

## A Doctor Who Makes House Calls

Text: Luke 10:1-9

Hymn: "Christ High-Ascended, Now in Glory Seated" (*LSB 840*)

Although there is a lot of overlap among the four Gospels, especially among Matthew, Mark, and Luke, each evangelist gives us a unique angle on the life and work, the teaching and significance, of our Lord Jesus Christ. Scholars have written many articles and books teasing out and identifying and explaining what these different themes are. St. Luke, too, has his own unique contribution, his particular angle on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

St. Luke was clearly a well educated man. He writes excellent Greek, but he's also well versed in the Old Testament, especially in the Greek version of the Old Testament, which he not only refers to but also mimics the style of.

Of the four evangelists, Luke was the only Gentile. He was quite possibly a native of Macedonia, judging by the fact that when you follow St. Paul's journeys in the Book of Acts (which Luke also wrote), as Paul crosses over from Asia Minor into Macedonia, all of a sudden the subject of the verbs becomes "we" (starting in Acts 16:10), which suggests that Luke himself at that point now joined the journey.

He was very faithful. He visited Paul when Paul was held captive in Caesarea (Philemon 24). And when Paul was in prison and on trial in Rome, the only long-time companion of Paul's that was there with him was Luke, the beloved physician (Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11).

As this educated, learned Gentile Christian, Luke had a few particular motives in writing his Gospel. First of all, he was very methodical. He says at the beginning,

“Others have undertaken to write this Gospel, but I’ve decided to write it in an *orderly* fashion” (1:1-4). He has researched his materials and spoken to eyewitnesses, at least one of whom must have been Mary, the mother of our Lord. Luke alone relates things that only Mary would have known.

Another thing he wanted to communicate was a message of Jesus that was comprehensible to a Gentile audience. So he writes things in a way that a non-Jewish reader could comprehend. Jesus’ death is presented as a noble death. He comes across as much as possible as a noble man, which no doubt caused a lot of confusion, since normally a man crucified as a robber and being a noble man don’t go together.

But today, on the Festival of St. Luke, I would like to focus on how Luke presents Jesus as the Great Physician. Our Collect of the Day brings this out when it refers to “the healing medicine of the Gospel and the Sacraments.” It is only Luke’s Gospel, for example, that gives us the Parable of the Good Samaritan. There we have the story of the traveler who is beaten and left to die. As an act of unmerited, unwarranted, unlikely sacrificial love, the Samaritan comes along and brings about healing, not only healing by rescue in that moment but also restoration. He not only covers the half-dead man’s wounds with wine and oil but takes him to an inn and charges the innkeeper to make sure that the man recovers (10:30-37).

And so we have an image not only of how we ought to be towards one another in love, how we are to care for one another in love, but fundamentally of what Jesus has come to do, as the great “healer of the nations” (Rev 22:2). We have various accounts in all of the Gospels of Jesus’ healing. That’s the obvious level. On a more subtle level, though, what does it mean to be healed by Jesus? What does it mean to be healed at

all? Jesus sent out the Seventy-Two with the words, "Heal the sick and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'" (v 9).

If someone is sick or injured, at what point do we say that they are healed? Is it the moment when the tumor is removed or the fracture is repaired? Is that person now healed? Is it the moment when they are no longer starving or no longer in pain? Are they well again? Of course, when people are ill or injured, there is the immediate and acute need: If you are bleeding, the bleeding must stop or you will die. If something is broke, it must be repaired. If something doesn't belong, it must be removed. But that in itself is not yet the fullness of healing.

We all know from experience that when we get injured and are no longer injured in that way, we may say that we are healed *but* we are not fully recovered. I have on my right pinky finger a reminder of why little children should not jump up and down on beds located beneath glass chandeliers. The bleeding stopped soon after it was cut, but the scar has remained and it reminds me of that incident. And I'm sure you carry various things in your bodies, of injuries or past illnesses, that left you not quite the way you were before. To be fully healed is not just not to be ill but to be recovered to full health. That is why people have to go through things like physical therapy, not only to mend the broken bones but also to get the muscles back to where they were before they were housed in plaster for six weeks or three months.

This too is the image we should keep in mind when we think of healing or, to use the Biblical word which means the same thing, *salvation*, which Jesus brings to us. Jesus came not only to remove what was wrong, to take away our sins, but to make us whole. When he found us in a ditch, he didn't just say, "Let's take the wound away.

Let's stitch you up. And now good luck with the rest of your life." No, He picked us up and took us to the hospital, to be mended, to recover, to be rehabilitated, to do the necessary spiritual therapy to make us strong and fit, not again but *for the first time*.

What the Gospel brings us is not merely the removal of something but the making of a new thing: Everyone who is in Christ is a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). We are created anew to be for the first time what we were meant to be when God made the world and proclaimed it very good. If you've had a good life by human standards, you ain't seen nothing yet. And if your life has had more than its share of struggles and sorrows by human standards, what Jesus has prepared for you is going to so over-brighten those dark shadows that they're going to vanish from view and memory in the new heaven and the new earth.

Jesus came to bring us a gift that only He could bring. He became like us so that we might become like Him. What are we like? Sinful and weak and mortal. And so Jesus took upon Himself our sins. He shared our weakness. And He died in our place. So that we might become like Him. What is He like? Holy and righteous. Glorious. Immortal. Pleasing to God, good in every way. That is what Jesus came to make of us.

So which are you now? The true answer is that you are somewhere in between. You are no longer what you were once. You are no longer defined by your sin. You are now defined by your standing before God. But you're not yet fully formed. The rehabilitation must go on. That's why Christians are called to rest in their salvation and at the same time work out their salvation in fear and trembling (Mt 11:28; Phil 2:12).

We have full confidence that we are well in God's eyes on account of what Jesus has done for us and what God has given to us by His Holy Spirit. Nothing needs to be

done about that. But then we need to put those new muscles to work that God has given us by the Holy Spirit, of righteousness and obedience and joy in the Lord, of willing service and genuine love. All of which are His gifts, too. And these we find in Luke's Gospel, where we're told that in the kingdom of God, everything is reversed. Things that seem great in the world are shown in their true light to be of little importance. Things that are thought to be little turn out to be great.

In the Alleluia verse we had the words, "Today salvation has come to this house." That's a reference to the calling of Zacchaeus. Who was Zacchaeus? He was despised, an outcast, and small in stature. He humbled himself. A grown man climbed a tree to see Jesus! Jesus showed him honor. He became in stature before the world the greatest in Jericho, because he trusted Jesus and sought Him out (19:1-10).

Not only that, but things begin to be mended. Luke shows us again and again in His Gospel that this call of God is to all people—the unclean, outsiders, Gentiles. Creation is to be restored. Relationships are to be healed. It is no longer them and us—just children of God through faith in Jesus. One creation in Christ Jesus.

And so Jesus truly is the Great Physician. He removes what doesn't belong—He takes our sin away—but then He puts us through the hard and rigorous work of spiritual exercise. May God give us grace to be good patients of Jesus, as the Holy Spirit puts us through the routine of strengthening us in those things which we'll bear into eternal life, to form us more and more into the image of the perfect human, Jesus Christ. To be like Him in His meekness and humility. To be like Him in His love for others. To be like Him in His wisdom and maturity. To be like Him in obedience and love for God the Father. To be like Him in entrusting ourselves to God, knowing that He will deliver us.

