

Today, the Church commemorates St. Luke, the Evangelist, Missionary, and Martyr. That is why our paraments are red today. The paraments are red for Pentecost, Reformation, Ordination, and anytime the Church commemorates an Evangelist or Martyr—also for the funeral of a pastor—although let's not think about that just yet.

You may have already read the devotion about Luke in *Celebrating the Saints*. Luke wrote the Gospel named after him and the Book of Acts in our Bible—about a third of the New Testament. He was the only Gentile writer in the whole of Scripture. He was a missionary and traveling companion of St. Paul. And Paul called him the beloved physician.

We sang about Luke in our opening hymn. Did you know there was a hymn that contained 28 verses in our hymnal? In fact, it takes four pages to include them all. Now, thankfully—or unfortunately—we only sang three verses. But we sang verse 26, which commemorates Luke. And it makes something of his task as a healer and a preacher.

“For that beloved physician, all praise, whose Gospel shows the Healer of the nations, the One who shares our woes, Your wine and oil, O Savior, upon our spirits pour, and with true balm of Gilead, anoint us evermore.”

Very nice. And what a great prayer. One that should stick with us. One that should shape our lives—and our whole view of the world. I also appreciate Luke's introduction to his Gospel. It gives us a glimpse into his purpose in writing—and a hint of his personality. I read this with our Mary Martha ladies this week. But it is worth repeating.

“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.”

Theophilus is unknown to us outside of this introduction—and the introduction to Acts. The name means, “One who loves God.” And some have suggested that it is a generic title for believers in all history—those who love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength. I tend to think Theophilus was a real person too. But regardless, Luke's Gospel is for us who love God—who love the story of Jesus Christ. And Luke's description of the life of Christ is detailed and orderly. He gives us so many particulars unique to him.

Zechariah and the birth of John the Baptist, the Annunciation, the Magnificat, the Benedictus, the angelic choir at Jesus' birth, the Nunc Dimittis, twelve-year-old Jesus, the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the raising of the widow's son at Nain, Jesus on the Road to Emmaus, the Ascension of Christ. And I could keep going. We really need Luke's Gospel.

The Gospel reading assigned for the Festival of St. Luke reminds us of Luke as a missionary. Remember that Luke is not one of the Twelve. Mark wasn't either, as far as that goes. This does remind us that the missionary calling is for more than just the Twelve—or the Seventy-two sent out in this passage.

I often think of myself as a missionary. That is the nature of the pastoral office—especially in times when the culture has drifted so far away from true Christianity. I read a

book a couple of years ago about the life and work of Søren Kierkegaard. You have heard me mention him before. He was not a perfect man—a little melancholy—very sarcastic—although I appreciate both of those things.

But he wrote to a generation of people who claimed to be Christian simply as a heritage. For them, Christianity was about family and where you lived. It wasn't a personal faith in Jesus. And very few were actually following Jesus. Their lives, confessions, and conversations revealed some serious confusion about Christianity.

Kierkegaard considered himself a Christian missionary to Christians—to people who claimed they were Christians. But it was clear such people had no idea what that means. There are a number of parallels to our own day. I think that this is *the task* that God has given to us in our community—to make true Christianity known in Clinton, Iowa, and all of our surrounding communities.

But this must begin with us. So today, let me invite you to grasp what Christ came to do—to put to death our sin—and to put us on the road to eternal life. He came to put our old, sinful, broken lives to an end—and give us a bit of His own. He came to conform us to His image—to restore the image of God in us. Jesus came to make us disciples—to shape us into learners and followers of Jesus Christ. And He came to make each one of us disciple-makers.

In our reading, Jesus sends out the Seventy-Two. The scope of His ministry broadens. Earlier—back in chapter nine—Jesus sent out just the Twelve to preach the Kingdom of God. And then at the end of this chapter, we find that Jesus has just been in Samaria.

The number seventy-two was the standard reference to the number of Gentile nations. The *Table of Nations* all the way back in Genesis 10 lists seventy-two nations. By sending out seventy-two disciples—six times twelve—Jesus signals that His message and mission are meant for all the nations and peoples of the world. Here, Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. And He still had many places He wanted to preach the Kingdom of God. And to that end, He sent messengers ahead to prepare for His coming.

The Gospel work was not for the Apostles only—but for all people who follow Christ. These were ordinary believers. And this is one of the earliest indications of the missionary calling for the whole Church. Every cross-carrying disciple has a cross-proclaiming witness for Christ. And every disciple has the responsibility to pray that the Lord would send out laborers into the harvest field, beyond their own witness.

I have talked about our witness in the world over these last few weeks. Our witness includes simple things like attending worship regularly—making Church your highest priority. It includes the manner in which we use our resources. Where our treasure is, there our hearts will be also.

And it includes the fruit of the Spirit. Our witness in the world should be to live emotionally and spiritually mature lives. This means that we are not people who are constantly arguing and provoking one another. We aren't constantly complaining about the lives that God has given us. We dealt with the text from Paul in Philippians 2. And notice that it includes the same kind of warnings about the condition of the world that Jesus offers. Here, Paul says, "Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world."

And let me add one more form this witness in the world might take. Over the last few years, I have encouraged Scripture memorization. We have had theme verses related to our emphases. In Psalm 119, we hear, “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”

The value of Scripture memorization is manifold. We preach the kingdom to ourselves—more about that in a moment. We have the Word of God on our lips. We start to sound like the Scriptures in our own conversations. We focus on the deeper theology of a particular verse or set of verses. And God’s Word produces the life of Christ in us. The Word does what it says.

This year’s verse is Jeremiah 6:16. It is on our poster downstairs. We have worked on it in Youth Catechesis. I have included it in sermons and Bible studies. “Thus says the LORD: ‘Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.’”

This is what I want for you—these ancient paths—the good way. I like the way Jesus says it in Matthew 5, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” This is our witness in the world. And it is the cure we need for our souls.

One last thing. Remember that the Gospel is for you too. It is easy to think about all that we should be doing for the kingdom of God. And I do want you to think about such things. But first—and even primarily—remember that the Kingdom of God is Christ’s work in the world—in your world—in your life. It is for you.

Your sins have been forgiven in the cross of Christ. Your life has been made new. You have the promise of eternal life set before you. Christ is with us in the Word proclaimed and in the bread and wine of His precious body and blood.

You are a redeemed and regenerated child of God. The kingdom of God has arrived, and that is terribly good news. And when such good news is in our hearts—and on our minds—it will just come pouring out of us—in the way that we live—and in the witness we offer.

So today, we commemorate St. Luke. We are grateful for the example he left for us—his missionary work—his faith and his faithfulness. He is an excellent example of the Christian life. He was not one of the Twelve. But he still had an important role in announcing the Kingdom of God—and in traveling with Paul. He supported the Gospel with the whole direction of his life.

I hope the same for us. We are missionaries in the world. We walk on ancient paths. Now, we need not turn every conversation back to Jesus. It is okay to talk about the weather, sports, politics—although always with arguing and complaining—and maybe we could all talk about ourselves a little less.

But let’s look for opportunities to make Jesus and the kingdom of God known in our world—albeit in a winsome manner. Let’s set His Word in our hearts—in our minds—and before our eyes. We are His people. We have both the privilege and the responsibility of announcing the amazing good news, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.”

“For that beloved physician, all praise, whose Gospel shows the Healer of the nations, the One who shares our woes, Your wine and oil, O Savior, upon our spirits pour, and with true balm of Gilead, anoint us evermore.” In the name of Jesus. Amen.