

Sermon - St. Luke's Day 2024
Healing and Wholeness
10/20/24

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the calendar of the Church, the Feast of St. Luke is celebrated on October 18th each year. Because our own parish is under St. Luke's patronage, we are permitted to celebrate the feast on a Sunday, the day when most of us are used to gathering together in the church. Every Sunday at the Eucharist, we pray for the companionship of St. Luke, "the evangelist and physician," – a powerful friend in heaven whose life and legacy point us beautifully toward Christ.

Luke was not among the original or even the slightly amended group of the first twelve disciples who accompanied Jesus, but he is vibrantly present throughout the Bible. He is most famously the author of the third Gospel that bears his name, and his writing continues with the Acts of the Apostles. Scholars differ on their commitment to the details, but it has been widely agreed that Luke traveled extensively – and worked tirelessly – alongside St. Paul. Luke is mentioned in several of Paul's letters, and he is called, more than once, "a physician." Our own church was given the name "St. Luke's" in his honor, for this has always been a place of healing. Some of you here today have been present since the very beginning, when this church moved from the holy space of a generously offered home into a community space at Scandia Village. Like a physician, it has always been a place that holds bodies and souls to be precious.

Luke is known in his writings for honoring all life as precious. Luke's Gospel is the one from which we receive most stories of Jesus healing other people. In Luke's Gospel, we see a special attention paid to women, children, and the poor. Where other Gospels mention the sick and the downtrodden, it is St. Luke's Gospel that gives them names and voices. His language and

the style of his writing indicate that he was one of the most educated, articulate authors of the entire Bible (in fact, he often quotes texts from the classical Greek curriculum - Homer, Aesop, Euripides, and Plato, among others!), and he uses these great gifts to express the care of almighty God for those who are most forgotten and most in need. It is Luke who gives us some of the greatest songs in scripture: Mary's *Magnificat*, Zechariah's *Benedictus*. It is Luke who gives us the story of Anna and Simon in the temple, receiving the child Jesus. Only in Luke do we find the stories of the prodigal son, the good Samaritan, and the rich man and Lazarus. It is Luke who gives us that marvelous assertion in the midst of uncertainty and bewilderment: he recalls the voice of the angel, Gabriel, as he proclaims, "nothing will be impossible with God." His Gospel and his sequel in the Acts of the Apostles are brimming with healing, body and soul.

It can be a bold thing to speak about healing – both in the wider world and in the church. I'm sure I'm not alone when I confess that the older I get, the more difficult it can be, sometimes, to talk about healing. The older we get, the more we understand just how much more there is in our bodies, our spirits, and the world that still cries out for restoration and the soothing of pain. The older we get, the more familiar we seem to become with what can feel like unanswered prayer. What does it mean when our prayers for healing of body, mind, or spirit do not seem to be received or even heard by God? Who is listening when we cannot seem to hear the voice of an angel or to see the father waiting for us at the end of the road home or to feel the hands of the Son of God lay their blessing upon our eyes that yearn for sight?

It is interesting that the Gospel text that is appointed for the celebration of this Feast today is this selection from the fourth chapter of Luke's Gospel. There are dozens of stories of healing that could've been chosen: Jesus cleansing lepers, restoring sight to the blind, breath to the dead, strength to the one who could not stand. And yet instead of a story where Jesus

encounters a sick person and heals them, we receive something else. Jesus enters the synagogue in his home town, picks up the scroll from which the elders read for the lesson, and reads a portion of the book of the prophet Isaiah.

The book of Isaiah is a prayer. In fact, it is an unanswered prayer. The book of Isaiah speaks of the condemnation of Israel – of all the ways that the people of God had stumbled and failed and yearned and lost sight of the majesty and provision of God. Isaiah speaks into the exile – the time when Israel was so uprooted from her destiny that her people were literally uprooted and cast into the darkness of a land that could not recognize them. The Book of the Prophet Isaiah is an entire book of *yearning* – of unanswered prayer.

And yet in the midst of all of this suffering and all of these unanswered prayers, there is hope: “Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” The prayers may seem right now in this minute to have been forgotten, but the one who receives them is faithful.

There is a reason why we read from the book of Isaiah during the season of Advent. It is the season where we come face to face with a world in darkness, and yet offer our hope for its restoration. That hope is rewarded on Christmas day, with the arrival of the Messiah who is the true blossom of every prayer that has ever been uttered since the beginning of time.

This text from Luke 4 is chosen for today because it shows us not just one scene of the healing of one body or even one soul. It shows us something larger. Jesus stands in the synagogue and he reads from Isaiah and proclaims, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in

your hearing.” Today, every prayer is answered – all them – for in Jesus, God restores all of humanity to its wholeness and its health.

All of this is very beautiful. And all of this is true. And all of this can seem useless in a hospital waiting room. Or at the scene of a car accident. Or in a graveyard. I know that. I know it, and you know it. Most of us, God help us, know this. We can believe in God and hope for the answers to our prayers, and still weep for the pain that has not yet been healed. But a good place to begin, when we are able, **is simply to draw near to Christ.** By his side, we will find two magnificent gifts:

First, we will find that the story is longer, richer than we had believed. When Jesus declares, “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me,” and when he reveals to all creation that he, himself, is the answer to every prayer, what he does is show us the true end of the story: Resurrection. Jesus is not here just to soothe an ache or cure a sickness, he is here to restore us to life in the heart of God. We may not feel it or believe it today, but our own stories have been knit into the fabric of this singular promise: “that though this body be destroyed, yet shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself and mine eyes shall behold, and not as a stranger.” As St. Paul says, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” Our stories are longer, richer than our pain. And their end, in Christ, is Resurrection.

The other gift we receive in drawing close to Christ in our need is that as we spend more time with him, he teaches us more about true healing. He shows us how beautiful things are present, even in pain. He shows us moments of clarity and grace that we could never have imagined had we not encountered them from the inside. **He transforms suffering, and he transforms us,** often helping us become versions of ourselves of such unspeakable beauty that

there may even be a moment where we can give thanks for even the time we have lived in the darkness. After all, darkness is where life comes from. Seeds, children, stars – all of creation, all of life, all of it begins in a dark, unknowable place. But the end is Resurrection and true, abundant, unstoppable life.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.