
Stories and the Gospel of Luke

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By the Rev. Canon Cathy Zappa**

In our Sunday liturgies this summer, we are making our way through the Gospel of Luke. That is because we follow a lectionary (the Revised Common Lectionary, to be precise), which takes us through much of the Bible over the course of three years. We hear from Matthew in Year A, Mark in Year B, and Luke in Year C. John is sprinkled throughout, especially during the season of Easter.

So here we are, deep into Luke, which is one of my favorite gospels. Without the Gospel of Luke, we wouldn't have the *Magnificat* or *Nunc Dimittis* that we hear at Evensong during the program year. Nor would we have the Christmas pageant as we know it, or any record of Jesus' teenage years or his visit to Mary and Martha, or some of his most famous parables: the parable of the prodigal son, or the good Samaritan, or the rich man and Lazarus. Luke's Gospel is known and beloved also for its attention to the role and voice of women, its concern for the poor and oppressed, its emphasis on the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and its hope for salvation for all people.

Luke the evangelist takes all these themes and vignettes and weaves them together into what he calls "an orderly account, for you, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed."

Of course, the million-dollar question is, what is that truth? Who is Jesus in Luke's Gospel? Is he a teacher, healer, or prophet? A champion of women or the poor, Jews or Gentiles? Is he the Son of God, or a human being? Luke's answer is, "Yes! Let me tell you a story."

He is writing to early Christians, who are still figuring out what it means to be Christian and finding themselves at odds with the Roman Empire, with the synagogue down the street, and even with one another. Arguments are erupting about who Jesus is. Communities are dividing over who has the truth and who doesn't. Over who is in, and who is out. But Luke doesn't try to settle the matter once-and-for-all, with a bumper-sticker proclamation that leaves no room for discussion or objection. No, he tells a story!

Just think about the power of a story, particularly in times of conflict. We can argue about issues or opinions all day long, but stories help us see the individuals and communities behind an issue, and allow us to enter into their experience. Stories help us imagine different perspectives and new possibilities for all of us. In the shared vulnerability of sharing stories, we can create a sacred space where understanding and healing may begin.

Indeed, I wonder how some of the conflicts of our own time—how some of our own broken relationships and theological and political divisions—might be transformed, if we spent less time fighting over positions and jockeying for moral high ground, and more time sharing our stories: sharing the experiences and hopes and fears underneath our opinions, and listening for the stories of others, especially those with whom we disagree.

Stories are important. What is your story, and who needs to hear it? And whose story do you need to hear?

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