

12 October 2016
St. Luke, Evangelist [observed]

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Greenspring Village, Springfield, VA

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“No Empty Promises with God”
Text: Isaiah 35:5-8; Luke 10:1-9

We're in the hot and heavy of the political season again, and so as usual, lots of promises are being made. I will do this. You will get that. But you and I know they won't do and we won't get all that is promised. Much of it is just words.

Well we heard words from God tonight. Promises. From Isaiah. *The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.* And more. But with these words God wasn't trolling for votes. He doesn't need your vote. He is God whether you believe in Him or not. There are no competitors. No real ones, anyway. And while some people in this world wouldn't vote for God even if they could, because they don't like His Word or His morality, He's still God. And that's not going to change.

So perhaps it is surprising that still He makes these promises. He doesn't need to. But it's what God does. In His Word He tells us what He has done in the past, and He tells us what He will do in the future. All so that we may know Him and His goodness, and that we may know and believe in Him.

Which is why St. Luke, who we are commemorating tonight, wrote His Gospel. It is said, speaking of politicians and elections, that the United States Senate is the most exclusive club in the world - there are only 100 senators. But there are only four Evangelists, four Gospel writers. And God chose Luke to be one of them.

And what Luke does in His Gospel is show how God did all that He had promised to do. That when God says He will do something, you can take that to the bank. You can believe it as if it has already happened. That's how sure and true his Word is, unlike many of the promises we hear today. And Luke starts at the beginning (a very good place to start) with the fulfillment of the very first promise God made - the promise of a Saviour. He tells us how Jesus was born and then what Jesus did, His miracles, fulfilling all those words and promises we heard in Isaiah. And then He finishes with the highest and hardest fulfillment of all - with God doing what He had promised with Jesus dying on the cross. Isaiah reported that promise too. That Jesus would be *stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted* (Isaiah 53:4). That Jesus would be so abused and disfigured that He wouldn't even be able to be recognized (Isaiah 52:14). And that because He did all this, *by His wounds we are healed* (Isaiah 53:5).

Luke reported how those promised healings began, how Jesus did those things. And then, as we heard tonight, how Jesus sent His disciples out to do those things, too. They went out and not only preached His Word but also healed with His authority. They were really extensions of Him. To give His gifts.

But . . . where is that healing today? You have problems, so do I, so do many. There are blind, deaf, and lame people today. Where is that healing today? Maybe God really is just like our politicians, making promises that are just words, that we can't really rely on or count on . . .

No, Luke tells us. He did keep them. He fulfilled them. The accounts are true. But there is more to it than that. Those physical healings weren't just goodies God was doling out, they had a purpose - they were signs, pointers, to the fulfillment of an even greater promise and a more important healing. The healing not just of the body but the healing of the soul. A healing that will last not just for a time, but forever. The healing that would come only, as Isaiah said, *by the wounds of Jesus*. By Jesus' death and resurrection. That we have hope not just for this world and life, but for eternal life.

So while the promises of healing spoken by Isaiah were fulfilled by Jesus, we are not then without promises of our own. He has given us new promises, of new healing. The healing of forgiveness. And He is still fulfilling those words, sending His servants, pastors, to do that as well. To preach His Gospel, to baptize, to absolve, to feed. With His authority, as extensions of Himself. To give His gifts. That *the kingdom of God come near to you*, still today.

But again, not to get elected. The Church is not a popularity contest. Rather, as always, from the very first day of creation until the Last Day, God simply wants to give to you. Sometimes we reject His gifts and think we want something else, something better, something more fun, something that will benefit us more - but those things we chase after are the real empty promises. For while we may get something in the short term, it will not last. The world and its promises are fickle and fleeting. But what God gives is lasting: adoption into His family and the promise of His kingdom.

That's what Luke wants you to know and why He wrote His Gospel. So that when we doubt, when we wonder, when we don't see God keeping His promises, when we think God is not loving and not loving me, when satan whispers into our ears that our sins are bigger than God's forgiveness . . . Luke says: hear this. God is faithful and His words are true. Jesus came. Jesus died. Jesus rose. For you. All His promises fulfilled.

Well, no, not all. There is still another promise that hasn't yet been fulfilled, when Jesus will come back again, to raise all the dead and take us home. To His home and our home. The home that He promised He was going to prepare for us (John 14:3). Will He fulfill that?

Well Luke would ask: Did He fulfill His promises of the past? Is He fulfilling His promises now? So He keep this one too. You can be sure. You can stake not your vote, but your life on it. Luke says that, in fact, in the first few verses of His Gospel:

*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** (Luke 1:1-4).*

That you may have certainty, be sure. These promises have been fulfilled. These promises are true. And yes, these promises are *for you*.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.