

Sermon – Feast of St Luke

Luke 4: 14-21

The Apostle Luke, whom we commemorate today, seems to me to be a man of a number of complementary talents. First and foremost he was a Christian, a follower of the way. Secondly he was reported to be a physician, therefore a learned man who had studied the human body and ancient medicine and healing, to enable him to care for the sick of his day.

Thirdly he was reported to be a historian. This would seem to fit with the profile of a learned man. The study of medicine was largely based on knowledge from the ancient Greeks so this may have been the catalyst for Luke's interest in history. Lastly, we understand from the letters of the Apostle Paul, and from the book of the Acts of the Apostles, that Luke was a missionary, sharing with Paul, the journey to spread the gospel.

As a physician, Luke would have been more highly educated than the average person, no doubt contributing to his ability to research the life of Jesus Christ and make sense of it by writing his narrative. The writer of Ecclesiasticus tells us that "the skill of a physician makes them distinguished" and that "their gift of healing comes from the Most High."

Luke is also acknowledged as being responsible for writing what is known as the Acts of the Apostles, in addition to the Gospel according to St Luke. The Acts of the Apostles is an intriguing insight into the early church and how it formed after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. He records the leadership of St Peter and the rise of St Paul, from zealous persecutor to humbled follower of Jesus, and later courageous evangelist.

The role of physician in early society is vastly different from today, as is the role of historian. However, the constant aim of the physician is to help people heal and overcome their ailments. His 'profession,' if I can call it that, helped inform his interest in healing and his evident acquaintance with and sympathy for the suffering.

St Luke is also seen as the most balanced of the gospel writers in that he specifically lifts the role of women and gives emphasis to the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus, and their mothers Elizabeth and Mary.

So St Luke is a worthy patron saint of this parish and has much to teach us about our role as a church in community. So here we gather on this Feast of St Luke to celebrate our patronal saint and to take stock of what God has called us to be in the community today.

At the celebration of the fourth consecration of the church in 1915, after rebuilding from the devastation of fire, The Rev. Dr George Van De Water preached. Rev Van De Water was the second rector of this parish from 1880 to 1887. His sermon was insightful and pointed, and a reminder to those attending that day of the important work of the church in its community. He

said, “the sole reason for a church in a community is to make the community better.” If we don’t agree with this succinct statement, then why are we here.

Rev Van De Water also said, that “the function of the Christian church is to make people like Christ.” Again we can hardly disagree with this. The question for us today is how to best do this in a dense urban environment where many prefer to rely on themselves rather than rely on Jesus Christ to shape one’s life.

How do we teach and celebrate the life of Jesus Christ and how do we be examples of Holy Spirit-filled Christians in this community, and within our families and communities in which we live and work?

As the church we are called upon to consistently reflect on how we are carrying out these two aims in community. Last year the vestry proposed leading a conversation with you on exactly this. Who are we in this community? How do we honor our heritage and how do we celebrate the future of God’s ministry here? How do we make this community better, and how do we demonstrate to the community the love of Jesus Christ? But we were somewhat derailed in our intention due to the pandemic shutdown. So it is worth restating again.

If we fail to live out our core purpose and the calling God makes of us, we do risk alienating ourselves from the community in which we serve, and then we become obsolete. The first parish failed, but the second incarnation under the saintly leadership of St Luke, and some very able and faithful people, thrived despite many setbacks. It is a testimony to the courage, faith and stewardship of the congregations over these many years.

The parish has evolved and changed over time, especially with the consolidation of parishes into St Luke’s. In 1943 it was the parish of St Matthew. In 1993 it was the parish of St Michel, St Mark and then in 2012 the parishioners from the Church of the Redeemer. We are stronger together and we can learn much from the resiliency of our forebears.

Rev Van De Water commented in his sermon that “A church in city or country, parish church, mission chapel, or cathedral, that means nothing to the neighborhood but a beautiful building, in which from time to time is furnished a well-ordered service for those who like it well enough to pay for it, is nothing but a medieval monstrosity underserving the name of the church.” These are strong words but prescient for us today as we turn our hearts and minds to the work of the Holy Spirit in the days, weeks, months and years ahead.

We have a beautiful building, the legacy of faithful stewardship over nearly two centuries, and it will be even more beautiful when the renovations have concluded. But then what? Will we fall into believing that people will come just because the building is beautiful, or will they come to meet Jesus, find community and be transformed in their lives by our outreach work. The church has to be more than just the building.

Most come to a Christian faith community to find Jesus Christ, to find healing from broken lives, to find a loving and supportive community, and to find hope. We all can be inspired by our patron saint St Luke. We too can be physicians like him in the midst of this busy and expanding community, helping to heal the souls of the lost.

Together, each week, we gather to worship God, to give thanks for the life and atoning death of Jesus Christ and to build community. Will those that cross our threshold day after day, find Christ here, alive and vibrant? For this the church is consecrated as holy ground for the holy work we are called to do. All who cross the threshold of this house of prayer will receive the blessing of God, whether they stay for a moment or a lifetime. Lives are transformed by the grace of God, working through us, baptized Christians.

I leave the final words today to Rev Van De Water, 104 years after they were first uttered in this sacred space. "What mean ye by this service. This, and nothing less than this: that St Luke's Church is henceforth declared officially to be a consecrated building for consecrated [people]. Your inheritance among the saints, your obligations to your Savior, your everlasting happiness, demand that you reconsecrate yourselves this day to the service of Christ and His Church. Let this be our pledge and promise as we with intention hold the hand to take the bread from the Risen Savior: 'Henceforth, for me to live, is Christ.'"

So may it be, blessed by the Holy Spirit, and by St Luke.

Amen