

From The Rector's Desk – Easter 2019

by the Rev. Daniel Fournier



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Dear Friends,

This year I have been speaking a lot about the uniqueness of the Gospel of Luke. For me, this year of preaching has become extremely exciting and renewing. For most of my years of ongoing study, I have been a fervent fan of the motifs surrounding Mark's and John's Gospels. I love Mark because it reflects an earlier telling of the Jesus' story and a rawer presentation of the details surrounding Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. I love John's gospel because of its depth and later theological developments that help to fill out our understanding of Jesus told by the four canonical gospels. And then there is Luke. I have now learned so much in my studies of Luke's gospel account this year and have become a fan as well. I have come to love and appreciate the uniqueness of Luke's story. When we compare Luke's unique features to the other gospels, we discover how special this account really is. Do not get me wrong. I am a fan of all the gospels! But this year, I have come to a new appreciation of Luke, the physician, the historian, the eloquent writer.

The Holy Gospel according to Luke is written primarily to a well-educated, well-cultured, Hellenistic and Gentile audience, a Greek speaking (Greco-Roman) group of people. Those studying the language and form of Luke's writings note that he used a more sophisticated and finer form of the Greek language.

Now as I write about Luke in the context of my Holy Week/Easter Prescription article, what is the main point I would like to convey that I take two paragraphs just to get started? Luke has something to tell us this year in the story celebrations of Holy Week and Easter. As the people of the parish of St. Luke, we should really get a grasp of the Lukan Easter message.

We know that Luke is very special in the early part of the gospel as we receive a very special profile of Jesus' early life, his birth story, his mother Mary's early experience of Jesus, and more on Jesus' connection to his hometown. But I am focusing on the meaning of Jesus' ministry, a ministry of healing and freeing, of standing with, and of compassion. One of the unique features of Luke's gospel account is that this ministry of Jesus never ends. It does not transition at the cross in the same way that we find in Mark and Matthew, but just continues. A key verse to understand comes back to something we focused on at the beginning of the year as Jesus reads in the synagogue from the scroll of Isaiah: *"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, 21 NRSV.*



This compassion and way of Jesus would ultimately lead Jesus to the cross. All the way through his journey, he continues to bless others and, in a sense, his blessing of others, his full on commitment to bless and heal those who are vulnerable, broken sinners led him to the cross. And this mission would still carry on beyond the cross in the presence of the resurrected Christ. We see this evidenced in the most gentle and compassionate way Jesus reveals himself to the disciples,

whether on the road to Emmaus, or Jesus appearing to the frightened gathered community of disciples showering his peace upon them, and finally giving them his deepest blessing as he ascends.

Yes indeed, this pattern of Jesus' ministry persists unbroken throughout Luke's gospel account and even as Jesus approaches his most difficult hour. The following are some highlights to pay attention to as we ponder Luke's passion story. In Jesus' conversation with Peter during the Last Supper, Jesus states that he has prayed for Peter, that once this ordeal would be over, Peter would hold on to his faith and support the faith of his brothers and sisters as a rock of faith.

Another significant uniqueness to Luke's passion of Jesus story is that of the garden scene. It is interesting to note that Jesus is not thrown to the ground in agony, nor does he tell his disciples to stay awake, but to pray that they may not be put to the test, as he will be praying ultimately for strength. This still indicates care and compassion for Jesus' loved ones.

Still another example of Jesus' compassion even in his worst hour is in what he does for the High Priest's slave, whose ear has been cut off by one of the disciples. Jesus heals the slave. Or while being tormented, Jesus exclaims, "God forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Or one of the most famous of scenes is of Jesus hanging on the cross alongside two self-identified criminals and saying, "Today you will be with me in paradise."

Finally, on the cross we hear Jesus' final words, which are not the cry to God, "Why have you abandoned me?" But the final and total giving over of himself in the words, "Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit." This very last act of Jesus prior to his death is seen less from the lens of something God did to Jesus, the concept of a price or ransom that must be paid to satisfy some debt in order to save humankind. But rather, the emphasis we see here is Jesus who gives up his spirit, a sacrifice as a statement of compassion, to be one with all that Jesus came into mission for. There is a difference between these two understandings.

This is the depth that Jesus has gone for each of us because of love, and because of compassion. But also, because Jesus' prime directive "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" was and has fully been carried throughout his life, death, and resurrection. So, the question becomes interesting if we then understand Jesus' mission as ongoing. Who is now called to carry it out? Friends, read Luke's gospel and seek God's grace to search your heart. It is there you will find the answer.

May God go deep into your life this Easter and may you discover his risen presence in your lives throughout the season.

Easter Blessings to you all.

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