

Jazz Vespers for St. Luke Feast Day

18 October 2024

Psalms 147:1-7; Sirach 38:1-4,6-10,12-14; Luke 4:14-21

For the Word of God in scripture,

For the Word of God among us,

For the Word of God within us,

Thanks be to God. Amen.¹

Please be seated.

Today we celebrate the Feast of our Patron Saint, St. Luke/San Lucas. St. Luke is known as the Evangelist, but also as the Physician. Scholars point out that Luke used numerous medical terms in his writings, and is the only gospel writer that recorded Jesus' statement about physicians. "Physician, heal yourself!" (Luke 5:31) They note that Luke ministered, not only to the soul, but to the whole person. In his works, they see efforts to address physical needs of the body, emotional needs of the mind, and spiritual needs of the soul.²

And since I always try to bring music into our reflections during Jazz Vespers, I thought I'd combine our two themes for the evening, healing and music, by looking a bit at the role music can play in healing.

According to an article available through Harvard Medical School Publishing,³ "music therapy can calm anxiety, ease pain, and provide a pleasant diversion during chemotherapy

¹ Iona Abbey Service of Prayers for Healing. The Iona community. Wild Goose Publications

² <https://biblearchaeology.org/research/new-testament-era/3237-luke-the-physician-with-medicine-for-the-souls>

³ <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/how-music-can-help-you-heal>

or a hospital stay.” I noticed during my own time as a hospital chaplain that music could help lower the stress levels in patients and family members alike. It was not unusual for individuals facing death to request a song, particularly a favorite hymn.

Music therapy is considered to be a “burgeoning field.” Licensed music therapists are accomplished musicians who use a range of styles of music to evoke emotional responses, to relax or stimulate people, to help them heal.

While I think many of us are familiar with music’s ability to calm, or to provide a pleasant diversion during difficult procedures, music has also been shown, in certain cases, to help improve the recovery of motor and cognitive function.⁴ I don’t know how many of you were able to see Lady Gaga and Tony Bennett singing together.⁵ Long after Tony Bennett had been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, at a time when he struggled to form thoughts or recognize faces, he could still remember—and perform—complex musical pieces. "When that music comes on (SNAP), it's-- something happens to him," Lady Gaga said. "He knows exactly what he's doing. And what's important for me, actually, just to make sure that I don't get in the way of that."

Yet Tony Bennett was not the only beneficiary. Lady Gaga shared that, prior to their first joint album, released in 2014, she had considered quitting music. She didn’t want to sing anymore. It did not bring her joy. At that time, Lady Gaga was stressed, and depressed, and had a lot of people wanted things from her. She continued, “And then I spent a lot of time with Tony. He wanted nothing but my friendship and my voice.”

⁴ www.uwhealth.org/news/the-healing-power-of-music

⁵ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/lady-gaga-tony-bennett-dead-age-96-singer-was-going-to-quit-says-he-saved-her-life/>

Tony Bennett told her, “I have never once in my career not wanted to do this.” And, she said, “It stung. Six months ago, I didn’t feel that way. I tell Tony every day that he saved my life.” Together, they created beautiful music, healing music.

And we can also use music as part of maintaining a healthy life. Listening to classical music, relaxing music, calming music, an hour before bedtime can relieve anxiety and stress that has built up during the day. It can create a sense of calm, and lead to improved sleep. Listening to the right kind of music can even reduce road rage, something we can all appreciate.

So tonight, as we celebrate the Feast of St. Luke, the physician, who dedicated his life to both proclaiming the gospel and to healing, we can also enjoy the wonderful musical medicine provided by our outstanding musicians.

I’d like to close with a prayer, adapted from the Litany for Healing we use at our Wednesday services. And as I pray, I invite you to settle into your seats, close your eyes, and take a few deep breaths. Play back in your mind some of the music we have heard tonight.

Let us pray:

O God of love and healing,

Together we lift our prayers to you.

Creator God, you breathe life into your whole Creation,

Help us breathe deeply of your peace and presence.

Redeemer God, you give us yourself to make our joy complete,

Help us give our fear, pain, and grief to you.

Comforter God, you move through our lives in unexpected ways,

Help us move in concert with your life-giving motion.

Holy Trinity, One God, accept our thanks and praise for all the blessings of this life.

Amen.⁶

⁶ Adapted from: Thomas, Adam. Where the Wind: A Litany for Healing. www.wherethewind.com