

### Transforming Faith: Luke on Teaching & Preaching

Who is the most influential writer in the New Testament? In terms of just numbers, it is probably Luke. He wrote about 27% and Paul about 23%, so together these two wrote half the NT. Luke's Gospel is about 19,500 words, and Acts about 18,500. One of the reasons why Luke is so important is because he records both the founding story of Jesus' ministry, including his teaching ministry, followed by an account of Jesus' ongoing ministry by the Holy Spirit through the mission and ministry of the Church and its leaders.

The hinge between Luke's two books – the Gospel and Acts – is the Emmaus Road story (Luke 24:13-25) which is about the dynamics of Jesus' transformative teaching. With dramatic irony, the risen Lord Jesus joins two grief-stricken disciples walking home to Emmaus after Jesus' crucifixion. Initially, they don't recognise him, yet their hearts burn within them as Jesus teaches them. Jesus opens their minds to understand the Scriptures, and reframes their hopes, in relation to his death and resurrection. He teaches them about his own transformation as the risen crucified Lord and this changes their perspective on the Scriptures and their framework for hope. As they share a meal the disciples recognise the reality of the risen Lord and become witnesses to his risen life.

One of the things we believe as Christians is that Jesus goes on teaching us through the Scriptures in the same way he taught those first disciples. The authority of the Bible is that Jesus teaches us through it as God's Word to us today amidst the realities of life. In the first verses of Acts 1 we see this pattern again as, by the Holy Spirit, Jesus repeats his teaching about the Kingdom of God to his disciples. The Kingdom had been the focus of his teaching in which he'd reworked the understanding of the Kingdom found in the OT history books. Jesus also prophesies what will happen after he's ascended when he, with the Father, send the Holy Spirit on the disciples. He says the disciples will be transformed by God's power to be witnesses of him throughout the world. That is how Jesus' ministry continues: through those who will hand on our transforming faith through ministries of the Word which reshape all of life.

### The Prodigal and the Prodigious

An example of Jesus teaching through the Scriptures is the Parable of the Prodigal Son. This parable retells the story of the founding Patriarch: Israel. Now Israel was originally called Jacob who eventually had 12 sons that became the 12 tribes of Israel. He also had an elder brother called Esau and a father who was called Isaac (son of Abraham). The relationship between the two brothers and the father is full of deceit, bitterness and rivalry. The younger son, Jacob, runs away to a far country. Much later, he returns not knowing how his elder brother will greet him or whether his father will receive him. Jesus' listeners would know the story very well. But Jesus retells the story so that all those listening find their perspective changed and their faith in God transformed.

So Jesus' parable reworks this foundation story of Israel. The similarities are many, but the emphases are different. God is the loving Father who runs out to meet and welcome his lost son and who says to his eldest son "You are always with me, and everything I have is yours". All are embraced by the Father, but all also need the transformation of repentance, of coming to themselves and starting a new way of life. To fully know the Father's love means living it out day by day – participating in Jesus' mission.

Paul was one of Luke's best friends. Luke not only researched Jesus in order to give us his teaching, but he also researched Paul (and Peter) so that in Acts we see the Apostolic life: what the teaching of the Apostles looks like in practice by those who set up the community that followed Jesus. Paul was not a prodigal, he was a transformed elder son. God's Father love overflowed in him so much that he reached out with Jesus' teaching not only to his own people, but to the Gentiles too. He stopped killing Christians and started loving Gentiles (us)! Paul was the Prodigious not the Prodigal son. In Acts 19: 10 & 20 Luke tells us of the outcome of Paul's ministry: 'This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia **heard the word of the Lord**', and, 'In this way **the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.**' Paul's ministry was sustained and powerful (with healings and exorcisms). His teaching was transformative: people's lives were reshaped through coming to know Jesus and the power of the Spirit. We note that all this took place in and around Paul's ministry centre: Ephesus (a bit like the Winchester School of Mission?!).

### Ephesian Learning (Ephesians 4:11-14).

So, not surprisingly, we find in Paul's letter to the Ephesians a clear statement about ministry. He tells us that the ascended Lord Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, gave us gifts of ministry: 'that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,<sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,<sup>13</sup> until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. This is what Jesus had prophesied.

These Word-type ministries are **shaping ministries**. So, from the start the Apostles set the unchanging shape of the Church: we are to be **Jesus-shaped**, growing into his fullness by living his mission in the world. Prophets show us what it means to realise this **mission-shape** in a particular time and context; evangelists help us **shape the message** with apologetic clarity and confidence in our own cultural setting; and pastor-teachers (one category) help to build up the church by **shaping the lives of disciples**. In the Church of England, we've recognised our apostolic foundations, but we've not been so good on prophets and evangelists; we tend to focus on pastor-teachers. *Living in Love and Faith*, the Bishops' Teaching Document & Resources, is therefore a watershed moment: it's about NT apostolic issues: human identity, sexuality and marriage. The Bishops have a prophetic responsibility at this time to lead in shaping our teaching: **our message about the Christ-like and mission-shape form of Christian discipleship in our modern contexts.**

Bishop Vincent (of Lérins), from the 4/5<sup>th</sup> Century, said that orthodox teaching has three elements: (1) it is what is believed always, by all and everywhere; (2) it has unfolded from what was given as a deposit to the Apostles in God's Word; and (3) it is also, based on Scripture, what has subsequently been agreed by church leaders, councils and the people. I've expressed my own teaching on these matters at Diocesan Synod (see the Diocesan website: Presidential Address, Sept 2017) but let me re-emphasise here that Jesus' teaching opens up new life: he does not close things down; everything is reframed. So, the transforming moment of the Emmaus Road is a **transforming momentum** as Jesus reshapes our lives through the Spirit and through teaching ministries. There is much at stake here: the lives of children, families, LGBTQ people, our national church, and world Christianity all of which are called to grow into the full stature of the risen Lord by living in love and faith. We pray for Jesus to teach us, and that we might learn.