



# SAINT LUKE'S

“LIFE LESSONS FROM LUKE”  
ST. LUKE'S SUNDAY

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

PSALM 147

TIMOTHY 4:5-13

LUKE 4:14-21

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY  
OCTOBER 20, 2019

*Only Luke is with me.* This extract from Paul's second letter to Timothy is about as woeful as Paul gets. We see Luke's loyalty and steadiness. Like Paul, Luke never knew Jesus personally but he met people who knew him. Luke was with Paul on early missionary journeys<sup>1</sup> and stayed with Paul until Paul's martyrdom in Rome around 64 AD, when Paul was martyred. After that, we don't know for sure what happened to Luke. Some early sources say Luke died at 84 in Greece.

We do know that some point after Paul dies, Luke writes down what he knows. It is a massive labor of love - parchment upon parchment of what would become Luke's gospel and then Vol. 2 - the Book of Acts. Luke tells us uniquely of the care God has for the lost and the least and the "invisible". The prodigal son and his resentful brother; the lost sheep and the good Shepherd; the unexpected kindness from the Good Samaritan. The shepherds are first to hear of Jesus' birth and there are no visiting kings in Luke.

Like his writings, Luke's life has chapters. Luke's life reveals the markers of the journey of discipleship. We

<sup>1</sup> Col.4:14; Philemon 1:24; starting in Acts 16:11, Luke switches to the pronoun "we" for three sections of Acts

can see in Luke's life a sort of primer or "what to expect" as we seek to follow Christ.

**First**, whatever our professional expertise, God will use it. Luke's education is valuable. He is a physician and communicates easily with a cosmopolitan audience. Luke does everything he can with the particular gifts God gives him. Luke is likely Gentile, not Jewish. God uses that to reach different audiences.

**Second**, we may not face shipwreck, trials and plots like Luke and Paul but we will certainly find ourselves in challenging situations. Often we don't have to journey far to find them. They can be as close as where we live and where we work. We face situations that we would not choose, and we are not sure what to do. We wonder if this is really the place we are meant to be. We wonder: where is God in this? The resource God gives Luke is the Holy Spirit and also the gift of fellowship. We are never alone in our lives of faith and the community can amplify and confirm what the Holy Spirit is up to, and point out things we may not have noticed. The disciples go about in pairs for a reason. There's Paul and Timothy, Paul and Luke, Paul and Barnabas – Paul is usually tagged with

someone. The challenging times are when we can lean on our community of faith to help us sift through what is going on and support and pray for us.

**Third**, like Luke we are each called to share our faith. We needn't wait to understand more or whatever inadequacy we feel our faith has. We have enough faith to be here this morning and that is what we can share. We can invite a friend to church, mention our faith to someone who is unchurched. At the very least, we can be honest about coming to Church, not hide it as though it is something shameful and embarrassing. "On Sunday mornings I go to church whenever I can"... In today's New York, that is a bold statement, a confession of faith. It is spiritually "coming out"! It may provoke curiosity and questions and provide an opportunity for conversation. My experience is that people are hungry - starved, really - for authentic spiritual experience, for a way into healthy spiritual life and community. If you have credibility with your friends, so will your faith journey. It was friends of my own age who brought me to committed faith in Christ when I was 20 years old. Our society is increasingly secular. Europe is a generation ahead of us. The coasts of our country are

ever more secular and – I hope I am wrong – but it may be only a matter of time before the South and Mid-West follow. There are people walking through our doors on Christmas Eve who do not know the story of Jesus; who have never heard about the Resurrection. If our friends and family don't hear and see the gospel from us, where will they see it and what version will they see? There are some versions of Christianity that envision a God who is punitive, vengeful, and frankly less mature than many human beings – who would want to sign up for that? If we love our friends, don't we want them to share our experience of a loving, generous, embracing God?

**Fourth,** Luke stays the course, stays faithful. *Only Luke is with me.* What is our compass in daily life? I find that it can be hard to focus on the most important things amid all the details and different needs for our attention. This is true in every way – in our to-do lists at home and work, and in our spiritual lives. There are so many things and people deserving of our attention. There is also the barrage of political chaos and climate change and ethnic cleansing of the Kurds and Brexit and wars. The daily news is head-spinning. I find I need a way to return to the center to orient my priorities and to make choices every day.

So here is a foundation according to Ignatius of Loyola. I find it helpful in focusing my mind and heart and offer it in case you might too. You may want to modernize the language, but the principle is rock solid. Ignatius' Principle and Foundation is this: man is created to praise, reverence and serve God. That's it. Human beings are created to praise, reverence (or honor), and serve God. You and I are alive to praise, reverence and serve God. St. Luke's is called into existence by the Holy Spirit to praise, reverence and serve God. Everything else flows from that. Note: if we put serving neighbor first, it doesn't necessarily lead us to God, but if we put serving God first, it will always lead to serving our neighbor. The great Commandments are to love God, and to love our neighbor. Both commandments are essential but the order is important. First and foremost, we are here to praise, reverence and serve God. Whatever situation we face, as people of faith we can ask: What is the way I can best praise, honor and serve God in this situation? What is the choice that seems closest to the Spirit of Jesus in this situation?... (even if it gets me in trouble).

How do we know if we are on the right path? There is no one "right path" if we are seeking to praise, reverence and serve God. There is only the path that

is the best fit for our particular gifts and calling. Unlike our cultural standards, competition and comparison are not useful criteria in following God. Luke's path was his alone and ours will be unique too. Every disciple will have different gifts and unique callings and *all* can glorify God, and serve our neighbor.

What would Luke think of this church named after him, 2000 years later? Would Luke recognize the marks of his gospel here? I believe he would. As we enter our 200th Anniversary year in 2020, let us keep the ears and eyes of our hearts open to ask: how are we called to serve God and neighbor in the next chapter of our life in Christ?

AMEN

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