

Festival of St. Luke
Sermon Text: Luke 1:1-4, 24:44-53
Related text: 2 Timothy 4:5-11
Date Preached: October 18, 2009

Grace to you and peace from God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

In the conclusion of the New Testament book Colossians, the Apostle Paul sends his final greetings. Included in these greetings from Paul are greetings from Demas and Luke, the beloved physician.

From this it is held throughout church history that the writer of the Gospel of Luke is this beloved physician. The writings of both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, also understood to be written by Luke, have as one of their foci healing.

Though for Luke, healing would likely be understood in very different terms than we might today. For example, in observance of this festival day, we and many other churches have healing rites as part of our worship service. In the prayers of the church this day serves to especially lift up those who serve in the medical fields. Yet, if you have come today expecting that you will be cured of whatever ailment has stricken you, I fear you may be disappointed.

If your perception of healing services are formed by those displayed on television, with a flair for the dramatic, I fear you may be disappointed.

This is not how most of the wider Christian church views healing. For the wider church, healing is intricately connected to our relationship with Jesus Christ our Lord. In this intimate relationship, Jesus says frequently the words, “Your faith has made you well.”

The question then that is before us in our life context is “What does this mean?” It is first and foremost a promise.

It is a promise of God to be with us in the midst of our suffering; God who is present with us in the physical suffering that comes with illness, present with us in the suffering that comes with the loss of human relationships through death, divorce or other forms of brokenness; present with us in the suffering that comes from feeling alone, the loss of a job, as well as feelings of helplessness. In whatever manner we suffer, we are embraced in the presence of God who promises wholeness and peace in our circumstances.

The promise is that there is no form of brokenness that is beyond God's ability to heal. Likewise, there is no form of brokenness to which God turns his back.

God's response is to invest in us more deeply. God's response to our sufferings and brokenness is to experience it himself in the brokenness of Christ. That is Luke's story. This is the testimony Luke offers to his friend Theophilus.

The name of Luke's friend is significant to us. This name is a combination of two Greek words. Theos means God. Philos is one of four Greek words for love. Put together, Theophilus means lover of God.

Children of God, we who love God discover that this book is addressed to us. In the pages of this gospel we hear the story of God's good news for us. It is summarized in the concluding verses that everything Jesus suffered was for the lovers of God, you and me.

It had to be this way says our Lord so that we could be connected to the saving relationship that for us is rooted in our baptismal identity. In Holy Baptism we are claimed as children of God. It is an identity of healing and hope.

Repentance and forgiveness are not simply things we do to be nice to each other when we've messed up in life. Repentance and forgiveness is an act of healing on God's part that is lived out in the renewal of relationships.

To share the peace as we do in worship is to proclaim this good news of healing, even in the midst of our fears over the spread of germs.

Later those who choose to will have the opportunity to receive a tangible sign of this healing hope. Anointing with oil was a common practice in the early church as a sign of healing. Traced on our foreheads in the sign of the cross reminds us of God's claim and promise of healing upon our lives.

Healing comes in many forms and in many ways. Healing can and frequently does come through the care received from doctors, nurses, therapists, chiropractors, medical researchers, counselors, care givers, and others all of whom in their work bear witness to God at work.

For in these and various ways, we experience the healing love of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in whom you have been baptized and in whom we have life. AMEN.