

Our journey through the bible finds itself in Acts this Sunday. One of the last classes I took before leaving the Seminary in Elkhart was entitled Luke-Acts. On account of the fact that Luke and Acts were very likely authored by the same individual, our instructor suggested, there may be thematic or narrative links between the two books. Given the way Acts begins this should have been obvious to me long before my third year in Seminary. This professorial clue allowed me to read Luke and Acts in a completely new way.

Isn't it curious that in both Luke 7 and Acts 10 we find a centurion—a career army man of the Roman military machine?; he plays a leading role in those stories and comes out looking pretty good in both. Or isn't it a surprise that even as Jesus raised dead children (a widow's son at Nain (7.11) and a religious leader's daughter (Lk 8.49-56)) Peter in Acts also raised the dead (Acts 9.36-42). Or we find minor differences in the words Jesus and Paul used to bless bread with unsuspecting disciples (Lk 24.14-20 // Acts 27.39-44). These are just three examples of ways Luke links with Acts. And then there are the connections to the Old Testament, which I will not get into now.

Luke's unifying theme behind the use of this narrative strategy in salvation. Salvation in Luke's gospel means bread for the hungry, release to the captives, sight to the blind, financial assistance for the hurting (Luk 4.18-19; see magnificat and Is 61). Jesus reflects this cosmic vision of the O.T. in what he says and does. The disciples followed Jesus. The early Church imitated him. And I think Luke expected the trajectory of this ministry would continue among God's people regardless of location or era. I will tease out two aspects of salvation which are stitched within Luke / Acts and consider how that ministry continues today in Saskatoon. God's salvation is realized through table fellowship and gender equality.

Narrative Unity Point One: Luke uses food, and table fellowship more broadly, to illustrate God's inclusive vision of salvation. Food, and the table, mediate God's grace. They are sacramental. Let me offer a partial list of the episodes in Luke and Acts involving the food:

Luke food references—partial list:

In her Magnificat Mary proclaims that the hungry will be filled with good things and the rich sent away hungry (1.53). [In Luke's gospel wealth used to benefit the hungry is a good thing whereas those who used wealth selfishly are described as rich: consider the wealth of the women of chapter 8(8.3), wealthy Zacchaeus (19.8), Ananias and Saphira (4.32-5.11).]

Jesus dines with tax collectors (5.29)

Jesus dines with Simon the Pharisee (7.36)

Jesus feeds 5,000 hungry people (9.13)

Jesus banquets with a leader of the Pharisees (14.1ff)

There is a feast for the prodigal son (15.23)

A Rich man will not give bread to Lazarus (16:19-31)

Jesus institutes Lords supper (22.14)

At Emmaus the risen Christ is made known in the breaking of bread (24.30-35)

The risen Christ eats fish among disciples to prove his resurrection (24.42-43)

Acts food references—partial list

Pentecost converts share possessions break bread together (2.46)
Widows not getting enough food, so “deacons” (see Luke 4.39) appointed
Peter is told in a vision to eat that which was deemed unclean (10.15)
Tyre and Sidon dependant on the king’s food, so Saul and Barnabas sent (12.20)
Sensitivity to food laws part of compromise at the Jerusalem Council (15.20)
Lydia hosts Paul and Timothy (16.15)
Macedonian Jailer and household convert and feed apostles (16.34)
Paul feeds sailors on a ship (Eucharistic words see Luke 28.35, Luke 9.13, 22.14, and 24. 30 for parallels)

Food, in Luke and Acts, is life. Tax collectors come to the table. Pharisees come to the table. Lost sons come to the table. Clueless disciples come to the table. Military personnel and civil servants come to the table. In Luke-Acts all have access to the table. In a very literal and metaphorical sense, all people deserve daily bread. God wants that all have opportunity to be satisfied physically and spiritually. How, then, is this vision being played and not being played out in Saskatoon today? I have asked urban farmer Jared Regier to share. Jared.

