



ST. LUKE'S

EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Sermon for the Feast of St. Luke, October 17th, 2021

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

The Rev. Dr. David Gortner

[Sirach 38:1-4,6-10,12-14](#)

[Psalm 147 or 147:1-7](#)

[2 Timothy 4:5-13](#)

[Luke 4:14-21](#)

Welcome to this Feast of St. Luke!

We hardly ever get to have this Feast-Day on a Sunday, celebrating and giving thanks for the apostle and evangelist for whose name we have taken for our church. Every year, our annual regional convention for the Diocese of Spokane is happening on this weekend closest to October 18th, and we are tuned into the worship of the gathered body of Episcopalians across this region of central and eastern Washington and north Idaho. But this year, instead of tuning into the diocesan convention's worship (happening right now at the Cathedral in Spokane), we are having our own celebration of the Feast of St. Luke. I encourage you to watch the worship at the Cathedral online, later, and listen to the bishop's sermon – or read the sermon as it was sent out in email and is posted on our website.

We are having taking this moment to celebrate the Feast of St. Luke at the conclusion of a summer when we purposefully went “out and about” in the surrounding communities, worshipping outdoors in parks and, last week, in the chapel of the old Fort Sherman grounds down by the lake. We have been discovering – or rediscovering – the wide range of places and communities in this area as we have worshipped in so many different locations this summer. Now we are back home again for the Fall, Winter, and Spring, with new insights and fresh thought on the world and communities around us.

So, St. Luke! Who was St. Luke? We know some things about Luke from scripture and early church tradition. He was a Physician. He was also clearly a dedicated Follower of Jesus. He was a Bridge-builder, across cultures both Greek and Jewish, and well-acquainted with scripture and societal wisdom. He was a fantastic Storyteller, and brought together stories in his Gospel and the companion Book of Acts that we don't find in any other Gospel – including some of our favorite stories of Christ's birth and the parable of the prodigal son. He was an Evangelist and Missionary, and talked in Acts about some of the adventures with Paul in the plural, saying how “We set out on this journey or that journey, together.” And he was a Good Companion on the road. Many believe that it may be himself he is referring to as one of the two people on the road to Emmaus after Jesus' resurrection following his cruel death, when his disciples were in a stir about his body being missing and his appearance to some of them. There, in the midst of sharing stories with the stranger that is the risen Christ Jesus, their hearts are stirred, and in breaking bread together they recognize Jesus right there with them. And toward the end of Paul's life in prison, Paul writes and asks for some companions to visit him, noting how “only Luke is with me” as a companion.

There is strong consensus that Luke was indeed the author of this Gospel and of the companion Book of Acts. These books date easily from around 70-80 A.D. and very likely earlier – there are signs that at least the Gospel was already written and in circulation before the letters of Paul were in wide distribution. It is not as early a Gospel as Mark, but it is richer with stories and teachings than Mark's, and it reads together with Acts as one continuous collection – combined, over one-fourth of the whole New Testament – that reveals God's work carrying on in marvelous new ways through Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

At the heart of Luke's message about Jesus is this passage from Isaiah that Jesus read aloud in the synagogue, announcing his calling and purpose to the world around him. Its words echo throughout the miracles in that Gospel and in Acts, and they are alluded to earlier in the Magnificat, Mary's great declaration to her cousin Elizabeth: "He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty." Today we hear again those words from Isaiah that Jesus read in the synagogue:

"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."

All of how Luke sees and understands Jesus is captured in these words. Jesus brings deliverance, good news, release, deep healing, freedom from oppression, promise.

This was the message, ministry, and mission of Jesus, God's beloved – in a world of Empire at that time full of injustices and cruelties, dished out in little and not so little ways on a daily basis so that people had given up on life being different and instead endured the daily grind of it all without much hope. "No, there is hope!" Throughout Luke and into Acts, the message of Jesus and of the Apostles following the moving power of the Holy Spirit is, "No, there is hope! There is God's presence, now, ready to heal and save and release! I am here to bring release and healing and new sight and empowerment. I want no one to be lost! I am here to reach into every corner of the earth. No matter what kind of poverty, captivity, blindness, or oppression – whether physical, spiritual, emotional, relational, or civic – I am here with the promise of new life."

