

18 October 2020  
Commemoration of Saint Luke, Evangelist

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Physician, Evangelist, Saint”

Text: Luke 10:1-9 (2 Timothy 4:5-18)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Saint Luke.** We’re commemorating him today. **Saint Luke the Evangelist.** If Luke was one of the 72 sent out by Jesus that we heard about today, then he was an evangelist twice over - first by mouth and second by pen.

**Saint Luke. The beloved physician** (Colossians 4:14). Physician of the body who became a physician of the soul. Or, if you like, he became a physician of the body *of Christ*. For that is the way of it with Jesus, after all. Peter and some of the other disciples went from being fishers of fish to fishers of men. So He also transforms Luke. Taking the gifts and talents and vocations He has given and not discarding them, but *enlarging* them. For I don’t think Luke ever stopped being a physician. Perhaps the reason he stuck by Paul so much was for this very reason - to treat Paul bodily. For Paul had no shortage of afflictions - from his famous thorn in the flesh, to 5 times receiving 39 lashes from the Jews, 3 times beaten with rods, stoned, 3 times shipwrecked, caught in riots, imprisoned - with chains and stocks and without, and often, he says, near death (2 Corinthians 11:23-27). If anyone ever needed a physician at their side, it was the apostle Paul. And it seems God gave him one, in Saint Luke.

**Saint Luke. A man of the Word.** Penning not only the Gospel that bears his name, but the continuation of his Gospel, the book of Acts.

**Saint Luke. A man of the Word *made flesh*.** For Saint Luke, as a physician of the body, knew the human body and cared for it. And it is the bodily that especially comes out in his Gospel. It is Luke who gives us what is one of the most well-known accounts in the Scriptures - the account of Jesus’ birth, His *bodily* birth in Bethlehem. But he is also the one who records for us such *bodily* teachings as the Parables of the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the rich man and Lazarus, and the Pharisee and the tax collector. And it is Saint Luke who records for us two of Jesus’ most comforting words from the cross, while He hung there in His body, dying: *Father, forgive them* (Luke 23:34) and *Today, you will be with me in Paradise* (Luke 23:43).

**Saint Luke.** Perhaps those dying words of Jesus were so precious to him because as a physician he knew - maybe more keenly than most, maybe more frustratingly than most -

that there was one thing that he, as a physician, could not heal, fix, overpower, or overcome: *death*. However long this world has been here, however long there has been a practice of medicine, this has been the constant. Medicine can extend life, delay death, make it more palatable, and fight it off, but in the end, death always wins. You know the old saying: *there's only two sure things in this world, death and taxes*. Well, there hasn't always been taxes, but ever since the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, there has always been death. And as a physician, Luke would have hated death. Death is the enemy.

So Saint Luke found a kindred spirit in Jesus. For Jesus hates death, too. Luke is the one who records for us that Jesus raised the son of the widow of Nain back to life again (Luke 7:11-17) and then did the same when the daughter of Jairus died before Jesus could get there to heal her (Luke 8:40-56). And *within* that story is the story of why Jesus couldn't get there in time - because He stopped to heal a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years (vs. 43-48). And about this woman, Luke includes this rather revealing line: *and though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone*.

**Saint Luke** knew the limitations of a physician. But here in Jesus was the one who knew no such limit, no such boundary. Here was the one who could do what Luke could not: **conquer death**.

So when Jesus sends out the 72, notice: what is there for the body? Nothing. Jesus sends them out with *no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals*. Nothing to carry extra supplies or tend to their bodily needs. In this way they are like lambs in the midst of wolves - with no bodily defense. But lambs need no bodily defense when they are under the care of the Good Shepherd. So what they carry with them is the Word. **The Word that carries Jesus and His gifts**. So with that Word they speak and give Jesus and His peace. With that Word they give Jesus and His healing. And with that Word the kingdom of God comes near. *Heal the sick and say to them*, Jesus says. That's Saint Luke in a nutshell. Healing and speaking. Physician and Evangelist. Physician of body and soul.

But these 72 not only carry with them this Word, **this Word carries them**. For the gifts are for them, too. The Word sustains them and gives them strength and hope. For this Word is the Word of the Word made flesh. The Word that carries the Jesus who carries them in His arms as His lambs.

