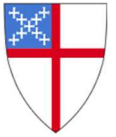




**Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
and the Feast of St. Luke**
Sermon, the Rev. Dr. David T. Gortner, Oct. 12, 2025



[Luke 4:16-21](#)

[Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7](#)

[2 Timothy 2:8-15, 4:5-13](#)

[Luke 17:11-19](#)

Greetings! Today we celebrate the Feast of St. Luke (it's actually not until Saturday, but we are celebrating early because next week is our convention for the Episcopal Diocese of Spokane, and we are going to be worshipping at the Cathedral in Spokane next Sunday).

We celebrate the life and witness of St. Luke. And we celebrate our life together as the congregation of St. Luke's here in Coeur d'Alene and this part of the Inland Northwest. And we pray for God's healing and for God's blessing and empowerment of us for our ministry and mission in this place.

Today, we began with the bold declaration of purpose that Jesus made in the synagogue in his home town – those words from Isaiah that he claimed as his own purpose and reason for being. We only hear this in the Gospel of Luke, and these words frame everything that Jesus did and said in that Gospel (and, for that matter, in all of the Gospels). After he was baptized and he heard God claim him as beloved, after he wrestled with temptation and turned away from the lures of self-serving power and manipulation, once he began to teach and heal and travel with God's good news, he made this bold declaration of purpose.

*“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.”*

This is our calling as followers of Jesus, and as this congregation of St. Luke's here in North Idaho. This is always before us. We who boldly come together in a church dedicated in the name of St. Luke, we are invited and compelled by the Spirit of God to utter and live this same declaration. We who gather here are part of a heritage of followers of this Jesus, in this place, seeking to live as Jesus lived, following his declaration and call. How, now in this place and time, are we bringing good news to the poor? How are we proclaiming release to any in captivity and bringing freedom to any oppressed? How are we awakening new sight and insight for those in any kind of blindness? How are we speaking God's favor and love in this region of North Idaho?

It doesn't matter what brought us here, or when we arrived. It doesn't matter if we came to this region seeking fresh opportunity or leaving behind bad history. It doesn't matter if we lived here for generations with contentment or frustration. It doesn't matter if we came here in exile or feel like exiles and foreigners. It matters that we live, that we live fully, and that we follow the call of Jesus as fully as we can, here and now.

In our long journey with Isaiah and Jeremiah, through the long years of the unravelling of the nation-states of Israel and Judah, we finally have come to the end of those kingdoms and the Jewish people entering into the centuries and millennia of exile. Here they are, being herded and crowded into Babylon and other cities of the Empire of that time, far from their homeland. And they face an unknown future, but have been given space to live their lives. And the word of God comes to them through Jeremiah – to bloom where they are planted, to live their lives fully and freely, and to interact with and care about and pray for the city where they live. *“Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”*

It doesn't matter what our state of well-being is in our life. It doesn't matter if we have been labeled, banished, or feared for possible contagion. It doesn't matter if we have been wounded or limited or disabled. It doesn't matter if we find ourselves in a kind of no-man's land. We can come as near as we think we can to Jesus and cry out for mercy and help. And we can follow the lead that we hear.

Leprosy, also known as Hansen disease, is a very slow-growing bacterial infection that causes skin, eye, muscle, nerve, and lung damage. Today, it is a curable disease with intense multidrug treatment over 6 to 12 months. It is relatively rare today, with about 200,000 known cases – and it is very rare in this country. Untreated or unrecognized until late, it leads to purplish bumps and lumps, reddish patches that are swollen and numb, loss of vision, weakness, ulcers, shriveling away of fingers and toes, flattening of the nose, continuous pain, and permanent paralysis and damage to hands and feet.¹

For centuries, leper colonies have existed in societies around the world, because the disease was frightening and completely mysterious, and people thought the best protection was to isolate people with the disease far away from other cities and villages. There are still leper colonies found across central Africa, in India and Bangladesh, in Colombia and Venezuela, in some South Pacific island nations, and in China. Mother Theresa and her companion sisters, in their lifelong service among “the poorest of the poor” in Bangladesh, cared for people with leprosy. Saint Francis and his brothers, centuries ago during Europe's late Middle Ages, stepped across the cultural boundaries of fear to come close to lepers and to help and even embrace them.

It's only four decades ago that we had a modern version of fearsome disease grip our imaginations, as AIDS emerged and cases grew rapidly across the world. In the early years, medical professionals and family members were afraid to approach, touch, or be near people with AIDS or HIV infection, because we didn't know how it spread. Very recently, we all have lived through the recent fearsome response to COVID that spread rapidly across the globe and claimed lives of elder and medically vulnerable people. Some of our church members were part of treating people with COVID in those early months before vaccines, and can recall how they suited up in protective gear to come into the same isolation rooms with patients in order to feed, care for, and treat them. Disabling and death-dealing diseases are still terrifying to us, and we still seek to protect people by separating those who are infected away from others. And we hold in deep honor and respect – and a bit of awe – those physicians and medical professionals and social service providers who walk forward into places of disease when others of us are running the other direction. Like the firefighters and police who ran in New York toward the World Trade Towers before and after they fell to rescue people, even as the crowds were running away for their own safety.

