

AFRICA BIBLE COMMENTARY

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stry, Luke shows e unique role he e beginning and o himself as the . However, in this mine whether he viour, the Christ ersary, confronts e the start of his n of salvation at

the outset by enticing Jesus to break faith with God. His proposal about bread and his quotations from Scripture (4:3) both involve things that are normally considered good. Yet under both is hidden the devil's poison. But Jesus, like John the Baptist (3:7-9), can unmask hidden evil and so he rejects these suggestions in order to remain God's Holy One and to speak for God as God's prophet (4:4, 8, 12). For all his power, Satan is no match for Jesus.

Then Luke ends this story with a note that will haunt the narrative: *The devil ... left him ... until an opportune time* (4:13). Towards the close of the book, we will read that after Jesus has completed his messianic teaching of Israel in the temple, 'Satan entered Judas ... he consented and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over' (22:3-6).

4:14-22 The Message of Liberation

At the outset it should be noted that the political language of Luke 4:14-44 is unmistakable. Immediately after undergoing his rites of passage, Jesus announces the five purposes for which God has sent him: *to preach good news to the poor ... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour* (4:18-19).

This announcement takes place during Jesus' visit to the synagogue of Nazareth where he publicly presents himself to the nation as God's Messiah. Invited by the leader of the synagogue to read from the Scriptures, Jesus stands, is handed a scroll that he unrolls to the intended passage, reads the passage, rolls the scroll up again, hands it back to the attendant, and sits down to speak while all eyes remain fixed on him (4:16-20). The interest of those present is intense, and Luke prolongs the silence surrounding the reading to make it clear that the eyes of all in the synagogue are fixed on Jesus' every move.

Jesus' exposition of the text is profound in its brevity: *And he began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'* (4:21). Perhaps, this is the shortest and the best sermon ever preached because *all spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth* (4:22).

It is clear that from the beginning to end Jesus was oriented to the needs of the poor, both those who were poor within themselves and those who were poor in social, economic and political contexts. His parents were not wealthy (2:24) and lived in a despised village (John 1:46). In his public ministry he lived poorly, mixed with the ordinary folk who were the poor, the 'prisoners', the 'blind' and the 'oppressed' (4:18). Furthermore, he shocked the elite by eating with social outcasts (5:30; 19:7). He acted and spoke in a manner that caused him to be seen as a serious threat by the various establishment groups in his country and by the Roman Empire. Eventually, the religious establishment and the Roman colonial power murdered Jesus.

4:23-6:16 A Ministry of Word and Deed

4:23-44 Ministry Launched

If someone has a message from God to give, the natural place to deliver that message is the place where people come together to worship or to hear the word of God. That is precisely what Jesus did when he began his campaign in a synagogue. He has described the nature of his ministry, saying that its content is preaching 'good news to the poor' and setting at liberty those that are oppressed (4:18-19). Its basis is the anointing of Jesus with the Holy Spirit (4:18). But Jesus is also clear about the results of his ministry (4:23-30). He will be rejected by his own people and he hints that there will be a wider mission to all kinds of people (4:23-27). The portrait of Jesus in this section is of someone who is empowered by the Holy Spirit. This empowering divides those Jesus meets into two groups: those who recognize God in Jesus' words and works and those who do not (4:28-30).

Luke then moves on to tell the first stories about Jesus' healing ministry. These involve an exorcism in Capernaum (4:31-35) and the story of healing of Peter's mother-in-law (4:38-39). Such activities brought Jesus a tremendous following (4:37, 42; 5:1-3) and led the people of Capernaum to try to keep him in their area (4:42). But Jesus responded as he had at Nazareth, indicating that it was necessary that he move on (4:43). The word of God cannot be restricted to one single place.

5:1-11 The Calling of Simon Peter

One day Jesus used Simon's boat as a pulpit from which to preach a sermon (5:3). Simon sat at Jesus' side right through the sermon but does not seem to have been particularly moved by it. Sensing this, Jesus told Simon to put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch (5:4). Significantly, even in expressing his doubts to Jesus, Simon addresses him as Master (5:5a). It is a term that subordinates used to address a superior. Perhaps Simon used this term because of his earlier experience of the miracle Jesus had performed in curing his mother-in-law of a great fever (4:38-39). Perhaps merely to please Jesus and show his gratitude for the healing, but with no hope of catching fish and making a profit, he let the net down (5:5b). Suddenly he has so many fish in his net that he has to beckon James and John, his business partners, to bring their boat to help him. In the end, both boats are so full of fish that they are in danger of sinking (5:6-7).

