

10.18.2020 The Feast of St. Luke the Evangelist

“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. If I had God's omnipotent power and wanted to declare His Gospel, I'd use my finger to carve it into the side of a mountain. I'd spell it out in the sky in every language known to man: *“For God so loved the world...”* If I had God's resources, I'd 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 19th 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 book of Acts. 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, and hast revealed them unto babes”* (Luke 10:21), to work through ordinary people to proclaim His extraordinary message. St. Luke demonstrates that truth for us this morning. St. 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). We can be sure that statement still applies to every faithful Christian. Our Lord says to us, *“He that hears you, hears Me.”* Our words may often feel 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 life and 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 remember 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 while the words we speak are not Holy Scripture, you can be sure that God 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 who have ears to hear, Jesus is present, speaking through us. It’s just as He promised, *“For when two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them”* (Matthew 18:20). When we speak His words to another person, we are gathered in His name, praying that He would be in our midst. His promise is evidence of 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).

St. 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 his Christian faith, 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 ministry 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, in his words, *“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, by reporting to him an eye-witness account of the events in our Lord's earthly ministry. St. Luke remained faithful to the Lord and to Paul, likely suffering much for Christ's sake and for the sake of the Gospel.

Now 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 hanging in the balance. When we consider all they endured, we have to ask ourselves: What are we willing to sacrifice for our Lord and for the sake of the Gospel? What cross are we willing to bear? The thought brings to mind a quote from Charles Spurgeon. He believed that "there are no crown-wearers in heaven who were not cross-bearers here below."

Christianity comes with a cross, and on days like today, when we celebrate the lives of the saints, that's a fact (written in red) that you can't miss. St. Paul bore the cross of martyrdom knowing that the Lord had laid up for him a crown of righteousness, and his companion, "*the beloved physician*" St. Luke the Evangelist took up his own cross, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote a prescription for our spiritual health: the Gospel of our Lord and Savior. The Gospel according to St. Luke, and the entirety of Holy Scripture, is God's prescription for our sin-sick souls, and our Lord, the Great Physician, who "*gives us victory over sin and death*" (1 Corinthians 15:57) invites us to receive His Remedy, His Body and Blood, given and shed for us for the forgiveness of sin.

It is by the grace of God, through evangelists like St. Luke, that we hear and receive God's prescription for a wounded and dying world. It is by the grace of God, through Word and Sacrament, that we draw near to receive the prescription, to receive the Remedy, to receive our Lord and God today. It is by His grace that we are here this morning to remember St. Luke and to thank God for sending His Holy Spirit to inspire him to proclaim the Gospel. May God give us grace to follow this good example, that we may rejoice in the life that now is, and dwell with our Savior in the life that is to come, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.