to him in the first place, because they've heard that he has the power to do that. But he doesn't. Instead, he says to them, very simply: "Go and show yourselves to the priests."

Now, why does he say that? Because he wants them to follow what the Law of God required. Because when the leprous person was healed, they were supposed to go to the priests. Leviticus 14 says very clearly again: "This shall be the law of the leprous person for the day of his cleansing. He shall be brought to the priest, and the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall look." And then there in Leviticus, Moses goes on to describe a very long list of things that they were supposed to do, things like sacrifices and washings and shaving of hair, all kinds of things. But the end result of all of it, the purpose of all of it was that the priest would then declare

them clean, and they would be able to go home. They could be part of society again. And that's certainly what these ten lepers want to happen.

But pay attention to the order here. The normal order of things is that they would be healed, and then they would go to the priests, and then they would be declared clean. But Jesus has skipped over that first step. He tells them to go to the priests even while they are still diseased, even while they are still unclean. They are supposed to go as if everything was fine already. And they have nothing else to go on. It's not like Jesus told them what was about to happen. All he said to them was "go and show yourselves to the priests." And so what are they going to do? Jesus has asked them to walk by faith and not by sight.

So let me ask you, Christians: what would you do in that situation? How would you react? I suspect we want to say, "Well, we'll just do what they did. They listened to Jesus, and they went, and everything turned out fine for them, so we would just do the same thing." But I think we only say that because we know how it's going to turn out. We know that they're going to be healed. We know that things work out in the end. In reality, what we're doing is we're simply walking by sight, because we know how the story goes. But if we were truly in their position, without any idea of what God was about to do, then it wouldn't be so easy to say that we would do the same, just as it is not so easy for us to walk by faith now and to not walk by sight.

Let me give you an example of what I mean by this. Paul says very clearly in Romans chapter 8: "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." What Paul is talking about in that section of Romans is that everything that we suffer now, especially as Christians, is ultimately meant for our good. It will ultimately result in the glory that will be ours when we are with God forever. But the question is, Christians: do you believe that? Do you believe that everything works together for good? Not just the good things, not just some things, but all things work together for good for those who love God? So that sickness, then, that you've been dealing with for a very long time, never seems to quite go away. God means that for good. Or that suffering that you're going through. It always seems to get worse, no matter what you do. God means that for good. Or even the death of a loved one, especially one that we weren't expecting, one that we didn't see coming. God means it for good. Do you believe that? Are you willing to trust in God and to believe that it is for your good, even when you can't see how? Are you willing to trust in God when you can't understand? Are you willing to trust in God when you can't see what's in front of you? Are you willing to go forward with nothing but the bare promise of God? That is part of what it means to walk by faith and not by sight.

And to their credit, the lepers all go. They listen to Jesus, and they go just as he tells them to. And they're all healed, because God is faithful to his promises. But now we see the other part of what it means to walk by faith. Because all ten of them are cleansed, certainly, but nine of them hurry on to go to the priests. Nine of them are so excited that they get to go home again that they don't even bother to remember anything that has just happened. But one, only one, turns around. Only one goes back to Jesus. Only one falls down before him and worships him. And he was a Samaritan. Being a Samaritan meant that he should've been the last person to do this. Being a Samaritan meant that he didn't even really know who God was. He had some pretty erroneous ideas of who God was. He should've been the last one. But he could see what the other nine

could not. He goes back, and he worships Jesus, and he teaches us what it means to walk by faith.

Because Christians, walking by faith is not just about following orders. Anybody could do that. There is no faith in just doing exactly what somebody tells you to do. But rather, walking by faith is doing these things because we trust in the Lord. Think of Noah again. Noah didn't build the ark because he had to. Noah built the ark because he had faith in God. Abraham didn't leave behind everything that he ever knew because his hands were tied. Abraham left it all behind because he feared the Lord. Abraham was not prepared to sacrifice Isaac because that's just what he had to do. Abraham was prepared because he knew that God is good and that God would work this also for good. They were willing to follow God, even when it didn't make any sense to do it. They were willing to go without seeing what was going to happen, because they knew that God is good. And when God had done the impossible for them, they worshiped the Lord. They gave thanks to him. Noah built an altar after the flood was gone. Abraham built altars all throughout the land of Canaan. Abraham offered the ram that God gave him instead of Isaac. And this Samaritan leper went back and worshiped Jesus. Because walking by faith, Christians, means walking with God, no matter where that may lead. The nine didn't understand that, but this one did.

Christians, trust in the Lord. Listen to him. He's going to tell you things are not always clear to you. He's going to say things that are sometimes very difficult to do. And to the eyes of your flesh, it might even seem crazy, insane to just go with God. But walk by faith. God will not lead you astray, just as he has never led any of his saints astray. Trust him and follow him, and he will work all things for good in the end.

Let us pray. Jesus, Master, lead us in the way that we should go, and teach us to trust in you, even when we cannot see the way, because you are merciful and good and work all things for good for those who love you; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.