

Title: *The gospel according to Luke – a first person account*

### **Luke 1:1-4**

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup>just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, <sup>3</sup>I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup>so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

### **Luke 4:16-21**

<sup>16</sup> When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup>and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

<sup>18</sup> ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,

<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’

<sup>20</sup>And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup>Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’

### For Reflection

When we look back over the gospel of Luke, we find that there are consistently three places where we meet God: 1) In scripture, 2) in prayer, 3) and among the poor.

-Mary Schertz, professor of New Testament, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary

It is a privilege to be here with you this morning. I am Luke. Some call my 'St. Luke', which is a bit embarrassing – I did write about ¼ of your New Testament, but a saint, I mean – who is to say. Others call me 'doctor Luke', as I am quite educated and polished in my writings. And, it is rumored that I am the doctor who traveled with Paul on many of his journeys, but I am not here to talk about that.

Your pastor asked me to speak with you today on why I wrote my gospel, why I put ink to parchment – why I dedicated years of my life in researching something outside of the medical profession – why I spent years traveling around Galilee to interview elders who were still alive that had met Jesus, who had heard him or seen him with their own ears and eyes; why I spent countless hours talking with those whose parents and aunts and uncles and neighbors had heard Jesus. I traveled to talk to the communities of Jesus' followers whose lives were completely changed by following him. This was years worth of work for me, for I was not an eye witness to the Jesus event – I was not alive when Jesus was alive – so writing this was not simple recall of what I had seen and heard. It took years of work. So, why did I dedicate my life to this?

You see, there had been a few other accounts of Jesus' life written down, and there were many stories being told about him. But, after I began doing interviews, after I began traveling the countryside and meeting those whose lives had been touched – I knew that many of these accounts were incomplete. As I heard and saw how whole communities were changed forever because of one story that Jesus told or one thing he did, well, I saw where some of these other

accounts of Good News did not tell the entire picture of Jesus' life – so I wrote my orderly account, to the best of my ability, with the help of Theophilus, my dear friend and benefactor.

You see, I don't know what kind of questions people are asking in your day, but in my day there were numerous people experiencing extreme poverty. There was an elite and wealthy class of Romans who had built much of their wealth through the spoils of war and by exploiting the peasant farmer and craftsman with low wages – their rule of law was harsh for non-Romans – and for the Jewish people, they had destroyed their temple. It was a dark time. And so, people were asking: Is God faithful? Is God active? Is God working in our lives? People were looking around and they were wondering, especially after the temple had come down: Where was God?

So I wrote this – to help people see where God was working – not in old and expected ways of the good old days of David and Solomon, but in new and fresh ways.

I don't know what the rulers are like in your day, but in my day, they were harsh and uncompromising. They seemed to be godless men, though they claimed to be gods themselves. They regularly tortured prisoners and used Capital Punishment – they sent their armies throughout the known world to conquer and intimidate. They chased people from their native homelands. So many in my time were asking, “Why do the wicked prosper?”

So I wrote this – to help illuminate that perhaps God was not working in and through government leaders at all, but through God's people – these small scattered communities of Jesus followers whose lives were oriented around the life and teachings of Jesus – communities who were transformed by his ways, his words, and his touch.

You see, so much of what had been written about Jesus in fifty years since he had been gone did not tell the whole story – many of, what I considered to be the most important pieces had gone untold. For example, some who were at the execution of Jesus, they remember a conversation that happened between Jesus and some other men who were also being executed for their crimes. One of these men was mocking Jesus – can you believe that – in his final acts on earth, with his final breaths he was mocking another man. Amazing what we will do to make ourselves feel better about our own life circumstances – using your final words to try to mock and shame another. But, there was also, I was told a second man – who sought to stand-up for Jesus, who used his final breath to proclaim the innocence of Jesus to this man. You see, no one else had written that story down – but without this story, we would not have a full picture of Jesus. So, I had to write.

