

**+ Luke 1:1-3; 24:44-49 + Luke's Gospel Is Our Gospel¹ +
+ 21st Sunday after Pentecost: St. Luke, Evangelist + 18 October 2015 +**

My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! (Luke 1:46-47)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

How would you finish this sentence, “The Gospel is...”? If I were to go around the room, I’m pretty sure that we’d get some great answers. “The Gospel is the good news of Jesus.” “The Gospel is life.” “The Gospel is God’s love for me.” “The Gospel is pardon from a death sentence.” “The Gospel is the difference between life and death.” “The Gospel is...”

...But how would someone else answer that question? You could type it into Google online and the first suggested answer would be “The Gospel is offensive.” How about your next door neighbor who hasn’t darkened the door of a church in years? How about your skeptical classmate? How about your co-worker who finds your faith offensive? How about someone like you—similar age, gender, cultural background, life experiences, but who doesn’t have any connection to Jesus? How would they answer that question, “The Gospel is...”?

We’d probably hear answers like “The Gospel is unnecessary.” “The Gospel is out of touch and irrelevant.” “The Gospel is ancient and made for another time and place.” “The Gospel is myth.” “The Gospel is hard to believe.” “The Gospel is just another manmade writing.” “The Gospel is...”

Now answers like that tend to offend our Christian ears—and rightly they should, but there is a kernel of truth to a couple of those answers. The Gospel is ancient. It’s been around for 2,000 years! There’s nothing young about it. The Gospel is also hard to believe. The good news of Jesus defies human reason because it’s good news of how a holy God willingly sacrificed everything for a world that didn’t deserve it and did it all for free—no strings attached. That’s pretty hard to believe because it doesn’t make sense to our human reason. You have to do something, right?

If the Gospel is ancient and hard to believe, what are we going to do with it? We live in a world that has a laser-like focus on the here and now with almost no regard whatsoever for what happened in the past. So Christians and congregations are tempted to jettison the ancient for the modern. We also live in a world where people tend to avoid or ridicule what is hard to believe. So Christians and congregations are tempted to water down the Gospel—really God’s Word as a whole—until the message we proclaim is nothing more than a self-help motivational speech.

Yet before we jettison the ancient or water down the difficult, the evangelist Luke—the Gospel writer—calls to us and says, “Wait! Look at what I **‘carefully investigated’** and see that the Gospel is just as relevant and important as it was in my day. In fact, it’s absolutely necessary for every generation! See that **my Gospel is your Gospel!**” Let’s take a look!

Among all the religions in the world, Christianity is unique. For example, Christianity is unique because no other religion is based on what someone else did to make you right with God. In every other religion, you have to make yourself right with God. In Christianity, Jesus made you right with God. Another way that Christianity is unique is because it’s based on historical facts—not feelings or visions recorded many years after the fact—and those facts have been attested to by eyewitnesses.

A good example of this is the account of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead—and the importance of eyewitnesses. Many have tried to prove that Jesus never rose from the dead, but a closer look at the historical facts make a pretty strong case that he did. Jesus died by Roman crucifixion—one of the most awful forms of execution ever devised. If Jesus had just passed out, it would’ve been pretty clear to the disciples when they saw him that he’d need major medical help. No, when Jesus appeared to his disciples on Easter and in the 40 days after that not only was he healed, but very much alive and in the flesh. What they saw changed their lives so much that they were willing to die for what they saw in the years that followed. No one had to convince them, because they had seen Jesus alive.

On top of that you have Paul who persecuted the church, but was only converted after seeing the living Jesus, or Jesus’ brother, James, who had been a skeptic, but was converted to the Christian faith only when he saw

¹ Some of the thoughts and language from this sermon were received with thanks from a 2010 sermon by Pr. Johnold Strey. <https://pastorstrey.wordpress.com/2010/10/16/sermon-for-luke-commemoration/>.

his brother Jesus alive. Neither of these men had a good reason to preach Christ's resurrection as his eyewitnesses. Unlike other religions, the events of Christianity were events that eyewitnesses saw and reported.

