**Listen! Look!**

**Luke!**

**Midrashing the Third Gospel**

Luke’s Gospel is the focus of our midrashic attention and imagination in this Bible Study/Exploration series. We will be using a “midrashic imagination” to explore some fascinating texts in the Gospel, and along the way we’ll see how Luke is a “darshan” (one who midrashes the Hebrew Scriptures, and early Christian Scriptures), by “minding the gaps” “texturing,” and “following the rabbit” in order to present a particularly timely and timeless “account of Jesus.”

There will be four sessions (we’ve built in a week for a snow day – which if we don’t need it, becomes a bonus day!), held face to face on Thursday mornings, 9:15-11 am, with online options for those who can’t attend all/some. You can find the blog posts at

<http://cpuc.edublogs.org/ListenLuke>.

**SCHEDULE OUTLINE**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Date | Topic Focus | Biblical Texts |
| Week 0  Thursday Jan 24 | SNOW DAY | SNOW DAY |
| Week 1  Thursday Jan 31 | “Dear Theophilus”  Luke the author, we the reader(s). | Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-5 |
| Week 2  Thursday Feb 7 | Where’s that Sermon again? Midrashing the Beatitudes | Luke 6:17-49  Matthew 5-7 |
| Week 3  Thursday Feb 14 | Listen to a Parable!  (or more) | Luke 15  Luke 8:4-18 |
| Week 4  Thursday Feb 21 | Eating our Way through Luke’s Gospel of Hospitality | Luke 9, 11, 14 |

**Session 1 Outline**

1. General Introductions

2. Midrash and Midrashic Imagination: A brief working definition

3. Introducing Luke

**1. General Introductions**

- Who are we all? Why are we here? What do we hope to gain from the experience?

- Creating safe space, welcome, expectations

- General Course introduction

**“Texts and Textures”**

Some general working assumptions about Scripture for this study series:

* It is a human text compiled over thousands of years in multiple locations by multiple authors
* It is now multilayered, with multiple perspectives, sometimes conflicting
* It was compiled for a ‘sacred purpose’ – a window into God’s character and desire.
* What makes a text “sacred” is how it connects the holy with the lived experience of those who read/study it
* Texts are meant to transcend time, ‘capturing’ the ephemeral’ of one generation to be shared with subsequent ones.

Texture

* When an ancient text is reworked for a new audience, or when it is read in a new context = texture!
* Ancient texts take on new meaning when interpreted in successive generations, or different cultural locations.

DISCUSSION/QUESTIONS?

**2. Midrash and the Midrashic Imagination: A Brief Introduction**

**Midrash = ??**

It is not a form of shingles! But I hope it is contagious!)

**Midrash as a verb/ process**

**דרש =**  derash – to seek, study, inquire, probe, pursue

**Midrash as a noun/Product**

Midrashim are stories about the stories in the Bible.

Jewish tradition has collected and compiled midrashim, along with commentary on the Biblical text, and with rules for applying the ancient text to new situations (halakhah), over the centuries long after the Bible is completed and bound.

Luke’s Gospel is full of midrashim, put into the mouth of Jesus the Rabbi, who explains the relevance of Torah for the new context (e.g. Luke 15)

**Wisdom on Midrash as Process**

*Rabbi Ben Bag Bag* (1-200 CE)

On reading Torah: “Turn it, and turn it again, or all is in it; and contemplate it, and grow grey and old over it, and stir not from it, for you can have no better rule/way of life than this. (*Avot 5:26*)

*Marc Gellman*(20th C)

“Explaining stories from the Bible only makes sense if there is just one right way to understand that story. But the stories in the Bible are so rich and deep and packed with a thousand different meanings that they cannot be explained just one right way. The best way to understand a story in the Bible is to make up another story about it.

*(Does God Have a Big Toe?)*

*Sandy Eisenberg Sasso* (21st C)

What would it be like if we were to read the Bible, not to tell the stories of the ancestors’ lives, but to help us tell the stories of *our* lives? What if we were to imagine that God’s question to Adam and Eve in the garden, “Where are you?” is also addressed to us? That God is speaking to us.

