



Sermon for the Feast of St. Luke and Our Church's 130th Year October 16, 2022

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Dr. David Gortner

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

[Psalm 147:1-7](#)

[2 Timothy 3:14-4:5](#)

[Luke 4:14-21](#)

Good morning, everyone! Good morning, and God's blessings.

Welcome to St. Luke's! Welcome on this day as we celebrate the Feast of St. Luke the evangelist and physician, and when we mark this 130th year of this church building where we have gathered all these years to worship, to share fellowship, to learn and grow, and to serve.

We are so glad to have everyone here together for a single service on this Sunday. Our 8-o'clock crowd is here with us for this special 10-o'clock worship service. And we are delighted to welcome all who are guest, visitors, and members from times past.

Today, our worship is a bit different, right? We have taken the pattern of worship from one of our older Books of Common Prayer, published and distributed in 1892 across the Episcopal Church. In this service, you have already found that things are happening at different times. As our founders would have done, we began the worship service on our knees with a shorter version of the Lord's Prayer. And, like our founders, we will end the service singing the Gloria. There are other differences as well, of course – the Olde English with the many "thee's and thou's" that we sayeth. Yea, verily.

A lot was happening in this country in 1892. Across the world, the great powers of the age were busy expanding, colonizing, and building their empires. It is the year that viruses were first discovered and described. In the U.S., under President Benjamin Harris, Ellis Island began receiving immigrants, and the early wave of many Germans, Jews from Central Europe, and Italians began arriving. The Chicago "L" elevated train opened. General Electric began. There was a war in Wyoming between small farmers and large-scale ranchers. Here, Fort Sherman was already long established, and soldiers were called upon to intervene in the violent mining strife between laborers and owners.

Here, largely in connection with the officers at Fort Sherman, an Episcopalian congregation had been forming and gathering for worship and prayer in houses. And, since 1892, Episcopalian Christians have gathered in this house of worship, week after week, year after year. Over the decades, St. Luke's has been active in faithful weekly worship and Christian education. Its members have been significant contributors to civic life in the community. Its current members come from across north Idaho, spanning from as far as Mullan, Athol, Rathdrum, and Plummer, and everywhere in between -- and extending over into Otis Orchards and Liberty Lake in Washington.

St. Luke's has a long heritage of concern for care and justice in our communities. Under Fr. Bob Hasseries, the church became a meeting space for the Task Force for Human Relations during the uprise of the Aryan Nation, after Fr. Bill Wassmuth, the priest at St. Pius, stepped aside from ordained ministry to work more intently on the civic challenges of the day. For decades, the church has hosted addictions-recovery groups, and, thanks to Fr. Pat Bell, for over ten years has housed the offices of Family Promise of North Idaho. Over decades, members have given time and effort into building and strengthening healthcare, housing, legal aid, school instruction and tutoring, and infrastructure in our city and region. Among our folks are people who have over the decades helped launch the Orchard Ridge elderly housing and care facilities, the Hospice of North Idaho,

the stock of affordable housing in this region that is now mostly overseen by St. Vincent de Paul Ministries, the legal aid for victims of domestic violence, the Silver Valley Community Resource Center, and an array of other initiatives with schools and colleges, medical professionals and public health, social services, and city planning. It was Deacon Bob Runkle who helped St. Luke's achieve designation in the Episcopal Church as a Jubilee Center, for its many forms of care, service, and advocacy in this community and region as well as in global mission initiatives.

Which brings us to the choosing of the name of this church. The early congregation and clergy chose the name of the biblical author, St. Luke. The Gospel of Luke and the Book of the Acts of the Apostles are together the longest combined works in the New Testament. These books have been treasured guides to Christian faith. They offer unique perspectives on the birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and they give us our only historical account of the early days of the followers of Jesus and the growth of the Church across the Roman Empire and southward into Ethiopia. This year, we have been walking through the Gospel of Luke on most Sundays. It is, I confess, my favorite Gospel.

St. Luke is remembered in St. Paul's letters as a physician -- a healer. He is remembered as author of the Gospel that bears his name, and of the Acts of the Apostles. He is remembered as a companion of St. Paul, the great missionary apostle whose life of fundamentalist fervor was forever changed by a vision of Christ who asked him, "Why are you persecuting me?" He may indeed have been with St. Paul as Paul was imprisoned in Rome, even to the end when Paul was killed for his faith.

It is in St. Luke's Gospel where Jesus reaches wide across social divisions and shows deep care for those who are considered outsiders. It is here that we find Jesus standing up in the synagogue and reading from Isaiah as his declaration of what he was here to do: "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 favour." (Luke 4:18-19).

Everything that follows in this Gospel shows how Jesus did just that -- and how he called and taught his followers to do the same. And throughout the Book of Acts, we read how the early Church became a place of healing, of empowering, and of a new way of life, wherever the Good News of Jesus Christ was carried and took hold. Luke helps us see that this Good News, this Way of Life, this Life-giving and Life-changing Power, is for everyone. Everyone! No matter what nation, race, clan, gender, age, or social status. God's love is the same for everyone -- and brings down the mighty from their thrones and lifts up the lowly so that all can stand together, learn together, eat together, serve each other, and move together in care for this world.

It is our hope, as the congregation of St. Luke's, to be this kind of healing presence. The Christ we follow is not some warrior god or empire-building. The Christ we follow is this One who came to heal, to free, to release, to bring sight, to share God's favor.

We will not be a church that seeks teachings to suit our own desires and personal or political leanings. We will listen to and follow the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We will not succumb to the seductive lure of "itching ears," as we heard in the Epistle to Timothy. We will stay true to following this Jesus who came to serve, to teach us the Way of Love, to heal and strengthen, to transform lives. Let's remember that Jesus read his declaration in the synagogue after returning from the wilderness where he faced down the temptations to use his power to feed his own desires, to obtain political power, or to become a celebrity. Casting off all privilege, Jesus empties himself into the world, giving himself totally, even to death on a cross, all so that we, God's creatures, can be lifted up, embraced, and loved totally by God -- and so that we can leave behind our distortions and become what God created us to be.

So, now, I invite each of you to read this declaration to each other. Read this as your own declaration, as a follower of Jesus our Lord and Savior. Read this as the calling you are embracing. Look each other in the eye as you read this. Speak these words to each other – and hear each other.

"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 favour." (Luke 4:18-19).

Friends, this is who we are called to be. Whom shall we be as a church for the next 130 years. This! This is what we shall be. St. Luke's is a church committed to following the Way of Jesus, as Jesus actually taught and showed in his life. Our vision and mission for St. Luke's Episcopal Church set before us a path we will follow for our next 130 years.

We will share, celebrate, and embody Jesus Christ's overflowing, unconditional love in North Idaho. By being deliberate disciples every day and learning to follow Jesus more and more, by entering courageous conversations with others around us as we speak of God's Good News and God's calling, as we welcome and build partnerships with other churches and community organizations, as we engage in meaningful actions of service, witness, and advocacy in this region, we build faithful and loving relationships with all people – seeking and serving Christ in all persons.

Come, Holy Spirit, and fill our hearts and minds, and direct our wills, so that the love of God can flow freely.

Amen? Amen!