

**Shepherd of the Springs Lutheran Church
Festival of the Evangelist, St. Luke**

Text: Luke 10: 1-9

Theme: *The Lord of the Harvest*

As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (II Tim. 4:5)

And He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest. Go your way: behold, I am sending you out as lambs among wolves." (Luke 10: 2-3)

This morning we observe and give thanks to God for the service to Christ and His Church rendered by the evangelist and physician, St. Luke. Luke was a well educated man of the ancient world who was a physician by trade. He is credited by the early church fathers as the author of the third Gospel and by implication, the book of Acts. Luke/Acts is a two part work addressed to a brother in the faith named Theophilus as recognized in the prologue to each of these works. Luke was an understudy and colleague in the mission work of the apostle Paul, having joined him on his Third Missionary Journey when Paul backtracked from Macedonia to Troas in Asia Minor. We understand the connection with Paul at this time from Luke's narrative in the book of Acts where at this juncture of his reporting about Paul's travels in Acts 20, he shifts from he/them to *we* in his report. Luke is one of those who was with Paul during his first Roman imprisonment, both ministering to and with Paul during those days of confinement.

Luke is one of two evangelists, along with Mark, who has presented the apostolic witness of Jesus and His ministry to the Church. Luke's gospel account has graced and inspired us with the traditional Christmas story and among all of the four gospels, his reflects the greatest emphasis on the graciousness of a merciful god and the involvement of women in the life and ministry of our Lord. Luke along with Mark, Timothy, and Titus were evangelists who labored in the Gospel of our Lord under the apostolic oversight of Paul and it is the work of the evangelist that our lessons this morning highlight. The office of evangelist is one of the four offices listed in Ephesians 4 that God established to be servants of the Word to proclaim the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ along with that of prophet, apostle, and pastor/teacher. The office of evangelist is probably more commonly known today as a missionary - one who is called by the Lord to bring his Gospel to peoples and places where it has not been heard. In this sense, the apostles like Paul were also evangelists who did missionary work of taking the Gospel into various regions of the world as far West as Rome and as far East as India.

I invite you to sharpen your understanding of this office and its work this

morning as we consider its role in the ongoing saving work of our Lord through the Gospel. There is much misunderstanding about this office and its work in our synod today. Let's consider what our lessons teach us. We see in our Gospel the beginnings of the work of an evangelist with the sending out of the 72 during the Lord's public ministry. These were the first laborers for Christ who were charged to prepare people for the coming of Jesus in the towns that He was about to visit. They were to travel lightly and understand that they would be like lambs among wolves. The point is forcefully made here by our Lord that while they would be laborers for the harvest of souls, there would be no adequacy for this work in themselves. Their role would be purely instrumental. The problem of sin is such that only the Lord of the Harvest and His saving work can overcome the powers that hold sway in God's spoiled creation - sin, death, and the Devil.

There is a paradox here. While Jesus tells us to pray for laborers to be sent, their role over against the forces of evil that must be overcome is compared to that of lambs facing off against wolves. The evangelist has nothing in himself, nor does he bring anything with him this is any match or contribute anything that would overcome the sinful powers of darkness that hold sway in the world and in the hearts of unregenerate sinners. Indeed, the evangelist must put on the full armor of God that Paul describes in Ephesians 6 just to stand against the powers of evil. There are no techniques, no strategies, no intrinsic qualities that the evangelist brings to his labor that would contribute anything concerning the effective saving of sinners. The evangelist is merely a chosen instrument for an encounter of sinners with the saving Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is Lord of the Harvest and that means that He is both the life-giving seed that is sown, and He is the One that creates the new life and fruitfulness of saved sinners. The Lord saves sinners *through* the work of the evangelist, but not *because* of it. The distinction here is very important to understand. The evangelist is a *chosen* instrument of our Lord, but not a *required* one. His role is honorific, not necessary. Today we have laid burdens on our people, telling them that they must get out there and evangelize to keep their non-Christian friends and neighbors from going to Hell as if God has put us in the position of being both instrumental and necessary for them to be saved. This is a terrible distortion. Evangelists are privileged instruments of the Lord's saving work - when, where, and as He chooses, but never necessary.

The second point about evangelists is that God has only called some to this work and office, not every Christian. Contrary to many voices in our church today, everyone is not a minister. Paul declares in Ephesians 4 that God gave *some* to be evangelists, not everyone. The Great Commission in the Church through which Christ carries out His own vocation of saving sinners in every place and age is ordered by offices that He has created. Paul, Barnabas, and Silas were raised up by the Lord to be evangelists through the Church at Antioch, but the whole congregation was not so raised up and sent. The Lord sent out 72 as apprentice evangelists, but He did not send everyone. And even when the disciples were overjoyed about the proclamation and praises of Jesus by the

crowds at his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus indicated that this was an event ordained by the Father and that stones could do as much. The Gospel and the sacraments have been given to the Church to proclaim and apply to a world of sinners through appointed vocations and offices, but they are not necessary for the success of the plan of salvation that the Father has given to the Son. It is simply the good pleasure of the Lord to work through His Church and its servants of the Word. The Lord continues today to raise up lambs that are sent out into the wolves' den to bleat His Gospel, through which sinners are saved. Indeed, the evangelist Luke is no longer being sent out. He is in glory along with Timothy and the apostle Paul, but his witness continues to be used by the Lord in every age to rescue sinners from the forces of darkness by the light of his Gospel. And to be sure, each of you in your vocations are used in countless ways by the Lord to prepare hearts and minds for the Lord's visitation through the saving Gospel. And there also, your role is instrumental and honorific, not necessary.

We give thanks to God for the continuing witness of St. Luke and all the evangelists that He has sent out into the harvest through the ages. What a privilege they have had to be used as stewards of the saving gifts and work of Christ to the nations. And we thank God for the opportunity that we have where He has placed us to labor in His vineyard to be instruments of His temporal and eternal blessings by which his love and mercy are showered, and sinners are blessed and saved by His word of Grace.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. A-men.