

Shedding Light on Luke's Gospel

Introduction

Starting at Advent and journeying through the season of Pentecost, Kairos follows the church calendar and lectionary. The lectionary is a resource used across the globe to guide the Church's teaching, meditation and reflection. The lectionary provides four passages for each Sunday: generally a selection from the Hebrew Bible, a Psalm, a selection from the New Testament epistles or Acts, and a selection from a Gospel.¹

The lectionary is structured into three different years: A, B, and C. Each year, one of the three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) serves as the primary guide through the Christian season (the Gospel of John is used throughout the lectionary each year). We are approaching the beginning of Year C (November 2009-November 2010) in which Luke's Gospel will be our primary guide.

Overview of the Gospel of Luke

- Who was Luke?
 - Traditionally, the writer of both the *Gospel According to Luke* and the *Acts of the Apostles*.
 - Two volumes comprising one whole work. The Gospel tells the continuing story of God through the person of Jesus, and Acts tells the continuing story of God through the work of the Holy Spirit.
 - An educated Gentile
 - An ancient historian
 - Luke 1:1-4 – “investigated everything”
 - A doctor?
 - Paul, in Colossians 4:14, refers to “our dear friend Luke, the doctor.” This could be (though is not necessarily) the same Luke who is the assumed author of Luke's Gospel and Acts. However, a “doctor” or “physician” in the 1st century might be more accurately likened to an anthropological philosopher rather than our current understanding of a modern medical doctor.

¹ You can find the Revised Common lectionary online at <http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu>

- What was Luke's World Like?

- A world in which peace and prosperity for Rome was achieved through subjugation and heavy taxation on conquered people groups (such as Israel).
- A world in which “social status and social stratification are paramount.”² See the below chart, which is applicable (though not specific) to the context of Jesus' world (Lenski, Gerhard Emmanuel. *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*, 284.). Notice the unequal power and privilege granted to the ruler, and the obvious difficulty in any kind of upward mobility (given the narrowness of the governing class). Also notice that the majority of the population is comprised of peasants, with the unclean, degraded, and expendable (lepers and others who are sick, those with disabilities, etc.) being a sizeable portion below the peasant level.

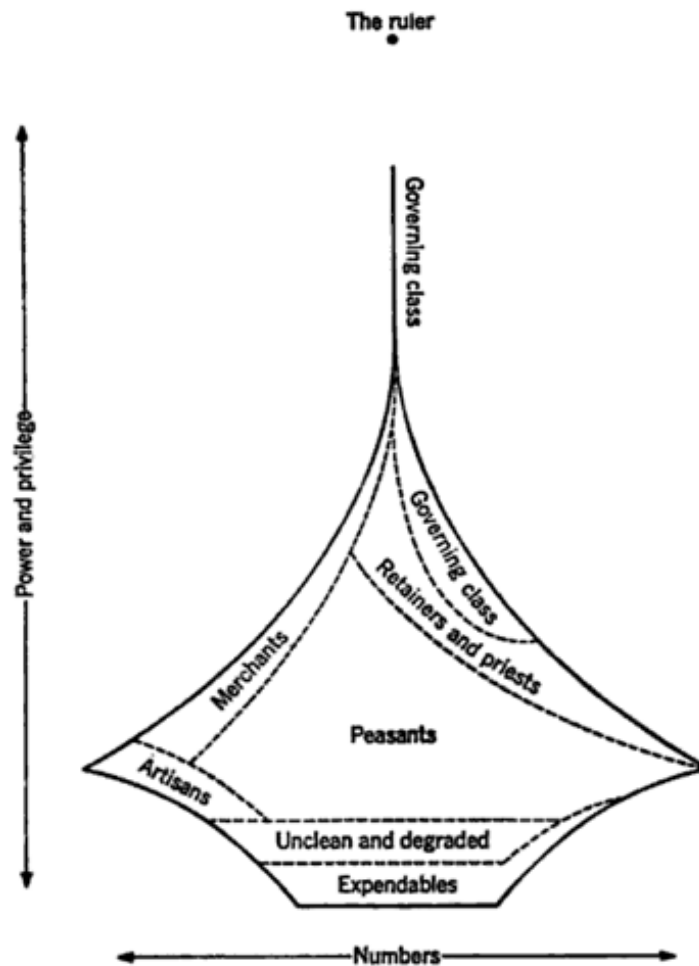


Figure 1 A graphic representation of the relationship among classes in agrarian societies.

