

COMMEMORATION OF ST. LUKE

2 Timothy 4:5-15

Luke alone is with me. (2 Timothy 4:11)

As I've explained in the past, one of the reasons the Lutheran Church observes the commemorations of the saints of old is because it reminds us that God uses people of all sorts and backgrounds and skill sets for the furthering of His kingdom, for the good of His Church. That ought to be an encouragement to all of us, reminding us that each of us has a place and a role in God's plans and for His glory. And that is not something to take lightly. No, that is something that should spur us to use our positions and backgrounds and skill sets as best we are able for His honor and for His kingdom, as well as for the benefit of our neighbors. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, one of our six Lutheran Confessions, puts it like this:

Our Confession approves honoring the saints in three ways. The first is thanksgiving. We should thank God because He has shown examples of mercy, because He wishes to save people, and because He has given teachers and other gifts to the Church... The second service is the strengthening of our faith. When we see Peter's denial forgiven, we also are encouraged to believe all the more that grace truly superabounds over sin. The third honor is the imitation, first of faith, then of other virtues. Everyone should imitate the saints according to his calling.

We are reminded of the truth that God uses all kinds of people in His service, people just like each of us in many ways, as we consider St. Luke, a man called from a unique background to do unique work for the Lord. And such consideration of St. Luke and the saints ought not distract us from our Lord Jesus, the heart and center and indispensable core of the message of Holy Scripture, but in fact focuses us on Him as He worked through these men and women of the past and as they worked for Him through His call and by His grace. As the writer to the Hebrews reminds us in his thirteenth chapter, *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."*

So about St. Luke. Luke is mentioned three times in the New Testament. St. Paul writes to St. Timothy of Luke's faithfulness in our second lesson. In Philemon, verse 24, St. Paul lists Luke as one of his fellow workers, a fellow minister of the gospel. In Colossians 4:14, St. Paul writes to the congregation in Colosse, *"Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas."*

St. Luke, we see, then, was a doctor who had also become a Christian missionary. What a blessing for St. Paul and his coworkers it must have been to have St. Luke along when they fell ill or were injured. It also seems that Luke was a Gentile and not a Jew, from the way he is listed in Colossians. St. Luke's writing style in his Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles bears evidence to his Greek education and intellectual gifts. As a Gentile physician, he was clearly well prepared for the evidence gathering and history recording that he did as an evangelist.

We see in the names listed in our second lesson examples both to follow and to avoid. St. Paul, at a difficult point in his ministry, lists men who had both supported and forsaken him. As Christians, we know what it is like both to be encouraged and discouraged by another. Ministers of the Word have historically especially been prone to experiencing such ups and downs. St. Luke, thank God, was an encouraging force in St. Paul's life, and helped the Apostle to sow the Word in so many places and with such Spirit-given fruit.

I think that as we consider St. Luke and the work he did for the Lord, we find two wonderful examples to follow as Christians. First, be a friend to someone in trial. As St. Paul was frequently tested, was persecuted and slandered, and suffered from whatever illness his thorn in the flesh was, St. Luke, as we read in his second book, the Acts of the Apostles, was often with him to uplift him, as we also are told in our second lesson. Luke couldn't necessarily take away Paul's problems, but he could be with him through them, and what a blessing it is as a Christian to have a brother or sister in the faith with us at such times.

Second, recall the story of Christ for others when you are able. St. Luke begins his Gospel with these words:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

When St. Luke encountered this man Theophilus, a man clearly interested in learning about the Faith, he took every effort to present the Faith to him, and to do so in a clear and understandable way. So also, when we as Christians have the opportunity to share the Faith with someone else, we too are to seize the opportunity and to do our best to explain the faith in a clear and understandable way. God's saving message is nothing to keep secret. No, others need the salvation God offers through the Scriptures and in Christ just as much as we do. Others also need to know where to turn to find forgiveness in sin, hope in despair, and life in death.

St. Luke, whether he intended to or not, also left behind a clear confession of his Christian faith through his writings. We might not all be writers, but we too have the opportunity for our confession of our Christian faith to live on through the impact we make in our daily lives with our loved ones and acquaintances, so that long after we're gone, hopefully our influence will remain, in our children, or through the support we offered for the ministry of the church here and throughout the world as a synod, or in whatever way that might happen.

St. Luke was not a perfect person. He wouldn't have held to the gospel like he did if he had been perfect. He wouldn't have needed it. No, like all the saints of old, he is another finger pointing us to the same Savior he needed and had found in Jesus. Through his Gospel, he tells us about that Jesus and bids us to embrace Him as our own. St. Luke was a saint in the same way all believers are saints: through faith, created and sustained through the preaching of the good news of Jesus Christ—precisely the good news of the life, death, and resurrection for sinners that Luke recorded for us in his writings, nfrom his famous Christmas account we will hear again in a few months to his report of the resurrection and ascension. And that message Luke brings us is not just his message, but our message, because it is the story of our God's love for each of us. And it is not merely our message to hold onto, but to pass on as well when God opens doors for doing so. So let us study the Word recorded for us by men like Luke through the Spirit's inspiration, that we might hold it rightly and purely, and let us support the right and pure preaching and teaching of it, and let us share it with those around us, and let us send out missionaries like Luke and Paul to proclaim it throughout the world. Amen.