

10.18.2015 The Feast of St. Luke the Evangelist

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"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength and my redeemer." (Psalm 19:14)

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9) God doesn't do things the way we would expect Him to do them. If I had God's ultimate power and I wanted to declare His Gospel, I would spell it out in the sky in every language known to man. I would carve it into the side of a mountain. If I had God's resources, I would use every supernatural means to proclaim the Good News; but God's ways are not our ways, and He has chosen to get His message out through ordinary people – by human proclamation.

This morning is the 20th Sunday after Trinity, but today we interrupt our regularly scheduled service to celebrate the Feast of St. Luke the Evangelist. Today, we take a pause from the green that has adorned our church for the past few months, and we shift our attention to the red, to the evangelist St. Luke, the author of the third Gospel as well as the Acts of the Apostles. This is the day the Church has set aside to remember Luke and to thank God for sending His Holy Spirit to inspire him to proclaim the Gospel, and to write about one third of the New Testament.

God (in His way) in His infinite wisdom and never failing love, has chosen to hide "these things from the wise and prudent" (Luke 10:21) and instead work through ordinary people to proclaim His extraordinary message. St. Luke demonstrates that truth for us this morning – Luke was an evangelist. When he was sent out among 70 of Jesus' disciples to proclaim the kingdom of God, Jesus said to them, "He that hears you hears me ..." (Luke 10:16) Our words may often be so ordinary, so common, but when they are inspired by God they bring His kingdom near. God uses the words of the evangelist to hasten His kingdom – to speak truth to a dying world.

We (in our way) introduce verses of Scripture as the letter of Paul to Timothy or the Gospel according to St. Luke; but Jesus said... "He that hears you hears me." It was Jesus who gave these ordinary men His extraordinary words. God inspired Paul, He inspired Luke, and He continues to advance His kingdom through the inspired words He gives us to speak. Our words, when Christ speaks through us, can proclaim the peace of the kingdom of God. Jesus Himself gives us words to speak – and for those that hear

– it is as if Jesus Himself was present. This shows how near God wants to be to us and how real He wants His kingdom to be among us. May the words of our mouth always follow the example of the Old Testament prophet Micaiah, who boldly said, “As the LORD lives, even what my God says, that will I speak.” (2 Chronicles 18:13)

St. Luke was an evangelist, and we also know that he was a physician, because Paul refers to him as “the beloved physician” in his letter to the Colossians (4:14). Perhaps it was his training and education that led Luke to be so meticulous, so diligent, in his writing; for at the outset of his Gospel, Luke makes it very clear that what he wrote was the result of much careful research, and that he “had perfect understanding of all things from the very first...” (Luke 1:3)

Luke was a companion to Paul on more than one of his missionary journeys, and in our Epistle today, as Paul nears the end of his life he writes to Timothy, “Only Luke is with me.” Paul knew that soon he would pay the full price for being a Christian, following Jesus would cost Paul his life. Paul said, “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.” (2 Timothy 4:6). All of his partners in the Gospel had left him for one reason or another...except for Luke. Only Luke was with him, but Paul was confident in facing his martyrdom, knowing “there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:8). No doubt one of those who have loved the Lord’s appearing was St. Luke, who certainly brought comfort and healing to Paul’s soul, reporting to him an eye-witness account of the events in our Lord’s earthly ministry, His resurrection, and His ascension. Luke remained faithful to the Lord and to Paul, likely suffering much for Christ’s sake and for the sake of the Gospel.

Here we are 2,000 years later, gathered together in a comfort that is far removed from the persecution that Paul and Luke endured. Here we are, with nowhere nearly as much on the line as they, their very lives in the balance. What are we willing to sacrifice for our Lord’s sake? What are we willing to put on the line for the sake of the Gospel? Will we ever have to put our money where our mouths are? We confess with our lips that we believe in one God the Father Almighty, in one Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost; but is this a daily confession that springs from a love of all our heart, soul, mind, and strength – or is the spirit willing, but the flesh weak. We want to be faithful to our Lord like Luke was with Paul, but we find ourselves more like Paul’s former associate Demas, in love with this present world and having deserted Him. We hear the Gospel read and we say, “Praise be to thee O Christ,” but all too often we are more like Alexander the coppersmith, another example from our Epistle, and we oppose the message.

But here comes “the beloved physician”, St. Luke, with the prescription for our spiritual

health: the Gospel of our Lord and Savior! In this divine prescription he has given us what we need to live, for he has given us the Good News that Jesus Christ has died for the forgiveness of our sins. Luke alone records the prayer our Lord offered on behalf of those who nailed Him to the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34). He offers that prayer on our behalf as well, for truly it was our sin that nailed Him to the cross. Luke alone records the promise to the good thief – Dismas – crucified next to Him, saying, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43). That promise is for us as well, for He has prepared a place in heaven for all who call upon His name. (Romans 10:13) Luke alone records these as the dying words of our Savior from the cross: "Father, into thy hands I commend My spirit" (Luke 23:46). May that be our prayer also. "I commit myself to you, O God. In my living and in my dying, in the good times and in the bad, whatever I am and have, I place in your hands, O God, for your safekeeping." (Adam Hamilton)

The Gospel according to St. Luke, and the entirety of Holy Scripture, is God's prescription for us. When we go to the pharmacy and get our filled prescriptions, the doctor's orders state how much medicine to take and when to take it. If the illness is very serious, failing to follow these orders will result in death. Jesus, the Great Physician, does not order; but invites us to receive His medicine for our souls, His body and blood, given and shed for us for the forgiveness of sin. Here at His Table our Lord is with us, saying, "Take, eat, this is My body, which is given for you... Drink ye all of this; for this is my Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you, and for many, for the remission of sins; Do this, as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me." (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

Even as St. Luke, the Evangelist and Physician, remained with his companion and mentor, the apostle St. Paul; here, in Word and Sacrament, the Lord is with us. By His grace, through evangelism, we hear God's prescription for a wounded and dying world, and we draw near to Him to receive the Remedy – to receive Him. He is the Remedy!

"To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen." (Jude 1:25)

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