

TUESDAY COMMUNION

“The Gospel of Luke”

Hymn:

Reading: Luke 1.1-4

Prayers:

Why did Luke begin the enormous task of writing his two volume work that we call “The Gospel of Luke” and “The Acts of the Apostles”? His words will fill a quarter of what we call the New Testament, a huge undertaking in the days when one wrote on parchment.

It was also an expensive undertaking. Very likely “Theophilus” is a wealthy Christian who is financing the whole project. He is from a gentile background and Luke feels the need to write a work which will give him “confidence” in his new faith.

What is that will give him this “confidence”?

First, what he is going to write will be well organised and arranged.

Luke is perfectly aware that others have attempted to write about what God has been doing in and through the life of Jesus. Indeed, his major source will be what we call “Mark’s Gospel” but there were also other documents which contained stories and saying of Jesus.

Luke feels that whilst these documents are valuable they do not give a consistent account of the life of Jesus. Many Greek readers will feel that the existing documents are not written in a way that inspire them with confidence. They are too rough and awkward and often they just appear to be a collection of stories and sayings without any attempt to link them together.

Secondly, this work has been carefully prepared and is therefore authoritative.

Luke speaks of three sources.

First there are those who were eye-witnesses of the events. He wasn’t one of those who personally knew Jesus but he has spoken to those who knew Jesus and were involved in the life of the early church. Indeed, it appears that Luke may have been with Paul on his early missionary journeys and therefore can offer us a first-hand account of what was happening in those days.

Secondly, he has studied the written narratives about Jesus. As we have said, he has a copy of Mark’s Gospel but also other documents, probably collections of sayings and stories. At times Luke will stick very close to Mark’s Gospel whilst at times altering it and adding new material.

Thirdly, he has undertaken his own careful research and has sought to understand who Jesus was and his significance for our understanding of what God is doing through him.

So, Theophilus and all those who read his work can have confidence that this is a book of careful scholarship.

Finally, Theophilus can have confidence in God.

Some gentiles, asked whether they could trust a God who seemed to have rejected the Jewish people despite all the promises he had made to them. If God had rejected them, might he not reject the followers of Jesus as well.

Luke in his Gospel and in Acts is anxious to show that Jesus is a new prophet like Moses, the great leader of the past. He will speak of how there is continuity between old Israel and the new Israel which he sees as the church. The difference is that whilst the old Israel was only for those who were Jews the new Israel is for all, both Jews and gentiles.

God hasn't forsaken his people but created a new community around Jesus who is a prophet like Moses, yet still greater.

What does all this have to say to us?

First, Luke's Gospel is a great read and it is a profitable read.

Secondly, Luke does what we all have to do, to speak of the story of God in Jesus in words that our generation can understand.

Thirdly, he addresses the questions people are asking and that, too, is a part of our calling in this age. We seek to speak to the needs of our generation in fresh ways whilst remaining faithful to the Christian tradition we've inherited.

In our communion we remember the mighty acts of God, we open our hearts and minds to the God we meet in Jesus, we recommit ourselves to live as his people and as witnesses to his life-changing power and love.

Today, we give thanks for the way that Luke has helped us to hear the Good News and respond to it.

Amen.