The effect upon Simon was understandable. He did not regard the miracle as a lesson in better fishing techniques that might improve his profits. All his attention was focused on the person of Jesus Christ (5:8a). His companions and his two business partners were equally astonished (5:9-10a).

Focusing his attention on Simon, Jesus tells him that he will now be joining Jesus in his own profession – which someone has translated as 'catching people alive' (5:10b). As the first of the disciples to be called, Simon Peter becomes both a spokesperson for the others and typical of them in their faith and weakness. Still, though Jesus focuses on Simon Peter, James and John share in Peter's commissioning. They respond to Jesus' words exactly as Peter does, leaving everything behind and following Jesus (5:11). It is remarkable that these men leave their profession and all their equipment to follow Jesus.

Today, we who have long known who Jesus is and what he requires of us in the sphere of our daily secular and sacred work may well have cause to feel even more insecure than Simon Peter when he cried out, *I am a sinful man* (5:8b). Our sinfulness as Christians may be seen in the substandard quality of our ministry in the world today, where poverty, gender inequality, a lack of housing, a lack of medical care, and many social ills prevail. We are not called to employment and service in the world for material profit, but primarily in order to please God and be engaged in the ministry of word and deed that 'catches people alive' and makes life liveable, humane and godly.

5:12-26 Believing in Divine Healing

In these episodes Luke gives more details about the healing ministry of Jesus, which was first mentioned in 4:31-41, and tells the story of two separate healings, one of a victim of leprosy and the other of a paralytic. The leper lived to testify to what Jesus had done for him (5:14) and the paralytic man went home healed both physically and spiritually – his sins forgiven and in right standing with God (5:20). For such individuals, being healed means being restored to one's extended family, friends and community. Health, therefore, implies safe integration into the life of society. Africans have long been aware of this, which is why we greet people by inquiring about their health and the health of their family members, even if the one being greeted is a total stranger. One does not only ask 'How are you?', but also 'How are your people?' Similarly, every farewell, even to a casual acquaintance, involves sending greetings to her or his family.

These human consequences of the healing must not be neglected. Our hearts are moved by the picture of the man falling on his face before Jesus pleading, *If you are willing, you can make me clean* (5:12, 24; see also Mark 1:40, Matt 8:2). We are also moved by the desperation of those who carried a paralysed man up onto the roof and let him down through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus (5:19). Jesus responds to the desperate faith of the leper and of those carrying the paralysed man and heals them. Such stories invite us to reflect on the church ministry of healing today.

A significant development in Africa is the rise of the African Instituted Churches (AICs). These dynamic and growing churches seek to have a truly African Christianity, not one that is imported from the West, and lay great stress on the theology and ministry of healing. They preach miraculous healing, or healing by the power of the Holy Spirit, and revive the linking of faith with health, healing and medicine that existed in biblical times.

The church as a whole is called to situate its understanding of health and healing within the African world view, which perceives health as more than merely physical well-being. Most Africans have not lost touch in their subconscious self with the world view that sees disease and misfortune as the result of malicious external factors. Fears of witchcraft, sorcery, taboos, curses, bad omens, malicious spirits and a host of other evil forces (often drawn from the interaction of traditional religions with Christianity and Islam with their devil, demons and jinn) are a reality to many Africans, regardless of education, socio-economic status or creed. Thus true health also involves spiritual, mental, physical, social and environmental harmony.

Any healing ministry in Africa that does not take African cosmology seriously is doomed to fail. The AICs have recognized this, and their healing does not aim to supplant medical treatment but to supplement it. Their prayers, visions, dreams, laying on of hands, use of holy water and oil, ashes, drums, staves and other rituals are aimed at dealing with practical problems of life, just as African traditional religion did and still does. In other words, in these churches the African world view is very much complemented by the biblical world view and the healing is done in the name of the Triune God, and particularly of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. We, too, need to take the social context into account as we seek to understand illness and the mediation of healing.

5:27-39 The Difference Jesus Makes

This passage consists of a series of accusations from the Pharisees about the lifestyle of Jesus and his followers and Jesus' answers. The first charge is that they associate with the wrong kind of people (5:30). They should not eat and drink with social outcasts. Jesus responds that the sick are the ones who need him, and, therefore, he as host invites sinners to eat with him (5:31-32).

The second charge is that the disciples' lifestyle is not serious enough. There is too much eating and drinking and not enough fasting and praying (5:33). Jesus says that fasting while proclaiming good news makes no more sense than fasting at a wedding feast. It is unthinkable (5:34-35).

Then Jesus tells a double parable. A piece of cloth from a new garment is not used to patch an old one because taking the piece would damage the new garment and the bright colours of the new cloth would not match the faded colours of

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