*(God’s Echo)*

**Can we “Midrash” the Bible as Christians?**

**Yes!** If we are willing to imagine that there is more than one way to interpret a text, we can “midrash” that text! We can “turn and turn it again”, we can “search, inquire, probe and pursue” possible meanings.

**Yes!** If we are willing to imagine that an ancient text might have something of relevance to teach us, or say to us in our own context, we can “midrash” that text, and make new meaning with it for us today.

**Yes!** If we are willing to imagine that these texts are still full of the breath of God *(2 Tim 3:15)*, and that God is still speaking through these texts, we can “midrash” them.

**Yes!** If we are willing to imagine that Jesus, a devout believer and practising Jew, learned to midrash the Old Testament texts, and that many of his teachings are “Midrash” on the Dream of God found in Torah and the Prophets, we can imagine that we are following in his footsteps when we “turn and turn the texts” ourselves.

**Midrashing the Biblical Text**

There are many ways to use a midrashic imagination to read and interpret a Biblical text. So many it can be overwhelming, so we will use a 5 point method throughout this course, so that we can get a feel for doing this ourselves, and to modify and adapt as we become more familiar with the process.

1. Hearing/Reading and Marking the Text
2. Minding the gap – what’s missing, what don’t you know?
3. Texturing the Text- Contexts: Who can help mind the gap?

Which community wrote it?

Which communities passed it on?

What other communities have read?

What community (individual) is reading it now?

1. Following the Rabbit – what intrigues you enough to follow it?
2. (re)Telling the Story
   * Stories within the story
   * Stories beyond the story
   * What story would you tell?

**4. Introducing Luke**

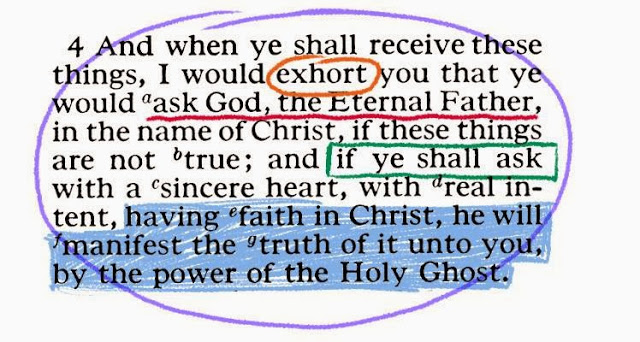
**1**Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, **2**just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, **3**I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke+1%3A1-4&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24889a)] to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, **4**so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

#### Footnotes:

1. [Luke 1:3](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke+1%3A1-4&version=NRSV#en-NRSV-24889) Or *for a long time*

**1. Hearing/ Marking the Text**

* Colours? Punctuations: \*? ! \_;
* Underlines, circling words.
* What stands out? What is puzzling? What feels personal? What provokes a strong reaction (what reaction?)
* Questions? Gaps?
* Words that stand out? Following a theme?



**2. Minding the Gaps**

This step helps us to realize that we have a partial written record, that even though this is “Scripture”, it’s incomplete, imperfect.

It also gives us permission to demand things of the text that it may not be able to deliver… we become its conversation partner rather than merely its consumer/recipient.

* Where are you missing information/narrative/detail you wish you could have?
  + e.g. Who is Theophilus?
  + Who were the “many” who have already written accounts?
  + who is “I”?
  + what does “servants of the word” mean?
  + your questions?
* Is there a fact gap you want to fill?
  + I don’t know really who Luke was/is?
  + I wish I knew more about the other accounts he refers to..

**3. Texturing the Text. Reading the text in context(s)**

Always these points are worth remembering about any Gospel text:

a) written after the events they record

b) by an author (or authors) *for* a particular community, and with a particular perspective guiding their writing

c) that other communities received the texts and chose to pass them down to the next generation

d) that we too read *in community*, as well as individuals.

e) that the texts are communications – attempts to convey.

* Who is “Luke”? When was this written? Who was Theophilus?
* For what community was this Gospel written?
* What are “Luke’s” sources for his “orderly account”?

