Sunday, November 8, 1981
THEY WERE HEALED AS THEY WENT
Luke 17:11-19

A certain wealthy businessman who had gained a fortune in a rather ruthless fashion found himself at mid-life in an embarrassing position. The practices by which he had made himself wealthy in the early part of the century had become socially unacceptable. People no longer admired individuals like him but tended increasingly to hold them in contempt.

This gentleman was not so much personally disturbed by this change in attitude, but his family was. His wife and daughters did not like being the objects of public disdain. It troubled them to see the family name made a synonym for brutal policies in industrial relations. They wanted the world to smile upon them when they went among ordinary people and not spit behind their backs.

So, they set about trying to improve his image. In the process they hired a public relations man to help. The father went along with the plan but didn't want to make any substantive changes in his ways, but merely an appearance of improvement.

After studying the problem carefully, the public relations man announced that he would undertake the job, but only if the client modified his more outrageous behavior somewhat. He at least wanted the tycoon to go through the motions ordinarily associated with a social conscience.

The man complained a bit but began to try new behavior. He agreed to sponsor a couple of national charities, pretended to be interested in the home life of his employees, spoke in a kindly manner to his neighbors, and covered his hand more carefully when destroying the competition. All this he did with the worst intentions in the world.

But then a strange thing happened. The great pretender began to enjoy the new lifestyle to which he had committed himself only superficially. It felt good, he found, to be liked, to have people smile at him in the streets, speak approvingly of him at their clubs, and seek him out as an ally in their causes. His wife and daughters loved it too, so that his home became a happier place.

This man discovered that he was being transformed by his acting differently. What began as pretending actually produced an authentic change in his view of himself and how he saw the world — a change for the better. He was acting himself into a new way of thinking.

The right kind of acting can and does have a profound effect on the kind of person we become. E. Stanley Jones put it this way — "It is easier to act yourself into a new way of thinking, than to think yourself into a new way of acting." We can make our muscles do what our brain first fears to do, and then, if we keep at it, our thinking will follow along and dramatic changes will occur in the process.

Our muscles can actually train our minds and our thoughts. That the mind can affect the muscles we all know and have experienced. The power of the mind, the power of imagination has been demonstrated over and over again. If you approach a job with the attitude that, "Well I don't think this will go too well," it will not go well. On the other hand, if you use all your strength and belief, it will go well.

A salesman going out on his rounds does ill to decide beforehand that he is not going to sell anything at a certain place. He does not know whether he will see or not, but by adopting a negative attitude that he will not, he transfers that attitude to his customers, and he doesn't sell anything. Some people seem to have an underlying pessimism that manifests itself again and again. They expect the worst out of the future. There is little positive openness and a lot of negative uneasiness about what is going to happen.

The point is that these expectations are powerful factors when it comes to shaping the future. We human beings have real freedom here. We can choose the stance we want to adopt and once that is done, this in itself begins to affect the future.

But when we cannot get our thinking into the right vein then we need to remember that our muscles can lead our mind. When we make ourselves act differently, our mind, our attitude can be brought along. Thus, taking a brisk walk can be perfectly compatible with nervous exhaustion and may help to rid oneself from the exhaustion. A physician wrote: "I first began walking as a means of escape, a way to get away from artificial lights and into the fresh air. After hours in the office, with nothing but a fluorescent ceiling to light my way, I found it refreshing to take a half-hour walk outside at lunchtime, to breathe the fresh air and feel the sun. I found that another half-hour walk in the cool night was an exhilarating way to unwind."

"I'll never forget the feeling I got on a winter night, as I walked along the deserted streets after many hours at the hospital. I suddenly realized that I didn't feel cold or tired. All the worries about my patients' illnesses as well as my own personal cares seemed to recede with each step. The profound fatigue that I'd experienced as I left the hospital seemed to evaporate into the atmosphere as quickly as the smoky vapor of my own breath disappearing in the night."

