

## feeding . . . gathering . . . carrying . . . leading . (Isaiah 40:11)

October 2, 2012

Dear Church Family,



This past Sunday I introduced our series this year in the Gospel of Luke, titled “Learning From Luke”. From the first four verses, we learn that this is an account of things that happened in history, remembered and passed on by eyewitnesses. Luke says he has investigated these things. He has consulted sources for his work, other accounts certainly (*many have undertaken*) and possibly direct interviews with eyewitnesses. However, Luke’s main goal is not to convince Theophilus that these things actually happened, rather his goal is to persuade him of the meaning and significance of “*what has been fulfilled among us*”. And Luke orders his account for that purpose. As we saw with Jesus’ visit to Nazareth, Luke will even report events out of sequence chronologically (as to how they happened in history) in order to emphasize important truths and meanings. We will be doing a narrative study of Luke, which means that we understand that Luke is telling us a story about Jesus. This story is not fiction, as it is about historical events, but it is a telling. We usually study the various stories or events within the gospels and glean meaning from them for our lives.

This is valuable and we all have favorite stories that have inspired, encouraged and challenged us. A narrative study looks at the gospel as one large story and pays attention to how that story is being told. This adds another dimension to our reading, one that is well suited to helping us to grow in wisdom (and Stuart has prepared us to perk our ears up at that).

Ancient and non-Western cultures have relied primarily on stories to transmit important truths and meanings. Their scholars are storytellers. We are a part of a cultural heritage that has moved away from story. Stories are seen as appropriate for children, but adult truth is conveyed through propositional statements that can be analyzed and verified through empirical evidence. We rely on studies (scientific, sociological, historical, Biblical, etc.) rather than stories. This is true of Western Theology as biblical narrative scholar Joel Green observes, “Talk about God among the theologically trained tends effortlessly, naturally, toward propositional statements, toward the unequivocal, toward the objective, toward a unified witness.” Green points out, however, that Scripture reveals God through story, not propositional statements. This is especially true of the gospel of Luke. We may not be entirely comfortable with that, but it is undeniable that this is the medium that God has deemed most effective to serve His purposes.

One of the main purposes of Scripture is to help us to grow in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Even our secular culture is starting to rediscover the power of story for conveying wisdom. Someone has recounted the following scene: “A teacher was asked by his frustrated students one day, “Master, we ask to hear the truth and all you tell us are stories.” The Master smiled and replied, “The shortest distance between a person and the truth is a story.”” We might object, like the frustrated students, that the shortest distance between a person and the truth is not a story. Stories require interpretation to get the meaning. Surely the shorter path is a clear propositional statement of the truth that can be immediately grasped. Ah... but where has that truth traveled? Hasn’t it only gone to the head in that form? Has it gone to the heart? Does the person really believe that truth? Have you ever heard the saying, “The longest distance in the world is from the head to the heart”? It takes more than a clear propositional statement to travel that distance. Isn’t the common complaint about Christians, and by Christians, that

we have all this head knowledge but our lives so often reveal that we do not really believe those truths? A truth statement will engage our minds while a good story will engage our minds and our hearts. Secular psychologist Robert Sternberg wrote this article for The Chronicle of Higher Education, "It's Not What You Know, But How You Use It: Teaching for Wisdom." This should remind us of what Stuart has been teaching about wisdom. Proponents of narrative study note that it is the stories that we believe that will influence our behavior, not what we mentally assent to. We are constantly constructing stories to interpret the data of our life experiences. As Green points out, "If we all live story formed lives, then we are confronted with the question, What stories will shape us? For the Christian, the answer is non negotiable. Our task is to make our lodging the Genesis-Revelation narrative(s) so that our models of interpretation are conformed to biblical narratives, so that these stories decisively shape our lives." This reminds me of Spurgeon's exhortation to his students to study the Word until their very blood was bibline!

As we do a narrative study, the Holy Spirit through Luke is (in the words of Joel Green) "inviting us to enter into the interpretive dance, that we actually involve ourselves, imaginatively and bodily in this story. [It is about] transforming us into servants of the divine purpose to which they provide witness... We [are to] attend to the invitation of the text, which inducts us into its world, so that biblical story shapes our lives profoundly and decisively, personally and collectively....with all this means in the transformation of our allegiances and commitments, realizing that this transformation will manifest itself in behaviors and practices appropriate to our social worlds." In other words, the gospel of Luke as a story or narrative is designed to help us grow in wisdom.

So immerse yourself in Luke and pay particular attention to how he is telling this story. One necessary directive: do not read what you know from other gospel accounts into Luke. You may think you are bringing in helpful insight, but it is actually not helpful. When we bring in information from other gospels, we are adding what Luke has not included. Remember our title, Learning from Luke. We need to let Luke tell the story his way. After all, he is the one who has been inspired to tell it.

Pastorally yours,  
Bo

<http://www.christourshpherd.org/pastlet.htm> (and follow links to download MP3 audio of sermon)