Now you might wonder, "What does this little venture into explaining the faith have to do with Luke and the gospel he wrote?" At the beginning of our text, Luke explains how he went about writing his gospel. **"Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word."**

Now Luke might be referring to the gospels of Matthew and Mark or some other less successful attempt, but what's most important here is that Luke's careful research came from interacting with eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry—including many servants of the Word of God. The Holy Spirit then used Luke to take all of that historical research and form an orderly account that has come down to us today in the inspired Scriptures.

...But Luke wasn't just writing a history. No, those gospel facts were used to create and strengthen faith. **"...It seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you know the certainty of the things you have been taught."** We're not sure who Theophilus was. It seems that he was already a Christian. Yet Luke wanted Theophilus to be sure of what he believed—to be certain of what he had been taught, certain that the Gospel is based on historical fact. So Luke took on the task of writing this thorough history of Christ's life and ministry.

Do you and I have that same attitude when it comes to the Gospel? We still proclaim the same factual Gospel that Luke recorded centuries ago. Our message today is not based on pop psychology or modern philosophy, but on real, historical facts. That's a unique and compelling message. You would think that we would have no trouble trusting the Gospel as **"the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes"** ...or do we? (Romans 1:16)

Sometimes you and I have a tendency to fall into a trap where we will defend the Word of God to the death, yet somehow fail to trust that the Gospel alone is the power of God that converts the lost and strengthens the found. Do we actually believe that proclaiming the factual Gospel is enough to bring souls into Christ's kingdom or do we somehow think that the simple Gospel is powerless when it comes to converting souls and strengthening faith?

You see, your inbred sinful nature is naturally skeptical of the Gospel's power. By faith, you want to put that Gospel to use—to "unleash the lion," but your sinful nature always tries to convince you that you have to add to or change the Gospel if you're going to succeed. So we're tempted to tell people what they want to hear, rather than what they need to hear, but then we lose the Gospel. We endanger our hearers' souls, and we condemn our own souls for our sinful failure to trust the power of the simple Gospel.

Thankfully our sinful failings can't change the simple facts of the Gospel. Your failures cannot erase the angels' message in Luke 2:(4) that **"in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."** My guilt cannot change Jesus' guilt-forgiving proclamation in Luke 19:(10), **"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."**

The Law sentences you to eternal death for your sin, but the Gospel tells you that Jesus took your place on the cross, tore down the barrier between you and God, and with your deliverance complete cried out, **"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."** The Law says that your sin should leave you dead in the grave and bound for hell, but on Easter morning the angel proclaimed **"He is not here; he is risen."** Now through faith in Jesus you receive his forgiveness and believe that his resurrection assures you of your own resurrection on the Last Day when Christ will come again.

What great comfort Luke offers as he presents these gospel facts! What great comfort we have in all of Scripture! Your faith is not based on a feeling or some heartburn or a dream in the night, but on Scriptural fact. What great comfort to know that Luke's gospel is our Gospel that extends peace and pardon from the risen Lord through his real resurrection from the dead!

That's good news that begs to be proclaimed! On Easter evening, Jesus reminded his disciples that the Old Testament had pointed to him, what he had accomplished for them, and what he would accomplish through them. **"This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms...This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."**

The events of Jesus' life, predicted in the Old Testament, were fulfilled. So Jesus pointed his disciples to their new commission. ***“You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”*** It was rather simple what they were going to do. They would be his witnesses. A witness sees, and then a witness testifies. Jesus would soon send them a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. From that point on they would carry out his commission to proclaim the Gospel.

Jesus didn't just commission his disciples, but he has commissioned you and me to proclaim the Gospel too—and what a privilege it is! What a privilege to tell someone on Christ's behalf, “I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit!” What a privilege to be the light of the Gospel in your sin-darkened community! What a privilege to explain the no-strings-attached Gospel to a searching soul for the very first time! What a privilege to proclaim the Gospel that forgives our sins and the sins of others, that comforts us and others, that promises eternal life to us and others who are brought to faith in Jesus.

The Gospel isn't really all that out of touch and irrelevant, is it? You see, the Gospel is the best news you have ever received—better than news of a good grade or a special surprise or a new job or a new life. You may not be a history geek, but you know and treasure the historical reality that you have in Christ. Let that be good news you gladly and freely proclaim! Amen.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests! (Luke 2:14 – NIV11)