We can change our thoughts and our mental attitude through the use of our muscles. It even works in dealing with our obsessions. I recently read about a woman who suffered tremendously from jealousy. Even though she knew deep down that her husband was faithful, she could not shake off the thought that he was unfaithful. Without being aware of it, she was reinforcing the thought of jealousy with her muscular actions. She would rummage through the pockets of her husband's clothes at night to search for evidence of his unfaithfulness. If she had been gone from the house for a time, when she returned, she would search the house for some object which would prove that her husband had had a visitor while she was gone. She spied on her husband's activities, checked continually on his whereabouts, and when he arrived home in the evening, she would question him incessantly with her suspicions. She was acting in a jealous way with every muscle of her body. Every search, every act of watching, every series of questions, only intensified her obsession and kept her mind on the idea that he was unfaithful.

With her counselor she agreed that she needed to command her muscles not to ask questions, not to search, not to telephone her husband's office. So, they worked out a scheme of muscle retraining, a series of exercises which helped her to begin to act as a person who wasn't jealous. After a few weeks, the obsession began to diminish and finally left completely. She had helped to act herself into a new way of thinking.

This power of positive action is at work in many healing processes. Having had surgery myself some years ago, I experienced this in a personal way. Just a few hours following surgery, the nurse told me it was time to get up and walk a few steps. No one feels like getting out of bed and walking that soon after surgery, but it's important that we begin to act as if we are getting

better and we need to exercise our muscles so that they work at helping us get better. The muscles can lead the mind. If I had stayed in bed that day and each day following, my recuperation from surgery would've been slowed down considerably. Modern medicine has discovered that it's beneficial to get the patient involved in the healing process in an active way. The more responsibility the patient begins to take for his or her own health, the faster healing will occur.

Jesus Christ acted and called on others to act. One day a young lawyer asked Jesus, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus did not tell him to go away and meditate, or think about it; rather he said, "Sell all you have, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come follow me." When Jesus called his twelve disciples, he called them into action: "Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Often as he healed a person he would give instructions for action — "Rise, take up your bed and walk." And in the story read from the Gospel of Luke this morning, when the ten lepers said to Jesus, "Have mercy on us, help us," he said, "Go and show yourselves to the priest." And then in this story there is the amazing statement, "And as they went, they were healed."

Our faith grows in the same way. We can't just sit around and wait for faith to appear and then grow strong. "They were healed as they went!" Jesus said at one point, "If you have faith as big as a mustard seed, you can move mountains." Too many of us sit around and want faith as big as a mountain to move a mustard seed. Faith grows as we put it into practice. A young man who was thinking of going into the ministry came to talk to me some years ago, and he finally said that he would go into the ministry if only he had more faith. Then I asked him, "If you had more faith, what would you do with it?" Think about it and ask yourself that question this morning, "If you had more faith what would you do with it?" "How would you use it?"

Our faith only begins to grow as we begin to use it. The more we put it to use, the more it grows. Faith works like the muscles in our bodies, the more we use them in the proper way, the stronger they grow.

Some people wait around to be made happy. They want someone else to do it for them. We can become happy people by taking some action on our part — by beginning to act happy.

When Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen but believe," he was not advocating blind, gullible faith, but rather an open, hopeful attitude toward the not-yet-experiences. "As they went, they were healed!" As the ten lepers walked towards showing themselves to the priest as Jesus had told them to do, they went with a positive open attitude. They were hopeful for the future.

Next week, we are going to have our annual Every-Member-Canvass. Some people will approach it with pessimism and therefore will hold back in their giving, not trusting the future. Others will wait to give more until they believe they have enough money, like the young man who wanted to wait until he had enough faith. But we rarely think we have enough.

You've heard the old saying — USE IT OR LOSE IT! If we don't use what little faith we have, we lose it. The more I put my faith to work, the more it grows. The more I use my thinking processes, the more improved and more useful they become.

Use it or lose it! That part of us, which is never invested in human life, what we hold onto most tightly is what we will lose. Start giving and you will become a happy thankful person. You can act yourself into a new way of thinking.

The vision of life given to us as Christians is one of hopefulness. The God disclosed and revealed in Jesus Christ is the source and fulfiller of all creation. God did not begin this world carelessly or irresponsibly. The god revealed in Jesus Christ is not the kind of God to start something and then lose interest in it.

So today being to act in a hopeful fashion. With God's help you can become the kind of person you were meant to be. Amen.