LUKE THE PHYSICIAN, EVANGELIST, YEAR ABC - SERMON

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SERMON

"Hindsight is 20/20." Perhaps you are familiar with this popular phrase. I often find myself saying it – or hearing it – in the aftermath of less-than ideal situations. Like, you choose to drive across town without putting your route into your GPS, and you end up in a horrible traffic jam: "Hindsight is 20/20." Or you take a chance on sharing some private life news with that one friend who can't quite keep things to themselves, and soon your whole friend group knows about it: "Hindsight is 20/20." Or you're at a house party and mistakenly eat a handful of black olives, thinking they were purple grapes: "Hindsight is 20/20."

This phrase can almost serve as our own kind of emotional armor. We can wrap ourselves in it – telling ourselves, "Hindsight is 20/20" – as a way of saying, "I am wiser now than I was before." "I will *not* make that mistake again." "I'm much more realistic now about *that* person, situation, or circumstance." "Hindsight is 20/20" can be a way for us to reframe the past and look towards the future with a renewed perspective.

Our gospel reading today starts with a verbose explanation about *why* Luke is writing this letter to Theophilus: *"Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I, too, decided, as one having a grasp of everything from the start, to write a well-ordered account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may have a firm grasp of the words in which you have been instructed" (Luke 1:1-4).*

I wonder if this is Luke's long-winded way of saying, "Hindsight is 20/20." He has heard other accounts of this story. He has received what others have had to say about this. But it seems that something might be missing. Something about these other narratives hasn't quite done it for Luke. Luke is thinking back on all the events that have occurred, and he has "decided, as one having a grasp of everything from the start, to write a well-ordered account" (Luke 1:3) for Theophilus, yes, but also for generations to come, including each one of you, "so that you may have a firm grasp of the words in which you have been instructed" (Luke 1:4).

Luke knows the story he will tell. He knows the beginning. He knows the middle. And he knows the ending. He knows that this story will get worse – a whole lot worse – before it gets better. And yet, he chooses to tell the story anyway.

Now, it's believed by many that Luke was a physician, and a familiar part of a physician's duty, according to the Hippocratic Oath, is to do no harm. Or… so I thought! I learned this week — thanks to a 2020 article from Harvard Health Publishing — that in fact the phrase "do no harm" does *not* come from the Hippocratic Oath but rather from another work by Hippocrates called *Of the Epidemics*, which states: *"The physician must be able to tell the antecedents, know the present, and foretell the future — must mediate these things, and have two special objects in view with regard to disease, namely, to do good or to do no harm."*[1]

I've wondered a lot this week if this decision felt like a challenge to Luke — to tell a story that he knew could offend, disgust, upset, and even enrage some of those who would hear it. But then I began to wonder if this decision felt almost like instinct, like breathing, like the only right choice all along — like a Jesus-centered paraphrase of this Hippocrates quote: to name the past in the full truth of what it is, to be aware of and accepting of the present, and to be able to give listeners hope for all that's to come.

Yes, Luke chose to tell a story that would offend, disgust, upset, and even enrage. But this story would also liberate, restore, bless, and heal its hearers. Because this story — it's not just words on a page. It's not just colorful images in a book. It's not just stories we tell our children in Sunday school or songs we sing along to on the radio. This story is real. There is blood. There are tears. There is violence. There is death. And there is grace. There is forgiveness. There is reconciliation. There is reversal of power. There is food for all and baskets of leftovers. There is healing. There is hope. There is resurrection. This story — this full, "well-ordered account" (Luke 1:3) — of the death and resurrection of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, is a story in which we can *all* find ourselves. So where do *you* find yourself?

Maybe you find yourself with Zechariah and Elizabeth as they grappled with the news of becoming parents to John the Baptist; with Mary as she is greeted by the angel

[1] https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/first-do-no-harm-201510138421

Gabriel and sings her praises to God; with the shepherds as an angel of the Lord greeted them in the night and brought them “good news of great joy for all the people” (Luke 2:10); or with Mary and Joseph as they searched in a panic for their missing twelve-year-old son Jesus.

Maybe you find yourself with Jesus as he was baptized by John in the River Jordan; “led by the Spirit in the wilderness” (Luke 4:1); preached the good news to his home congregation who then wanted to hurl him off a cliff; called his first disciples; performed healing after healing after healing; proclaimed blessings and woes, told his followers to “love your enemies” (Luke 6:27); and forgave “a woman in the city who was a sinner” (Luke 7:37), much to the surprise of the Pharisees.