² Green, 59.

- Purpose
 - **Luke's Mission:** To offer an “orderly account... so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught” (Lk 1:3-4) demonstrating that God’s universal plan of salvation is fulfilled in Jesus, the Messiah who fulfills the prophecies and hopes of the Hebrew Scriptures and the one who is empowered (and empowers others) by and through the work of God’s Spirit. Luke paints a picture of what it means to be aligned with God (through the “aligned” life of Jesus).
 - **Jesus’ Mission in Luke (in his own words recorded in Luke 4:18-19):** “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

- Outline of the Gospel
 - Preface and Birth Narrative (1:1-2:52)
 - Ministry in Galilee (3:1-9:50)
 - Journey to Jerusalem (9:51-19:27)
 - Ministry in Jerusalem (19:28-21:38)
 - Passion Narrative (22:1-23:56)
 - Resurrection Accounts (24:1-53)

- Major Themes in Luke
 - Salvation
 - Not just a future salvation (though there is a recognition/awareness of the importance of future consummation), but restoration of the present life.
 - Salvation includes both forgiveness of sins and deliverance from oppression (illness, spiritual, socio-economic, etc.).
 - “Salvation embraces the totality of embodied life, including its social, economic, and political concerns.”³
 - Salvation comes about through aligning oneself with Jesus.
 - Reversal Theme

³ Green, 25.

- Throughout Luke, the poor are exalted, hungry fed, lowly lifted up, etc. Those who should be outsiders are allowed “in.”
 - Focus on wealth, poverty, socio-economics, status, etc.
 - Language and stories emphasize the trajectory of gentile inclusion into the story of God’s salvation.
- Jesus in Luke
- Friend of Sinners
 - Portrayed as a prophet and the Davidic Messiah
 - Jesus aligned with God – calls people to align with him (therefore aligning themselves with God)
 - Empowered by the Spirit of God
 - See Luke 4:18-19.
 - Political language used (similar to language used to address Caesar), but Jesus is shown to offer salvation on a level beyond any ability of earthly ruler/power.

Reading Luke

At Kairos, we desire to be people shaped by the story God is writing, and one of the primary ways we receive that story is through the ancient texts of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. As we follow the lectionary through the upcoming seasons of the Christian calendar, we want to be immersed in the story of Jesus through the eyes of Luke.

Here are some suggestions and methods for diving in to Luke.

- (1) Read to **become familiarized** with the Gospel of Luke. Luke has 24 chapters; read a chapter a day and try to familiarize yourself with the “big picture” of Luke’s story. Do more than skim, but don’t focus on the small details in the text.
- (2) Read to **become formed** by the Gospel of Luke. Meditate on a few verses or passages (i.e. the songs of Zechariah or Mary, a parable, or a short saying of Jesus) and allow yourself to enter into the story. Place yourself in the story. Imagine Jesus speaking to you. In what ways is the text speaking to you? What does it mean for you to follow Jesus in the Gospel of Luke?
- (3) Read, hear, and experience the Gospel of Luke **in community**. Until the invention of the printing press, most communities shared a copy of the Scriptures and the standard practice was to experience the text through a communal reading. Amongst your family, friends, canvas groups, etc. schedule a few hours (~2 ½ to 3 for all 24 chapters) to read Luke out loud together, or pick a shorter portion of Luke to read and experience together.

Additional Resources (for studying Luke, the Christian calendar, etc.)

Green, Joel B. ***The Gospel of Luke***. (a dense and comprehensive engagement with Luke's Gospel. Great if you're looking for a detailed, historical, scholarly resource.)

Johnson, Luke Timothy. ***The Gospel of Luke*** (a commentary primarily concerned with the literary/narrative construction of Luke, shorter than Green's commentary and more detailed/comprehensive than Wright's)

Webber, Robert. ***Ancient-Future Time: Forming Spirituality through the Christian Year***. (a great look at how the Christian liturgical calendar plays into individual and communal spiritual growth and formation)

Wright, Tom. ***Luke for Everyone***. (an accessible and shorter commentary on Luke's Gospel. Great if you're looking for a resource to read alongside the text to provide basic overview and insight into Luke's story.)