

**18 October 2020**  
**Feast of St Luke**

Tradition holds that before the Evangelist Luke whom we recall today joined Paul in his missionary work, he made his living as a physician. His Gospel and its “companion volume,” the Acts of the Apostles, give evidence of Luke’s classical education and careful attention to details. Luke shows a particular sensitivity to the hidden movements of the heart; his is the only Gospel to relate the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son.

Luke did not know Jesus and his Gospel was written in the closing or last decade of the first century, probably after the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in the year 70. Like the entire Gospel writers Luke did not simply transmit the story of Jesus’ life and teaching as he received it. He was aware of the needs of his own community and his writings coloured by the conditions of his time. He recognised the need to make sense of the story of Jesus for the people of his generation. He used story and imagery he knew they would understand and be familiar with. He brings his perspective and understandings of the Jesus story as he has heard handed down. Throughout his Gospel Luke is seeking to engage his reader in the drama of salvation embracing the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In his narrative of the Jesus story there is hope of liberation from the bondages of our day so that we can be truly the people of God in today’s world. For Luke Jesus is both messiah and suffering servant of God.

Some recent scholarship suggests that Luke in writing to his community is encouraging them to be good citizens while under Roman occupation but to use their skills and faith to challenge those parts of the Roman ethos that was inconsistent with God’s rule. Likewise, in our day and age we are called to be participants in the world in which we live while objecting and challenging the forces that disadvantage and discriminate and to be a positive force for justice and mercy. Tackling the principalities and powers that afflict, abuse, destroy the lives of people across the known world of his time and likewise ours today. Over the past week I have heard a number of stories of how individuals have had their eyes opened when visiting neighbours and finding them in serious need. I have read reports of increasing numbers of people finding it difficult to meet everyday living expenses and desperate for social contact. Words of encouragement while welcome are losing their punch as we say. While governments have taken some action there is much more to be done and the Church has a vital role to be a voice for all in need. This is certainly the essence of Luke’s Gospel. Today I suspect most of us are waiting in anticipation of our Premier’s announcements about changes in the lockdown arrangements while viewing with distress and concern events in Europe and the United States.

Luke is my favourite Gospel for many reasons. I sometime write letters to express what I am feeling at the time whether it is to my local member, the Archbishop or friend although I may never send them if they are critical or angry letters. Today I have decided to write a letter to St Luke.

Dear Luke,

Please excuse my familiarity as we have never met but I feel I know you very well. I am very fond of your Gospel with part of my own Doctoral thesis being an examination of the Sermon on the Mount that you name the Sermon on the Plain. I like your account because it is not only a vision to be enacted and hoped for but as I read it one of action now, not sometime in the future. The words of the Lord’s Prayer reflect this, “your will be done on earth as in heaven”. In your Gospel Luke you have Jesus setting the example by coming down from the mountain top into the marketplace of cultures, race, gender, diversity, fear and anxiety, struggles, despairs and aspirations, a place very similar if not identical to the community in which we live today.

Luke I love your candor and earthiness, grounded in the grace, inclusiveness and unconditional love of God embracing what is best for the human condition and being created in God's image. You remind us that as followers of Jesus we are not only privileged but have the responsibility to treat each other with respect, justice and to exercise stewardship over the creation not only for the present but for future generations. I hope I am not embarrassing you with these words, but you stress in your parables, particularly the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son the goodness of God. Throughout your Gospel you describe and emphasize your love for those who are described as the outsider, that in your times included women, the widow, the poor and the leper among others. You are the only one that gives us the humble birth of Christ in lowly circumstances as a refugee and alien. Your account of the birth of Jesus has inspired and encouraged many and certainly captured the imagination of children worldwide. Luke in your narrative of the life of Jesus and his mission I discover Jesus in a very human way immersed in God's dreams and hopes for the creation. I could write many things but as you say at the beginning of your Gospel your intent is to write an orderly account so that you Theophilus will know the truth. I am sure these words are for me and all your followers in our time.

Yours etc.

In today's reading from Luke there is the sense of urgency as Jesus sends out or commissions 70 disciples in pairs. This story is unique to Luke. Earlier he had sent out 12 to heal and proclaim the kingdom. They are to travel lightly but he tells them they are likely to experience hostility, they will be vulnerable and rejected, challenged and abused, as "lamb sent among wolves". As Brendan Byrne says in his commentary on this passage, the tone is grim and Jesus prepares the 70 for sharing the hospitality of God in those who they meet and greet.

In the next part of the Gospel Luke describes their mission as a success and their confidence is encouraged by Jesus. He reminds them they are not judged by their success by their faithfulness. We have all been given different gifts that enable us to be the 70 or more to be sent out. Some preachers and teachers, some listeners, some consolers, some evangelists, some advocates, some not to sure. Many of us will know of the disappointments at our attempts to share the Gospel, the pain of rejection, ridicule, and anger towards us. Some of us may feel we have not always acted as we ought to have in the past and shied away from the challenges we have been called to address.

Luke throughout his narrative recognises all the challenges both you and I face today but reminds us that we are not called to be successful but faithful. In a world that appears to value who we are and what we achieve by what is called success in wealth, power and status it is easy to be disillusioned and give up. Paul in our second reading today has this sense of failure and abandonment yet he remains confident that God stands with him throughout his ordeals as he stands with us.

So, the message for us all today is that despite all the negative vibes we may sense, the blame games, the cat calls, the self-interest, be confident that this world and the church do not belong to us but to God. Support all that is good, encourage all who seek to uphold life as a gift to be cherished and valued. Be people of hope during times of pain, darkness and challenge and be conscious that in all things the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob remains committed to fulfilling the fullness of creation.

As I have said on previous occasions little is to be achieved in back slapping celebrities or dare, I say aggressive journalists or commentators or playing the blame game. The call for the followers of Christ is not to be seduced into political games or point scoring but rather to build the Kingdom of God. Central to Luke's Jesus, is our prime task as ambassadors and witnesses to the God of promise and hope who remains faithful and waiting.

Amen