

October 18, 2020 - Feast of St. Luke - Sermon notes

2 Timothy 4:5-13, Psalm 147:1-7, Luke 4:14-21

Today the Church gives thanks to God for the many ways in which St. Luke brought the message of God's love into the lives of people all over the world. While his name is very well known there is very little we know about the man except what we can deduce from his writings and a few references made by St. Paul. We know, for instance, that he was not a member of the 12 apostles and that he accompanied St. Paul on at least one missionary journey and that he was a physician. All other conclusions that scholars have made have been based on good and reliable evidence but we have no real method of confirming them. So, even though he wasn't one of the 'famous' Christians he was one of the most effective in communicating what God had done in Jesus Christ. It is, after all, his version of the Christmas story that is most familiar - even Linus of Peanuts fame used his story to tell people what Christmas is all about. If you look at the very beginning of his Gospel you find out that he endeavoured to write 'an orderly account' to a reader named Theophilus. I find it interesting to notice that the name 'Theophilus' translates into 'lover of God or friend of God' which could mean that this was a literary device to address a document to all those who are friends with God. It is assumed by many that St. Luke was a Gentile who came to believe in the Jewish God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob through an encounter with God's Messiah Jesus. While his writing seems to be directed to a Gentile audience he relies heavily on the Old Testament scriptures which means the reader is drawn into that world defined by the experiences of Abraham and Abraham's descendants. So we give thanks for this man who has been powerfully used by God to spread the message of God's love and forgiveness to a waiting world.

In a book named, "For All the Saints" published by the Anglican Book Centre, a writer has said the following.

*"Luke is mentioned three times in the Letters of Saint Paul, once as "the beloved physician," but the Church remembers him chiefly as the author of two books which came to be included in the New Testament.*

*The first book is the one we know as the Gospel according to Luke, where he told the story of Jesus, his preaching and mighty work in the border-country of Galilee, his suffering, death and resurrection at the very heart of Israel, in Jerusalem itself. The second of Luke's two books is the Acts of the Apostles. In this work he told how the good news was spread: how the apostles began their preaching at Jerusalem and moved westwards with the gospel until they reached the very centre of the Roman empire, the city of Rome itself. Thus, in these two books, Luke presented a comprehensive history of the gospel in terms of a journey from the hinterland of Judea to the heartland of imperial power and*

*civilization. We offer thanks to God for bestowing such gifts of understanding and literary skill on Luke, and we celebrate Luke himself because he responded so faithfully to the working of grace. But still, we remember the story-teller for the story that he told; and that story is the Lord's story. So, on this his day, we can honour Saint Luke no more highly than by joining in the telling of that story, which God gave him power to give us; that story which is the praise of God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit."*

The part of the story we are focussing on today comes at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. The scene is the town where Jesus grew up and the synagogue which would have been very familiar to him. Following his baptism by John in the Jordan River and the temptation in the wilderness Jesus began to travel around Galilee speaking in the synagogues of the area and receiving a good report. As was the custom he was invited to bring a message to the community in Nazareth. We don't know if the reading was chosen by him or if it was simply the reading for the day but Jesus used it as a jumping off point to say something about what God was doing. The passage comes from the book of Isaiah in chapter 61 which is the part of the book of Isaiah that deals with the coming Messiah. The Isaiah passage speaks of a future day when God will anoint a leader to bring about the 'day of the Lord' and in the synagogue in Nazareth Jesus claimed to be that person. After reading the passage he said, 'today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing'. In telling this story St. Luke makes a clear connection between the God who called Abraham and his descendants and the story of Jesus and his disciples. As we look closely at the passage quoted in Luke's Gospel we see that the Messiah of God was given a particular task which largely included proclaiming something that was to happen. The poor were to have good news brought to them and the captives were to hear about their release. The blind were to hear that their sight would be returned and the oppressed were to find freedom. The year of the Lord's favour was about to come to earth according to this passage of Scripture and by announcing that 'today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing' Jesus was claiming that he was the anointed one spoken of in this passage and therefore, as he would say numerous times, 'the kingdom of heaven has come near'. The list of things such as the blind receiving their sight was a list of things that happen when the kingdom of God comes to the earth and one of the things that St. Luke was able to do through his writings was point to the evidence that this was indeed happening. As we walk with Jesus through his earthly ministry by reading the stories St. Luke records we see what happens when the kingdom of God is on earth as it is in heaven. There were cases when the blind received their sight and those who were held captive by demons were released to enjoy a full life once again. As an historical chronicler St. Luke provided a wonderful glimpse into the everyday world as it was impacted by the presence of God's Messiah and

those empowered by God's Holy Spirit after Jesus ascended.

As we give thanks for his ministry we may feel the challenge to do something ourselves about proclaiming the message of God's Good News. St. Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, took the tools that were at hand in him and allowed them to be used under that inspiration. You and I have a similar opportunity to help people know more about the overall story of God and the specific circumstances that arise as the kingdom of God impacts the kingdom of this world. While we may not be gifted in the same way as St. Luke we can, as St. Paul said to Timothy, 'do the work of an evangelist' using our own gifts and talents. During this pandemic I have been greatly impressed by the creativity of people whose lines of communication have been drastically altered by the conditions under which we now live. The poor have good news proclaimed to them through food hampers delivered to their door. Oppressed people are given the freedom to find their way through greater access to mental health centres and the prayers of many people. Others are being healed in various ways through the efforts of some pretty amazing people. All of these things and more are methods of proclaiming the 'year of the Lord's favour'. As the days of the pandemic stretch on and on we still need this proclamation - perhaps even more than we needed it at the beginning of the restrictions. We have the opportunity to share the good news with as many people as we can encounter in new ways by telling them the 'old, old story of Jesus and his love'.

In thanksgiving for the ministry of St. Luke perhaps it would be a good idea to read through the books he wrote which have been preserved for us in the pages of the Bible. The Gospel according to St. Luke is only 24 chapters long and is quite the page turner when read from beginning to end. The Acts of the Apostles is a little longer but covers a great many of the important events of the first generation of Christians as they felt their way into the future made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. Whether you choose to try this experiment or find another way to honour the memory of St. Luke I pray that the Good News of God in Christ will be spread a little further in the days and weeks to come.

"Almighty God, who inspired Luke the physician to proclaim the love and healing power of your Son, give your Church, by the grace of your Spirit and the medicine of the gospel, the same love and power to heal; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. (Collect for the feast of St. Luke)