

+In the Name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen+

A few weeks back, one of the staff at Twin lakes sent a message saying that it was a gift that St. John’s was live-streaming and recording our masses. In a somewhat apologetic tone the sender said, “You know how it is when you are a nurse; you work all sorts of hours and with all conditions of people, and now with Covid-19 a lot of uncertainty...I have permanently taken on 12 hour shifts for weekends, so getting to worship isn’t usually possible. This makes a difference”. It has occurred to me that today is most appropriate for those in the medical field to be about their business—healing, sustaining, and caring for others because it is the Feast Day of St. Luke—Physician and Evangelist; those are closer than they may seem. And it is likely that each of us brings to this moment a concern about well-being, health, and wholeness that is as weighty as any time over the past century.

In terms of direct biographical information, we know only minute details about Luke. He is, of course, mentioned today in the Epistle to Timothy, and Colossians identifies him as a physician, that is, one who heals. It has often been thought he was one of the 70 sent out as part of the mission recounted in the Gospel. Some have suggested he was one of the persons on the road to Emmaus. The data is sketchy. However, if a person’s mind and soul can be glimpsed through their writings and what they leave for others, we can see amazing images of Luke’s heart and how it was owned by the Messiah! The CORE of his proclamation is to announce the arrival of the hoped-for Kingdom, the Reign of God now present in Jesus of Nazareth; a Kingdom marked by health and restoration of human brokenness. In fact, if you read Luke’s Gospel you will find throughout it a devastating passion for the infirm, the outcast, the poor, those sick in body and spirit. It is the physician who gives us the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis; prayers of those seeking God, and they are first responders in the Gospel that staying connected to the Father is life-giving. It is Luke who gives us the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son, the stories of the lost sheep, the 10 lepers, and the woman with an unrelenting hemorrhage. In one he takes on the self-important priest for ignoring a mugging victim and leaving it to an un-respected minority to carry out the work of healing. In the another a son, broke, smelling of cheap booze and the pig pen comes home asking to be a servant and the Father explodes in seeking to restore (another word for healing) the renegade.

Casting it in the words of Frederick Buechner, “To put it in a nutshell, by playing all these things up Luke shows he was a man who believed that you should not let the fact that a person is jail-bait keep you from treating him like a human being...These characteristics may not prove that he was a doctor, but if he wasn’t, it was a serious loss to the medical profession!”

What is really at stake in having a day to commemorate Luke is not merely his profession, but the fact that with his profession and his gift as a poet, he served our Lord and His people as an Evangelist. i.e. He was a teller of the Good News. This means today should remind us that what is crucial is the Gospel; the Gospel of light and grace over darkness and death, and we are part of its transmission and embodiment.

Most lectionaries for today use the very beginning and ending of Luke’s story. What appears so divergent and unrelated actually are very close, for in putting these bookends together we come to see how Luke’s whole endeavor is summed up...Jesus, crucified out of his love for us all, and risen, is the Great Physician and Benefactor of all humanity. What Luke wants you and me to get

is that in Christ, God has given us victory over all that torments us and makes us ill. This is at the very center of our life, and what gives us the courage to have hope. Do we believe God is “FOR US”?

The second thing crucial is that God has the unmitigated nerve to entrust that treasure and its communication to the likes of people such as us!! “You are my witnesses”, Jesus tells the disciples (we are disciples, too). In psychology we have developed technical language for peoples’ fears—phobia. Acrophobia is fear of heights; arachnophobia is fear of spiders. Many of us Anglicans have marturiaphobia—the fear of being called to bear witness. I suspect the idea conjures up images of a street corner or TV evangelist. But to bear witness of God’s action in Christ is not cajoling or caterwauling, and it is more than passing on information—it is to confess—to be a warm, live bearer of news, so that those whose lives intertwine with ours experience the news for themselves. It means that you and I are “Living Reminders” of the Gospel of God’s Healing.

The Gospels (Mt., Mk., etc) themselves are crucial for the church, but they are one step removed from people as Luke points out to Theophilus (lover of God), for it is the eye witnesses first and then the writings. The Gospels support faith, give us a true tie with our heritage, but the Word of God (Jesus) proclaimed and received in Sacraments by live persons, is alive and dynamic—He encounters and addresses, challenges and judges, forgives and heals and therefore gives true life! And notice that the words encounter, challenge, forgive, heal—those are words that can only take place in a relationship.

We, and many others, are in the middle of a convulsive, ill, and too often violent world. What we yearn and call for is a Deliverer—someone who will liberate us from harm and make of whole again. Often those voices are filled with pain, carry wounds physical or spiritual, and are not calm but filled with confusion and longing. They are looking for someone to set them free from hatred, hunger and loss of hope—in short, a Messiah who will bring peace and healing. Looking to the political realm has brought disappointment, because that realm cannot, by its very nature, restore fallen humanity—that is a myth of our time. Socio-political matters can be tools for good, but they are not salvific. If we are to take Luke, and for that matter, all of Scripture seriously, we must come to terms with the fact that people are looking to the Church (a faithful community) for sustenance and God is taking you and me and making us signposts of that Messiah. You cannot avoid that this is the meaning of being God’s chosen people. The same as those, who at the end of Luke’s Gospel are sent.

I dare say that in the moments of need in your own life, when your resources were too thin, when you sought out some word of help/hope, you did not expect in going to your priests or a trusted friend to be given black print on a white page. When seeking love you do not go to Webster’s or the Oxford Dictionary of the English language for a definition. No, what you need is an embodiment of that love which knows your wounds and seeks to give you a space in their life where you can receive love and be healed. Life without relationships of this kind is simply too dreadful to face. To be a witness can only happen when we give of ourselves because God has already given us healing and hope.

Luke, in all the marvelous depth of a poet and storyteller brings us time after time into contact with the very heart of God. And the heart of the Holy One leads him over and again to place himself right where I would most like to avoid; God places himself through his Son into the dark, lonely, hurting spaces in order to visit the sickness of the world and bring it life. I had the privilege

over two and a half decades to spend life in a healthcare context with senior adults. The people in that space were not immune to any of the illnesses or personal struggles common to all humans. They managed those challenges with varying degrees of skill, as is true of all of us. Frequently I was struck by the way faith interpreted and allowed men and women to live in hope; to be made whole even as “cures or simple fixes” eluded them. Those men and women knew there was something more than darkness; they knew the God who brought light out of nothing and promises to do so again.

St. Irenaeus, a very early bishop once said, “The glory of God is a human fully alive”. We may wish from time to time to run and hide from the world out there and the pain in here. But God has already walked through all of that on our behalf, and now asks us to bear witness to his infinite goodness and love. The world is full of hurting people and they are a reminder to us that we are not to fear our world, but of how much we are needed to bear the Gospel to them. What might it mean for a person in a nursing facility, Assisted Living, or simply isolated by Covid-19 to receive a 15 minute phone call which signifies they are remembered? What would be the impact of an anonymous \$20 gift card to man or woman whose job has been lost? What does it really look like to bear witness to life? Luke has told us.

It is most appropriate to commemorate Luke this day, and all who heal. But, I am sure he would remind us...”It isn't me, but the Gospel that heals”!! Amen+