



SAINT LUKE'S

“IN ST. LUKE’S STEPS”

THE FEAST OF SAINT LUKE
YEAR A

ECCLESIASTICUS 38:1-4,6-10,12-14

PSALM 147

2 TIMOTHY 4:5-13

LUKE 4:14-21

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY

OCTOBER 22, 2017

As Paul is in prison awaiting execution, he passes on a moving charge to his protégé Timothy. We hear a portion of this letter from prison today. Paul writes: *Luke alone is with me*. Among his final instructions, Paul says to Timothy: *always be sober, endure suffering, **do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.***

Do the work of an evangelist. Carry out your ministry fully. Just to be clear, since it is not necessarily obvious: the original Luke who is mentioned in several places as St. Paul's companion, is not the same Luke who physically authored this gospel. All four gospels originate in an oral narrative which is - a generation or two later - written down and given a name connecting it to an authoritative original source. In ways that are lost to us, Paul's companion Luke is identified as the source, inspiration and spiritual ancestor of this gospel. Paul calls "original Luke" *the beloved physician*,¹ and *fellow-worker*². Who doesn't love a kind and caring physician? Original Luke was a loyal traveling companion in Paul's missionary journeys, and stays with Paul through thick and thin. "Author Luke" is many things that we might find flattering to ourselves as the patron saint of this parish. He is cosmopolitan and highly educated - he writes in sophisticated Greek. Author Luke is Gentile and often gets Jewish customs only half-accurate, but he means well and so he constantly tries to make Hebrew customs intelligible to Gentiles and vice versa. Author Luke is compassionate across cultural and ethnic divisions, and cares about outsiders. He gives us Good Samaritans, worthy Canaanite women, little children who are to be cherished not brushed aside, lost sheep and returning prodigal sons. Who doesn't love

¹ Col. 4:14

² Philemon 1:24

this kind and cuddly Luke?

Yet both Original Luke and Author Luke are first and foremost evangelists. Their purpose is to share the story of God's love made known most fully and most deeply in Jesus.

When was the last time you shared your hope in Christ, flickering though it might be? When was the last time you invited someone to church? We all need reminding that most of us are here because someone, somewhere had the courage to say: Come and See. Sometimes, people have never heard about Jesus and simply walk through a church door and are captured by God's Spirit. But more often, we are here because someone shared the gospel with us and sparked our quest. They may not have felt expert or perfect in faith, but they shared anyway. It is so important to remind ourselves that we never graduate from our primary call to share the gospel, to invite, to welcome others to grow in faith along with us.

Did you know that studies have shown that it matters *who* welcomes? The clergy can welcome and we do and we follow through - but research shows that if I am a visitor, I am wondering "Will I fit in here?" "Will I be accepted as I am?". The single most important factor in how I will feel about St. Luke's is whether people *in the pew* are welcoming. In my last parish the church was fairly often very full at the main service in the late 1990s and early 2000s (the same time as I think church attendance was peaking at St. Luke's?), and so we needed to encourage

folks to move into the pews and not sit on the outside – to make it more inviting for others to enter the same pew. During my years in parish ministry - in every parish, and certainly here – people have said: “I love the worship, the clergy, the music, the messages (as people often call sermons) but no-one in the congregation spoke to me. I didn't make a single new friend after 6 months of worshipping at the church”. Now some of you are wonderful at welcoming. Some of you are always bringing friends to church and introducing them around. That is beautiful to see. You make the community itself part of the good news of God’s welcome. We are *all* called to be evangelists in this way. We don’t have to go on missionary journeys like original Luke, to endure hunger, cold, sickness and prison and beatings. But we are all invited to follow St. Luke in bridging gaps, going out of our way to talk with people we don't yet know, helping others feel welcome, to be available, to listen, to accompany. It is a lovely thing really that the Lord asks of us as we follow in our patron saint's footsteps: Welcome others as the Lord has welcomed you. *Be God’s welcome* for someone else.

I know that Church is precious reflection time in today’s busy, noisy world. It is time out from producing and being “on”. That is fitting and good. Yet we are not here only for ourselves. We are asked to transform our mindset when we follow Christ. Christians are called to be people *for others* both here and in our daily lives. Our attention is both on Jesus *and* on our neighbors. *Carry out your ministry fully.*

In his recent book *Holy Living*, Rowan Williams writes that it is easy for

the church to look like any other organization - anxious, competitive, full of rivalries - *unless* we are transformed by the Holy Spirit into behaving differently from the world. One of the things monastic communities show us is that growing in Christ is intimately connected with being in a stable community. This takes serious commitment, Williams writes, not unlike a marriage: staying put and loving folks who may sometimes drive us crazy. This is not only true for monks and marrieds! Church communities are more resilient than many modern groups because of our stability in Christ's love. Churches can have very difficult conversations because of this foundation in Christ's love for each of us. Our relationships are not turned on and off like a cell phone. We don't unfriend people. Ever. The unconditional belonging that St. Luke's offers in Christ is a gift beyond price in a transient and often lonely city like ours. Our community is called to be a sanctuary and beacon. St. Luke's Sunday is a good moment to renew our commitment to Jesus' call to each of us. Paul's charge to Timothy is ours as well: How are we doing the work of an evangelist and carrying out fully the ministry God has given to each of us?

AMEN

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