

From Richard Hinder

Dear Friends

Yesterday and today the Church worldwide draws attention to Saint Luke - Apostle and composer of both Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles.

In today's world where so much news seems to be written from a biased, prejudiced or selective point of view, it is attractive for many people to restrict their reading and watching of news to channels (radio, TV, Internet and paper) which fit most well with their own prejudices and point of view. Such a narrowing of viewpoint results in partial truth at best. The full truth is obscured so much that it is barely recognisable.

Look back to the first century AD: in the 0030s to 0070s: the first forty or so years after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Many stories would have been circulating by word of mouth: "Have you heard? Well, let me tell you...."

Let us remember the old party game where people sit around the edge of a room and a sentence is passed in whispers from one starting person to the next person on their left (or right): from one person to the next, to the next, to the next: all around the circle. It is amusing to compare the initial message to the one which comes back, having travelled through perhaps a dozen repetitions. It is amazing how much detail in the sentence has been lost and how much the meaning has been mangled.

Back in the early church the apostles were concerned to document the truth as they had seen it: not passed on through other observers. Apostles were those disciples who had walked for a long time with Jesus through his years of mission throughout Israel, through his time of persecution, time of trial, crucifixion, resurrection and his weeks as the risen Christ up to his ascension: and had witnessed the coming of the Holy Spirit some weeks later.

So much had happened and with so much to do in establishing the early church, the apostles had little time in those early years to reflect upon the life of Jesus and what it all meant.

Mark was the first to write his account - very much in a classical Greco-Roman style befitting of a great warrior who died in battle.

Luke wrote a much more extensive work: covering not only the life and times of Jesus but also the development of the early church. His work is often known as 'Luke-Acts' but is counted as two separate volumes in the library we know as the Bible.

Matthew later wrote his account largely for the Jews in Israel and the wider Jewish diaspora along the edges of the Mediterranean Sea.

The other major volume on the life of Jesus came much later in the early years of the second century from the community around John.

It is Luke's account which is the most comprehensive in its overall timescale. Luke begins with an angel appearing before a priest Zechariah, the soon to be father of John the Baptist, foretelling of the birth of his son. This was prior to the birth of Jesus. Luke ends his writing in Acts chapter 28 with St Paul in Rome saying:



SAINT LUKE: CHURCH OF SANT'AGNESE IN AGONE, ROME

25b The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah,

26 “Go to this people and say,
You will indeed listen, but never understand,
and you will indeed look, but never perceive.

27 For this people’s heart has grown dull,
and their ears are hard of hearing,
and they have shut their eyes;
so that they might not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and understand with their heart and turn—
and I would heal them.”

28 Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.’

We see here that Luke understood the tendency of humanity to close their minds to news they do not want to hear.

Luke comes across as a man who understood all too clearly that documenting the truth is vital to its preservation and is the only way to suppress distortion. This is why, week after week, we need to go back to the verses of the Bible. Yes, modern interpretations of the message are helpful: but they can be misinterpreted. We need a solid anchor in the best translations of the Bible available to us today.

In a preface to Luke-Acts, Luke writes a note to his student Theophilus, explaining why he had written [see Acts 1:1-4]:

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

It is so important that we all search out the truth in our daily lives: dedicating ourselves to the suppression of falsehoods. We know where we can find out the truth about Jesus Christ: in the gospels.

In this day and age of the pandemic we need to have a heightened awareness of many falsehoods and half-truths spreading on social media. Let us all, like Luke, take care to investigate everything carefully so that when we pass on messages ‘others may know the truth’.

May the Lord be with you, comfort and bless you in all you do. Amen

Richard Hinder