Jared Reflects

Narrative Unity Point Two: The Gospel Transcends Gender barriers

It might be a stretch to call Luke a feminist, whatever way one would choose to define feminism. And yet the place of women within Luke-Acts bears such prominence we can not help but pay attention and ask what he is up to. Really, Patrick, do women really play such a big role in the narrative? Consider the evidence:

In the Luke birth narrative it is Mary and Elisabeth who are the central players. Zechariah, husband of Elisabeth, is rendered mute while Joseph never does get a speaking part. Even when Mary and Joseph go back to the temple to find their lost lad it is Mary who engages the boy Jesus in conversation (Lk 2.48).

In both Luke and Acts we find wealthy women who help finance the ministry of Jesus or the Church (Lk 8.1-3; Acts 16.11-15).

Luke, like the other gospels, has women who were first to experience the resurrection (Lk 24.10). In Acts it is Rhoda who testifies to the miracle of Peter’s release from prison in a scene reminiscent of Luke’s resurrection account in Luke 24 (Acts 12.12-17).

We must call attention to the male / female pairings throughout the gospel and Acts. Anna / and Simon both utter a blessing over the baby Jesus (2.25-38). Jesus raises a widow’s son from the dead (7.11-17) as well as Jarius’ daughter (8.53-56). In his own home Simon the Pharisee is paired with a sinful woman (7.36-50). In the parables of Luke 15 “the forgiving father” is linked with a woman (God) who searches for a lost coin (15.8-32). Jesus compares a generous widow with stingy temple goers (21.1). Joseph of Arimathea offers a tomb for the crucified Christ while women provide spices and ointments (23.50-56). At Pentecost Peter references the prophet Joel that both sons **AND** daughters will receive the gift of the spirit (Acts 2.17-18). Ananias and Sapphira are co-conspirators in their financial deceit (Acts 5.1-11). Peter’s mom does deacon work in Luke (Lk

4.39) serving men even as male deacons in Acts serve women (6.1-6). Lydia's household was baptized as was the family of the Macedonian jailer (16.15, 33). Both Aquila & Priscilla are named as workers in the church of Corinth (18.2-4).

Luke's persistent and consistent attention to women within the narrative leaves me with a couple of thoughts. First, Father / Son / Holy Spirit are concerned about the marginalized. Luke would have consider women a part of the marginalized caste within the Roman Empire. By taking such narrative efforts to highlight women Luke is emphasizing that the marginalized, and women in particular, are important within God's Kingdom and the church. The implication is that if God cares for the marginalized so should we.

Even more significant, I would say, the importance of the Good News wipes out gender differences and other distinctions we might make. The cause is so urgent that every disciple must actively employ their gift. It matters not if they are male / female, Jew / Gentile, free or slave. It is always a good to be reminded of this biblical truth.

So how does God do this today? Tammy is a female deacon in our city of Saskatoon and oversees ministry at Ronald McDonald House. Tammy, please share with us.

Tammy Reflects

In considering the interpretation of Luke I would whole heartedly agree of the importance and relevance of the Good News wiping out gender differences and distinctions in leadership and rather focusing on disciples actively employing their gifts, as a biblical truth. To put it simply, I am just not personally hard-wired in that way to consider feminism as that which would hold me back from doing what I feel called to do.

It was in my third year in Business School at U of S that I was fortunate enough to take a class under the leadership of Professor Ron Edmonds. His focus of human resource management and leadership was based on the book – The Leadership Challenge, by Kouzes and Poszner. In the study of this research there are 5 practices presented as models of exemplary leadership that achieve the extra-ordinary for individuals, teams, organizations and communities.