**LUKE in Context.**

* The third canonical Gospel.
* Traditional understandings about the author:
  + “Luke” a physician who was a travelling disciple of Paul (Col 4:14, Philm 1:24) (earliest source to make this claim is from late 2nd C)
  + An author of some literary sophistication, familiar with Greco-Roman literary form – his Greek is better than Mark or Matthew
  + Possibly from Antioch (Syria)
* Familiar with the “Septuagint” (LXX) – the current Greek Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures.
  + Some recent scholars see evidence of familiarity with the Hebrew Text
* His geographical knowledge of Palestine is “patchy” – you can’t draw a map of his Gospel! And his tone and view is more urban than rural
* He is anti-Semitic – his perspective on the continuing Jewish tradition is derogatory, and almost always set in opposition to Jesus’ vision/ministry/mission
* Luke’s Sources include
  + Mark
  + “Q”
  + Non-identifiable oral and written traditions which may contribute to unique Lukan pericopae

NB: but he does not include ANY Pauline material….

* Date of composition
  + Traditional: after Mark, and within lifetime of Paul’s ministry, i.e. before 70 CE.
  + For much of biblical historical scholarship, dated to 80-90 CE.
  + No later than Tertullian and Marcion – who quote the Gospel (i.e. not later than 140CE)
  + Borg and Jesus Scholars argue for a later date, after the “parting of ways” after the destruction of Jerusalem, as late as 110CE
  + Scholarly consensus dates it to 80-90. A generation after Mark
* “Most Excellent Theophilus”
  + = Lover of God
  + = A Roman name or (generic term for Gentile God-Fearers)
  + He already knows something about Jesus, and is assumed by Luke to have some familiarity with the Jewish story of Salvation (mediated through the LXX Greek Septuagint)
  + There is very little in the text to identify a “Lukan Community”
  + The authorial intent is to address the narrative to an “excellent” God-loving individual – implying that it was then shared with others
* Purpose:
  + To provide an “orderly account” within the context of multiple other versions of the Jesus story, some obviously earlier “eyewitness” accounts.
  + “So that you may know the truth” about previous instruction
  + To set the story of Jesus in the larger context of Salvation History.

**So what?**

Does dating, authorship, in-depth knowledge of how the Gospel was composed using earlier sources, make a faithful difference?

Some of my conclusions (so far)

* The fact that we can ask so much, and yet still know so little about the first 4 verses, makes me realize how much we can delve into Scripture and still come away knowing we’re touching a mystery, with “sacred purpose.”
* These questions and our failure to “settle” them, reminds us of the usefulness of midrashic processes to open up the possibilities, and to do so with humility
* an acknowledgement by this author that there are other usable “orderly accounts” reminds us to be open to multiple sources, opinions, and “ways”
* We start to see in this very careful introduction an author pointing to a perceived need among the “God Loving” community of the late first century:
  + for some theological coherence (the truth of what you’ve been instructed), in a context where multiple understandings of Judaism, and the new Jesus movement were rife.
  + for a “gospel” not only to tell “what happened” (so Mark), but what these happenings “signify”.
  + the thematic weaving of Luke is far more sophisticated, and marked than in Mark.
    - Salvation
    - The continuation of God’s Dream from the OT era into the era of Jesus as Christ and Lord, and (in Acts) the era of the Church empowered by the Holy Spirit, to break out from Jewish confines to “Samaria and to the ends of the earth.”

**For NEXT TIME**

We will be midrashing the Gospel reading to be used in worship on February 17th

Here we’ll be able to compare Luke with Matthew as they both use earlier sources to show Jesus as teacher of the crowds – as a Rabbi “drashing” the Torah for the new context of 1st century Galilean Palestine.

1. Read (or Listen) to Luke 6:17-49. Make a print out copy of a portion of the text, and try doing the first 2 steps of our Midrashic Method (Hearing/Marking and “Minding the Gap.”) before next week, and come prepared to share your “Gaps” and markings.

2. Read or listen to Matthew 5-7. Do you hear similarities? Differences? If you were to describe Jesus in Luke’s account and in Matthew’s, what differences (if any) would you note?

To help you:

Bible Gateway has texts and audios in some English Versions (KJV, NLT, MSG, eg. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke+1%3A1-4&version=NLT>

3. If you are artistically inclined, draw a sketch of the scene in Luke 6:17, and then try doing the same for Matt 5:1. Or try a Google image for each passage, and make a note of the differences you see.