So, friends, here we are thousands of years later. Seeking in the same way to be followers of Jesus, to be healers, declarers of God's goodness, companions on the road, a people seeking to live and to bring the true freedom of life in Christ for all.

130 years ago, at this time of year, this building was under construction, well on its way to being built. We know that as this building was being framed and sided, roofed and finished, the early congregation of Episcopal Christians was meeting for worship on the Fort Sherman grounds. Frederick Sellick, a seminary graduate in line to be ordained, was here to help lead folks through the process of forming a congregation and building a community. In early January of 1892, just after the mines had shut down in Kellogg and Wallace and months before the mining labor strikes of the region, this building's doors were opened and worship began for a parish named St. Luke's, with its first priest, Herman Page.

But in this completely new territory for white settlers making their way through the West, the community had already been forming for over ten years through officers at Fort Sherman and with visits by the famous western missionary bishop, Daniel Tuttle.

This building is a treasure, it is true. It is, I believe, the oldest original church building in continuous use in this city. But our history goes back years before the building. Our deepest history in this place is rooted in the heartfelt devotion and prayer of those followers of Jesus gathering in officers' quarters and in the chapel on the fort grounds. Our deepest history is in the fellowship of gatherings in households, of conversations in work and leisure, of individual and family prayer and reading of scripture, of building a new community together.

Here we are now, 130 years later, in an inland northwest that is rapidly changing all around us. Some of us have been part of this church community for over 30 years, and have seen the changes in Coeur d'Alene, Post Falls, and Hayden that have resulted in a tripling of population. Some of us have arrived just within this past year, during a rapid influx of people in the midst of a worldwide pandemic, and have seen how extreme positions fanned into hotheaded behavior are overheating the civic life of the region. And we have new forts and refuges, our hospitals and healthcare centers, where today's soldiers battle daily against disease and seek to dig protective trenches so that the fire of infection does not spread. Today especially, on this Feast of St. Luke the Physician, let us pray for and honor our physicians, nurses, technicians, aides, epidemiologists, public health defenders, and all healthcare workers.

What is God calling us to be for the world around us now, in this time and place?

Several weeks ago, our vestry and clergy met together for a half-day retreat. It was a first of this kind of work that the vestry has done in many, many years. We considered what St. Luke's has been at its best in the past and recently, where we find ourselves now in the world around us, what God may be calling us to be and become now, and what St. Luke's will be at its best in the future. I invite you to consider these questions for yourself now, that we considered together.

- What have been the experiences of us at our best at St. Luke's – recent and past?
- What does this point to as essential and important about our life of faith and ministry?

- Where do we find ourselves now? What kind of world are we in as a faith community?
- What sets us apart as followers of Jesus, for "such a time as this"?
- What might God be calling us to be and become and do for the next phase of life of St. Luke's?

- What will be the experiences of us at our best at St. Luke's as we live into this calling of mission and ministry in this time and the time ahead?

It was a wonderful retreat! I am so grateful for the thoughtful, prayerful, heartfelt engagement of our vestry leadership. From this come some emerging visions for our future – a future of a church community completely dedicated to forming deeper and closer relationships that build and strengthen the ways we live our faith, and completely dedicated to serving and forming partnerships in ways that bring people together and help build mutual understanding in our surrounding communities.

Your giving of yourself in this church community – your financial support as we look to the year and years ahead, your offering of time and energy and talent as we dive into renewed and fresh ministries, mission efforts, community partnerships, and building of a fellowship of followers of Jesus – all of these ways you give of yourself make the witness of St. Luke's as we seek to follow the moving power of the Holy Spirit already at work in the communities around us.

St. Luke's is called to now – to this time and place – and to a journey into a future that fits and follows the saint for whom we are named. St. Luke's is called to bring good news, to bring healing and strengthening, to follow the Holy Spirit and discover new companions and open new doorways for Christ to appear among us, breaking bread like at the end of that road to Emmaus, shining truth like for Paul on the road to Damascus, and in every place breaking down the barriers of poverty and prison and blindness.