

## Study Guide for the Gospel of Luke

### *Approaching the Gospel of Luke: Initial Reflections*

**Assigned Reading:** Luke, Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, chapter 6.

After you listened to the lecture, and have done the reading in Powell, the study guide has a twofold purpose:

- 1) To facilitate continued reflection and integration of the material by appropriating in the reading of select themes and passages in the Gospel of Luke.
- 2) To provide focus questions for group discussion of the Gospel of Luke in the light of the lecture and the reading.

Before you work through the study guide do the following:

- Make a brief list of the ideas and insights you encountered in the lecture and the textbook that challenged your working assumptions about the Gospel of Luke.
- Make a list of questions you would like to investigate further or discuss with others engaged in the class.

Read through the Gospel of Luke again in one sitting and do the following:

- Summarize in your own words what you think Luke's story of Jesus is about.
- Make a list of important themes and some of the ways your own understanding of Luke is different from what you heard in the lecture and read in Powell. Identify important questions the lecture and reading raised for you, and select key ideas and passages you would like to revisit.

### *Deeper Engagement with the Gospel of Luke*

The first two chapters of Luke's gospel, often called the "infancy narratives" reveal a great deal of Luke's theology. Not only does the gospel begin with Zechariah and Elizabeth, both righteous and devout Jews, but in the words of Gabriel and then speech inspired by the Holy Spirit, Luke outlines how God had long promised to be merciful to God's people Israel and to the Gentiles as well. Using the psalms, words from the prophets, and even the stories of the Exodus and of Hannah, Luke identifies God as one who is faithful, merciful, just, and who remembers his people and covenant promises. The purpose of God's saving intervention through Jesus is to ready the people (1:17) for a life in which they might "serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days" of their lives (1:74-75). In Luke's gospel Jesus becomes the example of such service. Through Jesus' parables, stories, and example, his followers are called upon to recognize that such a life is a foretaste of the kingdom itself. Such a foretaste brings joy, though it does not make for an easy life!

Not only does Jesus eat with outcasts and sinners (see, for example, 15:1-3), but his disciples are called upon to be wise providers of nourishment for their fellow humans (12:42-44). Luke's gospel is filled with unique parables (not in Matthew or Mark) that underline both the responsibility and joy of a life of service. Consider the story of the Good Samaritan, the stories of seeking the lost in Luke 15, of the Prodigal Son who comes home at last to feast, of Lazarus and the rich man who utterly failed in his calling to provide nourishment to one who needed it. You can think of more of these parables and stories. The ancient world was a hungry world. Jewish scripture, as well as the stories about the gods that circulated among non-Jewish peoples, promised heavenly banqueting as an image of the fulfillment of need and provision of joy for humans. Luke strongly emphasizes the calling of believers to provide this for one another.

In fact, when one gets to the book of Acts, "eating together with glad and generous hearts" is a mark of the early community (2:46), a foretaste of the full kingdom to come (3:20-21). The richness of this image is at the heart of Jesus' post-resurrection appearance at the table in Emmaus (24:30-31). It is in the breaking of the bread (nourishing to the body), as it was in the breaking of his body (nourishing to mind, heart, and spirit) that Jesus is recognizable. In our own day the abundance of food given to and for others is still a powerful image of justice throughout the earth and the abundance of life that God promises. Luke speaks of salvation as a way to talk about this image, a word that in Greek means not only life in the hereafter with God, but health, wholeness and well-being both now and then.

### *An Exercise in the Practice of Interpretation*

The following exercise is designed to help you explore in more depth a discipleship of justice and feeding in Luke's gospel. Do the following work on your own in order to discuss your learning with others.

- Read the “sermon on the plain” in Luke 6:12-26. Note the sequence of events in these verses.
- Compare this passage with Matthew 5:1-12. How do these two interpretations of Jesus’ “inaugural sermon” differ? Compared with Matthew, what emphases does Luke make?
- Find another parable or story in Luke’s gospel that illustrates one of the beatitudes or woes. For example, you might say that the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-30) illustrates 6:25, “Woe to you who are full now....” A concordance might help you make connections between the vocabulary of the beatitudes and woes with various parables or stories. Notes in some study bibles can also be helpful. Feel free to come up with as many illustrations as you want.
- Finally, what is the connection of “joy” or “gladness” with the blessings of discipleship? Use a concordance to look up the words associated with joy (delight, joy, rejoice, gladness in their varied forms). Where do these words occur? Does Luke make connections between joy, discipleship, and service? How do you understand those connections, if any?

**Discussion Question**

- Use the last connection in the paragraph above as a discussion question in your group.
- If Jesus uses both the beatitudes and woes and the parables to help us understand what the reign of God will be like, how does this conviction shape our lives as believers?
- Is there anything in your life that you would like to change in line with your deepened understanding of the link between service and joy? What do you need to do to make the change? What stands in your way? Perhaps members of the group might covenant to support one another in making small changes in individual lives or in committing to some group action in the congregation, the synod, or some other group.