

October 18, 2026 – 2 Timothy 4:5-18 & Luke 10:1-9

When we think of St Luke, the first thing that probably comes to mind about him is his work as a writer. After all, Luke is responsible for writing a significant portion of the New Testament. He gave us the Gospel that bears his name, telling us of the birth of Jesus, His ministry among sinners, His death and resurrection, and His ascension into heaven. He also wrote the Book of Acts, recording the work of the apostles as the risen Christ continued to gather His Church and send His Gospel into the world.

But there's another aspect of Luke's ministry that I want to focus on today. Luke was also a companion and fellow worker to the Apostle Paul. Traveling with him, sharing in his missionary labors, and remaining with him even when Paul was imprisoned in Rome. Luke served the Church not only by proclaiming the Gospel in writing, but also by standing beside a brother in Christ who needed his support.

That last part of Luke's ministry deserves some added attention, I think. Because as our opening hymn this morning mentions in the second verse, not everyone is called to preach like Paul. But every Christian is called to love and serve his neighbor, and that includes the neighbor sitting beside him in the pew. The work of the Church is not something we are meant to accomplish alone. God gives us brothers and sisters in Christ so that we might encourage one another, bear one another's burdens, and strengthen one another in the faith.

Consider today's Gospel. Jesus sends out seventy-two disciples ahead of Him, instructing them to proclaim that the kingdom of God has come near. But notice how He sends them: two by two. He doesn't send them out as isolated individuals. He sends them together. They need one another as they go into the world, facing rejection, hardship, and opposition. They need one another to share the burden, encourage one another when the work is difficult, and remind one another of the message they have been sent to proclaim.

This pattern continues throughout the New Testament. Paul almost always had a companion as he traveled: Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, and others. He entrusted the work of the Gospel to fellow laborers and depended on their assistance. And among the most faithful of those companions was Luke.

In the closing verses of this letter, that we heard this morning, Paul writes, "*Luke alone is with me.*" Paul is in prison, anticipating the end of his earthly life. Some of his companions have departed for other places, and others have left him for less admirable reasons. Demas, Paul tells us, deserted him because he loved the present world. Alexander the coppersmith did him great harm. Paul has experienced the painful reality of betrayal and abandonment.

But Luke remains. In a moment when Paul could easily have felt forgotten and alone, he had a brother in Christ who remained beside him. And that companionship mattered.

Paul, of all people, didn't need to be told that God was with him. He had proclaimed that truth to countless others. He had endured beatings, shipwrecks, hunger, and persecution for the sake of Christ. He knew the promises of God. Yet even Paul, an apostle chosen by the risen Lord Himself, benefited from the companionship of another Christian.

Because faith in God's promises doesn't mean that we have no need for one another. Trusting in Christ doesn't make us immune to loneliness, grief, discouragement, or fear. And that's exactly why the Church must be a place where Christians strengthen each other, rather than tear each other down.

Unfortunately, that doesn't always happen. And it's so easy to turn our conversations toward gossip. To repeat rumors without knowing whether they're true. To nurse bitter grudges against those who have offended us. It's so easy to criticize our fellow Christians rather than encourage them. And that just leads us to make the burdens of those around us heavier, instead of helping them carry those burdens.

The Church is not a gathering of people who have no struggles, no sins, and no weaknesses. If that were the requirement for membership, there would be no Church at all. The Church is a gathering of sinners whom Christ has forgiven. People who still need His mercy every day.

We come together not because we've already mastered the Christian life, but because we need the gifts Christ gives. We need to hear His Word of forgiveness. We need to receive His body and blood. We need the encouragement of fellow Christians who will remind us of God's promises. And they need the same from us.

But we're far from perfect at this task. We're not always the faithful companions God has called us to be. And sometimes we abandon those who need us. Sometimes we're even the source of another person's discouragement. The example of the saints is an example we are called to emulate. But it's also an example that convicts of how we have failed. Luke was a faithful friend to Paul. Far more faithful than we often are. And for that, we need to repent.

At the same, though, the example of the saints is also an example of Christ's forgiveness. Think about the loneliness of our Lord's passion. Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus gathered disciples around Himself. He taught them, prayed with them, and prepared them to carry His Gospel into the world. Yet when the hour of His suffering arrived, His disciples fled. Peter denied Him. The crowds rejected Him.

And as He hung upon the cross, bearing the sins of the world, even the comforting presence of His Father was hidden from Him beneath the judgment He endured for us. Until Jesus cried out, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

Christ endured that abandonment for you. He entered the deepest darkness of sin and death, bearing the judgment that should have been yours. He suffered the separation from God that your sins deserved, so that through His death and resurrection you might be reconciled to the Father.

He was abandoned so that you would be received. He endured death so that you would have eternal life. And He rose from the grave so that nothing, not even death itself, could separate you from the love of God.

Therefore, you are never alone. Christ has promised His Church, *"I am with you always, to the end of the age."* He sends His Holy Spirit to dwell with His people, to comfort them, to strengthen their faith, and to keep them in the one true faith. And He gathers those people into His Church, where His Word is proclaimed and His Sacraments are given.

Here, in the fellowship of believers, Christ provides tangible reminders of His abiding presence. When a fellow Christian speaks God's promises to you, Christ is strengthening you through His Word. When a brother or sister prays for you, encourages you, or helps you through a time of trouble, Christ is caring for you through the members of His body.

That's exactly what Paul experienced through Luke. Even in prison, even as he faced the end of his earthly life, Paul was not left entirely without human companionship. Luke was with him. And yet Paul knew that his ultimate confidence rested in something greater than Luke's presence.

Earlier in our Epistle, Paul writes that at his first defense no one came to stand by him, but then he adds, *"But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me."* Paul had experienced abandonment, but he had not been abandoned by Christ. The Lord remained faithful, strengthening His apostle so that the Gospel might be proclaimed even before those who held him captive.

That's our comfort, too. Our fellow Christians will sometimes fail us. We will sometimes fail them. Even the most faithful Christian companion can't remain at our side forever. But Christ will not fail us. He has conquered death, and He has promised to remain with His people until the end of the age. Through His Spirit, He continues to sustain us, and through His Church, He continues to give us companions for the journey.

So let us give thanks for St. Luke, not just because he wrote the Gospel that bears his name, but also because he reminds us of the importance of faithful Christian friends. Let us pray that God would make us more like Luke, willing to stand beside our brothers and sisters in their time of need. Let us resist the temptation to spread rumors, nurture bitterness, or use our words to tear others down. Instead, let us speak words that encourage, forgive those who have sinned against us, seek reconciliation where there is division, and bear one another's burdens in love.

The harvest is still plentiful, and the Lord still sends His people into the world to proclaim that the kingdom of God has come near. But he doesn't send us out alone. He gives us His Holy Spirit, who keeps us in the faith, and He gives us His Church, where we receive His gifts and strengthen one another for the work He has placed before us. And above all, He gives us Jesus Christ, who went to the cross alone so that we might never be alone in life or in death, until that day when all the saints are together again. Amen.