I don't know how the media works in your day, but in my day much of what was written and told was funded by the wealthy and the highly educated – historians and authors had benefactors paying them for their work. Because of this, much of what is told and written, it maintains a certain view of the world – the status quo – because we do not want to upset those who are paying for our work. But as I heard story after story about Jesus, what I heard was about someone who completely changed everything around. He said the first would be last; he told a story about a wealthy man who ended up damned while a poor beggar ended up with Abraham in paradise – even before his birth, many report that an angel told his mother that the lowly would be lifted up and rich would be sent away empty. Well, this is no life that maintained the status quo – so I had to write these things.

I don't know how the poor are treated in your day, but in my day it was a harsh life – many died from lack of clean water, from lack of enough food – most were ignored by the wealthy and the rulers. I am sure it is much different now, but that is what it was like in my day. But as I traveled and interviewed people, I learned that Jesus elevated the poor – that he spent time with the poor and even fed them. Who would believe a leader spending time with the poor, having dinners with the poor – in my day leaders dined with the wealthy and with other political leaders – they did not sit on hillsides with peasants. I heard that often when Jesus would teach, he would say, “blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” He taught that the kingdom of God belonged to the poor, not the wealthy, not the powerful – amazing – I had never heard anything like it before or since. I had to write this, how Jesus lifted up the poor – how he gave them worth and dignity – how he empowered them. I had to write to help paint the full picture.

I don't know what place women have in your society, but in my day women were not highly regarded – they did not have much of a place at the table – their opinions and voices were not heard, they did not go to the synagogue, they could not even testify in court or own property. But as I traveled about, only fifty years after Jesus walked the earth, I found that many of his followers were women – not only this, but leaders in some Christian communities were women – like in Philippi, there was a whole community of followers of Jesus who were begun by this fabulous woman Lydia – she was quite a character. Well, I was intrigued how was this possible – that arising in this man-centered world there were women at the center of Christian communities. As I asked about Jesus, I heard story after story: Jesus' resurrected body was first

seen by women; Jesus' mother Mary was strong and powerful – a servant of God; a woman, I was even told – once washed Jesus' feet with his tears – for many leaders this would have been a scandal, but Jesus called it an act of love.

So, I had to write about this. The world had to know about these things, especially about his mother, no one else had written about Jesus' mother. I can't understand that. So I wrote.

I don't know how foreigners are treated in your day, I am sure they are welcomed and you do not worry so much about who was born where – you are more sophisticated now and probably don't worry so much about borders and blood lines – but in my day, this was not the case. If you were a Roman, you had many rights, if you were not a Roman, well, let's just say you had many fewer rights. And for Jesus' people, for the Jews, they were very particular about where you were from, about what blood coursed through your veins. If you were not from the right places, people would not associate with you – my parents recall times in their lives when they were called names like “Gentile Dog”, and if you were from Samaria you were treated with suspicion. I, myself, do not come from Jewish ancestry – so I take this very personally. As I traveled I found that the followers of Jesus treated me as anyone else, they treated me as an equal. As I traveled I learned that the followers of Jesus were saying things like “there is no longer any distinction between Jews and Gentiles, between men and women, between slaves and free persons.”

Amazing – no one else dared to say such things. I heard story after story of Jesus breaking with these old ways – that he did not care what country you were from – he dined with people, no matter what country they were from. I was even told by many people about this famous story of Jesus, where a Samaritan was the hero of the story.

Of course, being a foreigner myself, I had to write about this – I had to write about this man – about this Messiah.

You see, during my day things felt so dark and bleak. We sometimes wondered if the feeling of darkness was the end...but I realized, in learning about the life and work of Jesus, that this darkness was not the darkness of death, it was the darkness of the womb – that new life lay just on the other side. That this darkness was not the end, it was just the changing of the times, the changing of eras – the status quo never goes down without a fight. I am a doctor, so that metaphor works for me, I hope it does for you as well.

Well, I must go, the hospital is paging me. I will leave you with this: You, who are lovers of God, if your world is anything like mine was – if you are still in need of light and hope – then I hope that this story is your story – I pray that you know it as well as you know the story of your own parents and grandparents – that this story shapes you in how you live and love – you, most excellent lovers of God.