

Homily for Saint Luke the Evangelist (Transferred)
October 19, 2020
By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

This comment in the entry for Saint Luke the Evangelist in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* caught my attention: Origen [the theologian who lived c. 185 to c. 254] is the first to identify Luke with the ‘brother’ of 2 Cor. 8:18, a view followed by the Anglican Collect for this feast.”¹ But the name Luke is not found in Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians. There is only one mention of a man named Luke in Paul’s seven letters whose authorship by Paul himself is widely undisputed, where Paul lists Luke as a “fellow worker.”²

The first two American Prayer Books, 1789 and 1892, used this collect from the Prayer Book of the Church of England:

Almighty God, who calledst Luke the Physician, whose praise is in the Gospel, to an Evangelist and Physician of the soul: may it please thee that, by the wholesome medicines of the doctrine

¹ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (ODCC) 2ed. (New York: Oxford University Press 1978), s.v. “Luke, St.,” 844–85.

² Philemon 1:24. Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 5–7.

*delivered by him, all the diseases of our souls may be healed; through the merits of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*³

As important as the ancient and biblical understanding that illness is a sign of God's judgment on a sinner, behind this prayer is the Protestant Reformation. Saints, relics, and miracles associated with them are gone.

In 1928, new attention was given to the Visitation of the Sick. The service renewed a New Testament ministry of healing, and Saint Luke got a new collect:

*Almighty God, who didst inspire thy servant Saint Luke the Physician, to set forth in the Gospel the love and healing power of thy Son; Manifest in thy Church the like power and love, to the healing of our bodies and our souls; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*⁴

One can date a new understanding of sickness by following the chemical and biological discoveries of nineteenth-century inventors and scientists—and medical practices. Think of Florence Nightingale and Louis Pasteur among many others. One might also

³ *The Book of Common Prayer* (1892), 215–16.

⁴ *The Book of Common Prayer* (1928), 253.

mention the decision of Queen Victoria not to bring forth her seventh and subsequent two children in pain.

Under Henry VIII, the complete suppression of monasticism in England started in 1532 and was completed in eight years. Shakespeare would speak of “Bare ruined choirs”—the ruins of so many monastic foundations—in a sonnet on life and death. Relics and statues were taken down and destroyed. The king and many others became enormously wealthy.

Although Henry arranged the arrest and execution of William Tyndale in 1536, Diarmaid MacCulloch writes, “Only a year after Tyndale’s death Thomas Cromwell secured a royal order for every parish in England to buy a complete [English language] Bible.”⁵ The struggle for a Protestant Church of England would continue until James II was deposed in 1688.

In Luke’s two books, his Gospel and Acts, we find healing of body and soul by Jesus and his apostles. My favorite chapter in Luke is the fifteenth, where Jesus speaks of a lost sheep, a lost coin, and not just a prodigal son, who comes home, but an elder son who stands outside. Luke leaves the father inviting the elder

⁵ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Viking, 2010), 627.

son, who never left, to join in the feast. We are left to decide if we will follow the God the Father into the banquet to which we have been invited.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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