

A Sermon for 22nd Sunday after Pentecost

October 20, 2024



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New Life Episcopal Church, Uniontown, OH

Ecclesiasticus 38:1-4, 6-10, 12-14, Luke 4:14-21

Healing

Today we celebrate Saint Luke the Physician, one of his many attributes including his excellent writing of the Saint Luke Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. Saint Luke offered so much to our tradition. It is good and right to honor him on this his feast day.

I would like to offer one of his attributes today as truly appropriate for our celebrations and observances. Luke's writing style is narrative and compassionate. He alone writes about Jesus' most compassionate parables, the Good Samaritan and the Return of the Prodigal Son. Both of these stories have beautiful scenes of reconciliation, forgiveness and healing.

Beyond these two parables, Saint Luke also offers scenes of healing in the story of Jesus' Passion. Only Luke, of the four Gospel writers, tells us about King Herod Agrippa, who happened to be in Jerusalem during Jesus' trial. Only Luke tells us that Herod and Pontius Pilate became friends at that time, healing old bad feelings.

Only Luke tells about the conversation Jesus had with his companions at the crucifixion – all three of them nailed to crosses for misdeeds against the Roman Empire. Jesus in the middle, a criminal on each side, three lonely men being executed. One of the men begs Jesus for compassion, right there on the cross. "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." The man uttered a plea bounded by faith that Jesus could do this. Jesus assured him that it would be so. We, too, in faith sing these words as a Taize chant.

The word I keep repeating here, in describing Luke the Physician and Evangelist – the word is HEALING. Just think about how many forms healing can take.

We often think of physical healing from injury, illness or from surgery. I have certainly learned about physical healing as I recovered from my knee replacement surgery last year. More recently, I am in recovery from my second eye cataract removal. I am always amazed by God's healing in such situations – every day, we get a little bit better, and ultimately, we are

totally healed, almost as if the affliction never happened. But we do remember, and we give thanks for God's miracle of healing.

We also yearn for healing from our losses. This parish has lost five parishioners to death this year. For such a small parish, this is a huge number. And each death represents a wrenching loss. I was speaking with a friend who was widowed last year. She insists that she is not grieving deeply, but I can hear it in her voice. She recalls that her husband's death was not unexpected, with many close calls and trips into intensive care, yet when he did die, it was a shock. It was the end of hope for continued life on this side of the grave. She agreed, it was different. She will be healing for a long time, after her 62-year marriage.

Other kinds of healing, other kinds of loss. Perhaps the loss of a friendship, the loss of a job, the loss of the ability to do what was easy, say, 20 years ago or less. I gave up jogging when I turned 50. I recently acknowledged that I would never climb Mount Everest. More seriously, I gave up hopes for an operatic career and for physical motherhood. These losses all required healing.

Today, after our service, we will gather downstairs for a magnificent feast and for story telling. I am relatively new in your community – I arrived in the fall of 2018, so we have been together about six years. We went through the trauma of COVID-19 together, and we emerged all the stronger for that experience. I know something of your history before all that, but in my mind, it is a bit sketchy and I look forward to hearing more detail. I know that you were originally two distinct parishes, St. Peter's in Akron, and St. Michael's here in Uniontown. Your talented rector Rev Stephanie Pace knit the two parishes together into this new entity, New Life. I'm sure that required a big adjustment for all of you, in particular the parishioners from St. Peter's, who had to give up their building. All the old memories from their times in that sacred space – the baptisms, the weddings, the funerals, the Sunday school, the music, all the experiences in that space, could still be cherished in memory, but not in location. That was loss, and that required healing. And what about the St. Michael's people here? St. Peter's parish joined them – was it like an invasion? Or was it a wonderful merger? I don't know. You tell me.

Today we honor St. Luke on his feast day, for his exquisite gospel writing, for his medical expertise, for his compassion, for his understanding of the

human condition and how much we need to hear the Good News in our world. We will tell our own stories and celebrate how we too can be signs of hope and love to a needy world.