These practices fit well within the defined reading presented in Luke so I wanted to share them with you as a background to my own experiences and philosophy of leadership. These 5 principles for leaders to engage include the following:

- To Model the Way – leaders establishing principles concerning the way people should be treated and the way goals should be pursued.
- To Inspire a Shared Vision – passionately believing that one can make a difference
- To Challenge the Process – opportunities to change the status quo and improve the organization; take risks; make mistakes and pick yourself up to carry on
- To Enable Others to Act – actively involving others in fostering collaboration and building spirited teams
- To Encourage the Heart – keeping hope and determination alive, leaders actively recognizing contributions that individuals make

As I consider my perspective on leadership, some of the roles I currently play in both my professional and personal life and decisions I have made to “put myself out there”, I would suggest there is a common leadership theme in my life - being inspired by others - both male and female, that have lead with their hearts, inspired a vision that has made an impact on the lives of others. This form of leadership is neither male nor female but rather focuses on the gifts of the leader ahead of us who is challenging us to act and inspire others in our own way.

I applied for the position at Ronald McDonald House SK because of the mission that rang so true to my core, I could not justify passing up the opportunity to apply. Now, working alongside men and women from within the community, sharing visions around the Board table, and choosing to be a servant leader to the families that need support, the work for me has truly been the most rewarding experience in my professional career. Families in this community which I work, come from all walks of life, from all circumstances, from all economic backgrounds. Together under one roof in this home, they find solace, comfort and care. Whether it is for a few nights at a time or an extended journey, in this moment of time they are all the same. And together staff and volunteers inspire one another and share a vision that we passionately believe in – that together we can and are making a difference in the lives of SK families and in return we are being rewarded by simply being given the opportunity to have gotten to know these people.

In the same way that I am drawn to a career that calls to my soul, in direct connection I am also called to volunteer work that inspires heartfelt leadership. Making a conscious choice to participate actively at the Board level in this congregation with a community of believers gives me the opportunity to lead when called upon but to more importantly be led by a group of inspiring and caring individuals and committees of people. The work that is done in our church through a shared vision to take risks, make a stand, put our beliefs out there and challenge the status quo in a community that has become my extended family, is in fact the make up of my spiritual self. It is therefore necessary for me to be a part of that community in a meaningful way. And finally as I consider the leadership role I have at Rosthern Junior College, it would be negligent of me if I didn't offer my praise and gratitude to the inspiration of a leader who took a chance, inspired a vision and enabled others to act for a school built on a Foundation of the importance of Christian education and spiritual teachings – offering students a place to experience more, find their own leadership potential while instilling a model of spiritual self. And although it has been through a variety of stages of metamorphosis, the core value of a meaningful, spiritual and authentic education in this institution continues to be the basis of the foundation that it was built upon. This is a shared and inspired vision, passed on through the generations, that I feel overwhelmingly called to participate in.

So for me this is the true essence of leadership – a sense of purpose that I feel specifically called to do in which I can use and share my gifts to offer myself and have an impact of a shared future. And although it sometimes makes my heart pound and my mouth go dry, we are in fact all asked to soar as leaders in our own way. Male, female, marginalized, or not – we are all invited to be the true form of our selves and to find that purpose for which we exist.

In Conclusion, one of the most amazing facets of Luke and Acts is that God and Jesus commission flawed disciples. The disciples are sent out to do ministry without fully comprehending the gospel they represent (Luke 9:1-11). The same goes for the 72 who in like

fashion are sent out (Luke 10:1-20). Saul, who becomes Paul, has persecuted Christians (Acts 9.13). The Macedonian jailer has been jailing Christians (Acts 16.33). God chooses the willing and grows us on the Way.

Patrick is not perfect. Tammy is not perfect. Jared is not perfect. You are not perfect. Get used to it and get over it! God and Jesus takes the likes of us, imperfect lumps of humanity, and finds a way to work goodness in the world. Be open to God's leading. This might mean a conversation of sorts, like Saul who became Paul. It may mean taking up the role of deacon, as Peter's mother did early in Luke's gospel. It may mean being a professional like Pricilla and Aquila who share goodness wherever the company assigns them. The point is that we offer ourselves to the salvation story God is enacting in our world. This is the trajectory from the Old Testament to Luke to Acts to Saskatoon. May God be gracious to us as we come to own the opportunities before us regardless of age, location, or life experience. Amen.

Patrick Preheim, co-pastor Nutana Park Mennonite Church