So they can go with *no moneybag, no knapsack, and no sandals*. Those words shock us and probably shocked them at first, too. But by this they learned of the one who can meet every need of ours - body and soul. And just as He used Saint Luke to provide for the needs of others, so He used others to provide for their needs, the needs of the 72. They would give them food and drink and lodging and all that was needed. And later, when Jesus would ask His disciples if they lacked anything went He sent them out, the answer was *no, nothing* (Luke 22:35).

So it is with us as well. Covid-19 has shaken up our world and **brought death to the fore**. For how many lambs has the Covid-wolf devoured? Doctors and scientists are working frantically to find a cure and a vaccine, and they probably will. They'll defeat Covid, **but they won't defeat death**. It will continue its relentless attack against us in one form or another. Another pandemic will come, another natural disaster, another terrorist attack. Diseases that have been around for a long time will continue to ravage our bodies, and if you're looking for job security, look no further than funerals and cemeteries. And while it has become fashionable these days to call funerals "memorials" or "celebrations of life," they're still funerals. It's still death. And it's still the enemy (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:26).

And Saint Luke, the beloved physician, knew this - that doctors cannot defeat death. **What He learned is that evangelists and pastors CAN!** Because they bring, they give, they apply the medicine of immortality: **the Word**. Because they bring, they give, they apply **Jesus, the Word made flesh** - the one who came to do what we could never do: **defeat death**. Because death, you see, *isn't* primarily a body-problem - it's a *soul*-problem. It's caused by sin. So if you want to deal with death, if you want to conquer death, you must deal with and conquer sin. Otherwise, you're just putting make-up on a corpse to make it look nice, and flowers on a grave. But the reality is still there.

But in Jesus, Luke came to know the one who could defeat death! Really and truly. And who did. That's why those words Jesus spoke from the cross and that Luke records for us are so important. *Father, forgive them* and *Today, you will be with me in Paradise* are words that give life to the dying! Words that give life even after death has claimed our bodies. For a physician, that was the end. But not for an Evangelist! For those who are carried by Jesus are carried through death to life again. For Saint Luke came to understand that conquering death *doesn't* mean staving off death and not dying - **it meant passing through death to life again**. Like the widow's son. Like Jairus' daughter. *Like Jesus Himself*.

That's why for Jesus, healing and forgiving always go together (Luke 5:23). Forgiveness is the medicine we really and truly need. And so Jesus takes our sin, puts it *on* Himself, *in* Himself, infects himself, covers Himself, every nook and cranny - He *becomes* sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21) and pays the price for all that sin: death. Our death. All death. To become the antidote for sin. The resurrection and the life. And His resurrection showed that, proved it. That death had been defeated because sin had been defeated. Our sin had been atoned for.

So while doctors today are using the blood of people who have caught and recovered from Covid-19 to cure those who are still getting it - Jesus did that long before now! **For His blood is the cure for our sin**. His blood poured upon us in the water and Word of **Holy Baptism** to wash away our sins and give us new life. His blood spoken upon us by the Word of **Holy Absolution** and in the Word of the **Holy Gospel** to heal us and restore

us. And His blood fed to us in the bread, wine, and Word of His **Holy Supper**, and we eat and drink His forgiveness and life, and receive that life that not even death can end.

And notice: healing and Word together. **Never apart from the Word** - the Word of the Word made flesh; the Word that carries and gives us the Word made flesh. The Word Jesus sent those 72 out with. The Word Saint Luke recorded in His Gospel. And the Word still spoken here, to you, by the Great Physician. Like Luke, using my mouth, but it's His Strong Word (LSB #578) that gives His life, His work, His gifts, His healing, His forgiveness. That gives Him.

Once Saint Luke learned that, was baptized into that, everything changed for Him. He was still a physician, but now also an Evangelist. And when he wrote his Gospel, it was so that - as he says in the introduction - that *Theophilus* (and us) *may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught* (Luke 1:3-4). That you have certainty about Jesus. That you be certain about His life, and yours. And then that you be like the disciples at the end of his Gospel, when after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, they were filled with great joy and were continually blessing God (Luke 24:50-53). Because they couldn't help it. Because Luke couldn't help it. Because you can't help it. For you have been healed and given life by the Great Physician. Your sins are forgiven and you have the promise of a life that will never end. What else is there to do but rejoice? And continually bless the God who has come in the flesh and given such great gifts to men.

Like Luke. Who we're commemorating today. Physician and Evangelist in this life, but a saint in Christ Jesus forever.

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

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.