So Jesus, in his travels of ministry and teaching, comes into a “no-man's-land,” a borderland of unclaimed territory between Judea and Samaria. It is here that lepers have been sent to live out their days, exiles apart from everyone else. Ten of them approach Jesus but keep their prescribed social distance, and cry out to him, “*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!*” Even here, they have heard of Jesus the great physician, the healer of all kinds of diseases and disabling conditions. And they have come.

It doesn't matter whatever your condition is, your state of wellness, your label, your mark.

Jesus saw these ten, and did not turn away. He declared healing to them right then and there, simply by telling them to do what the Law of Moses instructed for anyone who becomes healthy again or is cured – “*Go and show yourselves to the priests.*” The priests functioned as keepers of public health and would examine people to see if they could be in the company of others or were unclean and needed to be isolated away from others. So, Jesus told them to go and seek readmission to society – to step forward, to not hide, to show themselves and who they were, to be remembered and seen. He proclaimed release to the captives.

¹ From the Cleveland Clinic, also found at the CDC and World Health Organization.

All ten of them followed Jesus' command. And as they went, they found that they were made clean. All ten of them. Taking this step out of isolation and banishment, they found their dignity again. The label of "unclean" dropped away, and their bodies and hearts and minds became clean. They were healed.

Now, we don't know where the other nine went. I am sure they were all overjoyed and eager to return to their old lives and their families and communities. The other nine may have gone right away to the local priests for official readmission. and then gone as quickly as possible to their homes.

But one of them took in more deeply the reality, "I am really healed!" And he remembered their cry to Jesus and the response Jesus gave. He ran back to Jesus to thank him with all his heart, throwing himself at Jesus' feet in complete gratitude and adoration for the rescue of his life.

This Samaritan, this outsider still labeled with a category that set him as not really welcomed or respected by the Jewish people – this Samaritan shows us what true worship looks like. Jesus said to another Samaritan, a woman at the well, that "true worshippers will worship God in spirit and in truth." Here, a Samaritan shows us the way. Come back, turn around again and say thank you from the bottom of your heart. Run to meet the one who has restored you, on the road. As you do this, you will find your healing and restoration to life becomes even fuller and more complete.

Yes, we come together in temples and churches and holy places to worship, and we bring our hearts before God here in this place. But true worship is when we respond from our hearts and remember the grace we have experienced in our lives and turn aside from whatever else we are doing to go and give thanks. When you thank someone who has made a difference in your life, and open your heart to them and share with them the difference they have made, that is worship because God is near and God was in the grace given to you to change your life by that person. It doesn't matter who the person was or is, it doesn't matter who you are to that person – returning and giving heartfelt and humble thanks is true worship, it is proclaiming God's grace and favor with your whole heart.

Here we are, today, in a space that has gathered God's people for 133 years – a space that has gone through changes over the decades, from extensions of this small church to additions of buildings, to changes of pews, to carpeting and new paint colors – over years when the language of prayer and worship shifted from old English to modern English – through decades of change in our understanding of God's image in every person across the diversity of humanity – through decades of fresh and renewed emphasis on God's nearness to us and desire to draw us close. The space is fresh and different now with the changes to our chancel area, with the altar closer, just as we know Christ is closer, among the people.

But it is the same space. The same place of prayer, of learning, of seeking strength and clarity, of commitment to follow the way of Jesus. And it is the church whose patron saint is Luke. Luke knew intimately the desire Jesus had for healing and bringing freedom for all people – and he experienced how Christ transformed lives of people who were Jewish, Samaritan, Greek, African, Asian, and Roman. It is through Luke that we get the clearest picture of Jesus as the great physician, the one who lifts up the downtrodden, the savior for all humanity. It is Luke who remains with Paul to the end in his imprisonment as he still sought to guide the growing church from his cell, because the saving good news of God can never be chained. And it is through Luke that we see (in the Book of Acts) how the Holy Spirit stirred and moved people to find each other across the Empire and to experience the life-giving love of God.

This is our heritage. And this we step forward to fulfill, freshly in this time of history here, responding to God's call today. Over the past 133 years, I wonder what visions have called people from our church to serve, to help, to bring grace and good news to others that seem quite different – in places here and far away? We have had people embark from St. Luke's to serve as missionaries, physicians and nurses, teachers, lawyers, builders, deacons and priests, and ardent advocates to lift up the downtrodden. This is our heritage. Can you hear it?

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.” Good news to the poor! Release to the captives! Sight to the blind! Freedom for the oppressed! Favor and grace for all!

It doesn't matter what has held you back or bound you. You are free now. You are unchained. And you can now free others. How is the Spirit of God calling you now? How has that same Spirit called you in the past and compelled you to action? What has been, and what will be, your journey into the borderlands to show and declare God's freeing grace and love?

Almighty God, you inspired Luke the physician and missionary to record in the Gospel the love and healing power of Jesus your Son. By faithfully showing us the humanity of Jesus, he also showed Jesus' divinity and His genuine compassion for all human beings.

O Christ Jesus, the Great Physician, we pray for the healing of the nations and of our souls. We pray for your empowering grace to continue here in the Inland Northwest to show and share Your great love and power to heal, always to Your praise and glory. For you are God in perfect unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit, forever giving, forever one. Amen.