

## Sermon for St Luke 2020

*<sup>8</sup> Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; <sup>9</sup> cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'* Luke 10.8-9

Today we are celebrating, or at the very least, acknowledging, the ministry and the legacy of Saint Luke. Luke not only wrote the most social gospel, he also wrote the first history of the Christian Church. Luke has also written the Acts of the Apostles as a history of the first century of the church. This early history reveals the church's positive impact on the community, together with the conflicts caused, and the mistakes made.

Luke is determined to research and to offer a full explanation and description of the world in which he lived. He is in the first instance writing the gospel as a document for a character named Theophilus. In the opening paragraph of the gospel Luke says this. *"Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of 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 Lord, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed."*

We learn from this that Luke is thorough in his investigation and that he will only record that which has come to him from eyewitnesses. There is no room for creative writing. In this way Luke writes from the basic understanding of fact. He is convinced that he writes only the truth of the matter.

When he states that he will start at the beginning he intentionally takes us back beyond the birth of our Lord. He begins with the account of Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. Their child is the one who will become John the Baptist. It is John who is sent to prepare the way of the Lord. He is the voice crying out in the wilderness. He is the one calling for the people to repent and thus be prepared to meet the Messiah. The role of John the Baptist is critical, and Luke recognises this. The conception of John the Baptist becomes the beginning of Luke's record of the happenings in Judea.

From this point onward Luke takes up the gospel of our Lord with all of the remarkable things that Jesus has done. From the virgin birth, through the miracles of healing and resurrection, to the trial and the death of Christ. Luke concludes his Gospel with the ascension of our Lord. Theophilus should be well pleased with the account that has been written for him.

In the gospel today we have something of a repeat of the role of John the Baptist. Instead of sending John with his call to repentance, Jesus sends the disciples into the world to prepare the way for his ministry. He appointed and sent seventy of his disciples, in some translations seventy two disciples, to go before him to all of the places he intended to go. Like John the Baptist these people were to announce the coming of the Messiah. They were given authority by Jesus to cast out demons and to heal the sick. Needless to say, they were

astonished at all they could do in the name of Jesus. By calling on his name great miracles happened.

The primary message that they were to impart is that the kingdom of God has come near to the people. The miracles, the healing of the sick, the strengthening of the weak, the compassion and the love offered, were all signs of the coming of the Messiah.

There can be no doubt that the role of the seventy sent out by Jesus is the role that is now maintained, kept alive, and offered by the church in our time. We are the people who have been appointed by our Lord to go before him. We are the church. We are the Body of Christ. We are the children of God. We are to walk and live the faith into which we have been called.

Our faith is not something like our best suit or dress that we save for Sunday. Our faith is us, dressed in our everyday clothes, maintaining our faith, living our faith, and being our faith.

Our faith is not a request to do something. It is not a demand for a specific act. Our faith is a call to be who we are called to be. It is a call to be as Christ in our community. We are to stand for truth, and we are to deny the traps and the snares of the devil. More than this, our faith demands that we stand with the weak and the persecuted.

As we read through the gospel of Luke, we discover that this is the primary theme of the gospel. He speaks of the acts of healing, the casting out of demons, the Good Samaritan, the raising of Dorcas, the death, and the resurrection of Christ, as being basic facts, basic truths, of the faith. For Luke they are not points for debate, they are the reality of his research.

The charge to the seventy was confronting. Take no purse, take no sandals. Live the faith and all will be supplied. It is a definite intention to turn away from the things of the world and to seek only the rewards of faith. Of course we maintain our affection for the people we love and respect, but the first priority is to be to God and the Gospel of Christ.

Paul establishes this outlook in his letter to Timothy. He speaks of his friends with affection with particular emphasis on greeting Timothy. There is only one who has disappointed him and that is Demas who has fallen in love with this present world and deserted him. Paul makes no further comment about Demas, but the message is clear. Demas has turned away from God and has fallen in love with the world. The world in this sense is all that will lead us into sin and away from God.

It is our task in the faith to stay faithful to God and to not be distracted by the things of the world. It is also our task in the faith to fulfil the call that God has placed before us. We are to be John the Baptist, we are the seventy appointed, we are the church, and it is our God-given task to go out into the world to make Christ known.

The latest statistics from the church are sobering. The average age of parishioners is now high sixties. If we fail to make the gospel known in our time, then the future of the church is somewhat bleak.

Our Lord has appointed us for a specific role, and that is to go before the Lord and to make him known. Pray God that we will have the strength and the faith to present Christ to the world.