

Sermon for Morning Prayer
St. Luke the Evangelist

Lessons:¹

First Lesson: Here beginneth the seventh Verse of the fifty-second Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.²

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion.

“Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.³

“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he shewed [SHOWD] himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the

kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!”⁴ In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Development:

Just picture an ancient walled Near Eastern city during wartime. The gates are closed at all times and ingress and egress are strictly controlled, to assure that no enemy agents slip in or out. The walls are patrolled by vigilant sentries, who scan the surrounding hills as far as they can see, to give warning if a hostile army should approach. Every citizen lives in fear that the city may soon be besieged, bringing all the horrible risks of famine, disease, and rapine.

Fathers fear for their wives and children, who will be helpless if the city is assaulted. Wives and mothers fear for their husbands and sons, who will be forced to risk their lives in defence of the city if it is besieged. Children, as they always do, sense their elders’ worries and fear being left orphans, with no one to care for them.

These very real fears afflict every day as the city’s people work and haunt every night, when they try to sleep.

⁴ Isaiah 52:7 (KJV).

⁵ Isaiah 52:7 (KJV).

⁶ Psalm 98:3-4 (MCV).

⁷ St. Matthew 3:11 (KJV); *cf.* St. Mark 1:8, St. Luke 3:16, and St. John 1:33.

⁸ Acts 2:3.

⁹ Isaiah 53:3-7 (KJV).

¹⁰ Romans 2:13; James 1:22-23.

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Then one day, in the midst of all this anxiety for the future, the sentries spy, far off, a single figure appearing where the highway crests the top of one of the surrounding hills. The figure is a running man, who continues running down the road toward the city. His arms are waving and, when he draws near enough to be heard, he shouts to the soldiers on the top of the city's gate.

“Peace!” he calls. He is the herald sent by their king to tell the people of this city that their fears are at an end: the war is over and the city is saved. Every one of its inhabitants is saved. Relief and gratitude spread quickly among all the people of that city; this runner bears the most welcome words, the most beautiful message, that any of them have ever heard.

For the rest of their lives, all there will remember how they felt when the messenger's news reached them. God has been good to them and they rush to their temples in thanksgiving.

This is the image Isaiah sets before us in today's First Lesson: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!”⁵

Of course, Isaiah, like any good Old Testament prophet, is writing using metaphors from everyday life to describe unusual events. He is also writing on two levels: his first readers would have assumed that he was writing to declare some coming act of God that would rejuvenate the decayed political kingdom of Israel and make it once again a military power. We, however, know that he was actually writing about the coming of the Son of God who would save not just ancient Israel but the whole world and would do so not in a political and military sense but in a spiritual one.

This image of the heavenly herald who runs with the news of salvation is repeated in the ninety-eighth Psalm:

“The Lord declared his salvation; * his righteousness hath he openly showed in the light of the heathen;

“He hath remembered his mercy and truth toward the house of Israel; * and all the ends of the world have seen the salvation of our God.”⁶

Again, unlike Isaiah or the Psalmist’s original readers, we know that the herald who was to come was John the Baptist, the forerunner of Our Lord. We also recall that John announced the Messiah by calling his hearers to repent and be baptized as a sign of repentance.

Each of the Evangelists recorded John the Baptist as explaining the difference between his Old Testament baptism with water and the New Testament, Sacramental, baptism which was to come: “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire. . . .”⁷ Here, “with fire” is, of course, a reference to the visible manifestations of the Holy Spirit as He descended upon the Apostles and disciples on Pentecost.⁸

So we see that Isaiah foretold the coming of the herald, who was John the Baptist, and John foretold the coming of the Messiah, who was Jesus the Christ. And the account of Jesus’ coming and ministering was written down by the four Evangelists, which is why Isaiah’s beautiful image is an appropriate introduction to the day on which we remember St. Luke, who was one of those Evangelists and whose life’s work was to transmit to us the Gospel story.

For us, the citizens of the New Israel, the essence of that story is as Isaiah told us it would be:

“ . . . He is despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

“Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”⁹

Conclusion:

But we do not remember St. Luke only as one who wrote the Gospel story, for he was one who lived it as well. Throughout the long, weary missionary journeys that he recorded in Acts of the Apostles, he accompanied those Apostles, sharing in their troubles and burdens, supporting their efforts to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to the world. St. Luke was, if anyone ever was, not merely a hearer of the Word, but a doer also.¹⁰

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¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Fixed Holy Days* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xliv (PECUSA 1928/1943).

² Isaiah 52:7-10 (KJV).

³ Acts 1:1-8 (KJV).