SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE
in the City of New York
The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector
www.SaintThomasChurch.org

Sunday, October 18, 2020 *Solemn Eucharist*
The Feast of Saint Luke the Evangelist

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A Sermon by
The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, *Rector*
on
Ecclesiasticus 38:1-4, 6, 10, 12-14; 2 Timothy 4:5-13; and Luke 4:14-21
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Joy and Jubilee

When Jesus attended the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth, where he had grown up as a boy, we are told that all eyes were fixed on him. What were they expecting to hear? What would he do? Would Jesus have any answers for them in their busy lives?"

"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

And that was it. He rolled up the scroll and sat down.

"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

But how was the scripture? Let us remind ourselves of that powerful passage from the prophecy of Isaiah that Jesus chose to read:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me ***to bring good news to the poor.***
He has sent me ***to proclaim release to the captives***
and ***recovery of sight to the blind,***
to ***let the oppressed go free,***
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*"*

The fulfillment of those prophecies was not in what Jesus would *do* or how *busy* he would make himself accomplishing them*;* in fact, the Gospel tells us that he simply sat down. Perhaps that is the key to understanding this passage at the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry in Luke's Gospel; the fulfillment of those prophecies was to be **in his very self**. *Jesus* is the good news of God's love and forgiveness to those who have nothing – the poor in spirit and those who are powerless or homeless. *Jesus* is release to captives – those who are burdened by the things that prevent them from discovering God's presence as much as those who are burdened by sickness or disadvantage of any form. *Jesus* is recovery of sight to those who cannot find God as much as he is a source of healing for broken bodies. Jesus *frees* the oppressed, for he wants all people to be saved: *"When I am lifted up from the earth I shall draw all people to myself". (John 12:32)*

And above all, Jesus was anointed to proclaim 'the year of the Lord's favor' which, in the Old Testament, is the year of *Jubilee* when, significantly, the Hebrew scriptures tell us that all debts should be cancelled and land ownership reverted back to God every fifty years. Was that year of Jubilee ever kept? Did people really try and re-create a just and equal society? Most think not. But now, Jesus *in himself* becomes the focus of that year of Jubilee – the place of release and acceptance. Not government policy or church dogmatics, but through relationship with him drawing us back to the Father's love. In stretching out his arms of love on the hard wood of the cross, Jesus drew all people to himself – past, present, and future - **their lives in his hands.**

No wonder that this passage begins the earthly ministry of Jesus in Luke's Gospel for Luke, we are told, was a physician – a doctor - and that prophecy, fulfilled in Jesus Christ permeates his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles and, therefore, characterizes the Good News proclaimed in the scriptures. Luke the doctor understood that health and wholeness mattered, and that health was not just about physical disease, mental illness, or disability; it was also about repairing broken relationships.

Almost one third of the New Testament is under the authorship of the man called Luke and 35% of the Gospel that bear his name is unique to Luke. And that uniqueness is, as I suggest, characterized by this radical prophecy of Jubilee release in which a humble God empties himself in order to restore the lost. How appropriate that Luke's Gospel is known as the Gospel for the poor; it is the Gospel where women are as important as men; where children are cherished; a Gospel where this radical servanthood of Jesus Christ is proclaimed, and where the Master acts as the servant; it is Good News for the whole world.
Only Luke gives us two of the best-known parables of Jesus – the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan. The parable of the prodigal is reinforced with the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin, again, only found in Luke.

If we did not have Luke's gospel, Christmas would be very different; there would be no angels and shepherds, and no manger scene. Because of Luke, musicians have been inspired to set Zechariah, Mary, and Simeon's words to music – and the Benedictus, Magnificat, and the Nunc Dimittis have become clarion-calls for Luke's theology of radical Jubilee – rooted in the daily prayer of the Church from the earliest of days:

"To give light to them that sit in darkness
and in the shadow of death, *
  and to guide our feet into the way of peace."

"He hath put down the mighty from their seat, *
  and hath exalted the humble and meek.
He hath filled the hungry with good things, *
  and the rich he hath sent empty away."

"To be a light to lighten the Gentiles, *
  and to be the glory of thy people Israel."

I love the way N.T. Wright describes the Magnificat in his commentary on Luke's Gospel: *"It's the gospel before the gospel, a fierce bright shout of triumph thirty weeks before Bethlehem, thirty years before Calvary and Easter. It goes with a swing and a clap and a stamp. It's all about God, and it's all about revolution. And it's all because of Jesus – Jesus who is only just been conceived, not yet born, but who has made Elizabeth's baby leap for joy in her womb and has made Mary giddy with excitement and hope and triumph."* [1.]

Luke the physician knew the intimacy of how human beings related to the world, to each other, and to God and I think he probably marveled. He knew the complexities of life, but he also knew the good news of Jesus Christ and how God had entered into space and time in order to reveal himself as the one who could

bring true healing. To be healed is to be made whole – but that is not the same as 'fixing things' – rather, a realignment of our lives with Jesus who draws us to the Father and fills us with his Spirit.

Luke, therefore, tells us about God travelling with his pilgrim people. In his Gospel we have insights into Jesus and his life and teaching as he travelled on the road. His Gospel even ends with the beautiful story of the walk to Emmaus, again unique to Luke, in which Jesus appears to those sad disciples and reveals himself in the breaking of the bread. The Book of Acts – the second volume – is all about the Church on the move as Luke accompanies Paul on his journeys and witnesses the operation of the Holy Spirit on the lives of the followers of Jesus. From the amazing events of the Day of Pentecost when the Apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, to the arrival of Paul in Rome, the Acts of the Apostles is a heady mix of that radical Jubilee breaking into all four corners of the world. The Book of Acts, ends with these words that sum up the reason for the Gospel and the Book of Acts - *"proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ."*

There is a lovely tradition in the Church that became very popular in the Renaissance period, that Luke was not only a doctor but was also an artist, and that he painted the first portrait of our Lady with the Christ Child later in her life which, in the Orthodox tradition, is said to have been the first icon of the Mother of God. But as early as the 12th century, one icon in particular – painted in the 5th century – found in the Hodegon Monastery in Constantinople - was said to have been based on Luke's original image. The famous *Virgin Hodegetria* or 'she who points the way,' has been copied countless times all over the orthodox world ever since. Perhaps the legend is a little fanciful, but what a beautiful image of Mary showing the Christ Child to a waiting world and Jesus, in turn, raising his hand in blessing – it is a *joyful* image that certainly echoes Luke's proclamation of Good News.

Today we give thanks for Luke the physician, companion to Paul, and the one who has enriched the church's life and liturgy with the beauty of his Gospel and the energy of the Book of Acts. Here, in the midst of this Pandemic with a second wave, it seems, happening around the world, we pause for a moment and pray for all on the front line and for all who bring release to captives and those in the shadow of death. Luke may or may not have been an artist, but his attention to detail, and his observation of the activity of God in human lives gives us hope today. His Gospel and the Book of Acts, is characterized by great joy, so let us end by listening to the final words of his Gospel:

"And they worshiped Jesus, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God."

Let us put those words into practice my friends.

[1]. 'Luke for Everyone' – N.T. Wright page 12 in Kindle edition