Maybe you find yourself in the many parables that Jesus shared, but often didn’t explain – like the parable of the Good Samaritan, the barren fig tree, the mustard seed, the lost sheep, the lost coin, the prodigal and his brother.

Or in the nourishment of being fed by Jesus along with five thousand others; the shock and horror of the disciples as Jesus foretold his death and resurrection; the awe with Peter, James, and John as Jesus was transfigured before them; the generosity Jesus shows to Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector; the anger Jesus shows as he cleanses the temple; the anguish Jesus shows as he prays and “his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground” (Luke 22:44).

Maybe you find yourself in the horrors of Jesus’ betrayal, trial, crucifixion, and death — Peter’s denial three times; the shouts of "Crucify, crucify him!” (Luke 23:21); the crowd of people who followed him, every step of the way; the women “who were beating their breasts and wailing for him” (Luke 23:27); Jesus’ grace-filled promise that “today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43); the “darkness [that] came over the whole land until three in the afternoon” (Luke 23:44); Joseph of Arimathea, who received Jesus’ body and prepared it for burial; the women who “found the stone rolled away from the tomb” and were the first to hear the good news of Jesus’ resurrection; the Christ-followers who walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus and came to know it was him in the breaking of the bread.

In twenty-three and a half chapters, Luke shares examples, over and over again, of where we might find ourselves in the mystery, the grace, and the mercy of Jesus Christ. And Luke *still* isn't done.

The resurrected Jesus appears to the eleven, and to those with them. He says to them, "Peace be with you" (Luke 24:36), and he shows them his hands and his feet. They eat a meal together, and then Jesus reminds them what he has already done. The scriptures have been fulfilled, and Jesus opens their minds to understand them. And then Jesus tells them, "You are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:48).

Every person Jesus encountered. Every healing he performed. Every relationship he restored. Every perspective he changed. Every person he forgave. You are witnesses of this repentance and forgiveness and healing. You are witnesses of this reconciliation and restoration and transformation. You are witnesses of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection on the third day. Jesus says, "You are witnesses of *all* these things" (Luke 24:48, emphasis mine).

Now this is a different kind of perspective on that familiar phrase "Hindsight is 20/20." This is more than just a reframing of the past. This is more than a new way to look to the future with a renewed perspective. "You are witnesses" invites us into a completely new frame of mind, a new perspective on life itself, and a new understanding of both the people around us and ourselves. Through Jesus, the phrase "I will *not* make that same mistake again," transforms into "I will *not* be that same person again."

This transformation is not one that we come to on our own. But rather, as we immerse ourselves in the story of death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit that reveal to us where we might be within this story and how Jesus is already transforming us — to our very core.

To this group of broken, imperfect, perhaps still guilt-ridden or grieving disciples, Jesus assures them, "You are witnesses of these things." And then he blesses them. Jesus blesses them as he leads them out of their gathering place. He blesses them as they go all the way to Bethany. He blesses them as he withdraws from them. He blesses them as he is carried up into heaven.

In church, a blessing is shared with both hands outstretched, with palms facing outwards. If this was how Jesus blessed his disciples, then they would have seen, again, the evidence of all that he had endured — the scars on his hands. With his nail-scarred hands, Jesus blesses them.

Now, there is more to come for these disciples. (We will read all about that in the book of Acts.) And there is more to come for each of us. But what we have here, for now, at the end of the gospel of Luke, is a gift. This ending is a reminder that anywhere we go, we go with our resurrected Jesus, who blesses us.

The resurrected Jesus —
who was born on this earth and lived among us,
who proclaimed repentance and forgiveness of sins,
who infuriated people in power and uplifted the outcast,
who healed people, again and again,
who ate with sinners,
who taught his followers a different way of living and loving,
who was betrayed, crucified, died, and rose from the dead on the third day,
who ascended into heaven —
this resurrected Jesus, *our* resurrected Jesus, blesses his followers with nail-scarred hands and proclaims to them, “You are witnesses of these things.” It is more than a promise that “Hindsight is 20/20.” It’s a promise that transforms, that reassures, that accompanies, that sustains. By the grace of God and the resurrection of Jesus, we can go into the uncomfortable, into the difficult, into the unknown, surrounded by the promise that we are already witnesses to the boundless love and grace of God among us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.