SERMON · MOUNT CALVARY LUTHERAN CHURCH, SOQUEL

Beyond the Comfort Zone and Beneath the Surface

The Feast of St. Luke, Evangelist · October 18, 2026
Readings: Isaiah 43:8–13 · Psalm 124 · 2 Timothy 4:5–11 · Luke 1:1–4; 24:44–53

Preached by Dr. Thomas Lucking, PhD, LMFT thomaslucking.com

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let me start with a quick show of hands this morning: **How many of you like this quote?**

> ***"Life begins at the end of your comfort zone."***

Look around the room! It's always fascinating to see who raises a hand. When I share that quote with teenagers in counseling, almost every hand stays down. They groan! To a sixteen-year-old, "stepping outside your comfort zone" sounds like a polite adult way of saying "do more homework" or "go talk to people at a party where you don't know anyone."

But with adults? Hands shoot up! Adults smile and nod. Why? Because if life has taught us anything, it's that almost nothing of genuine beauty, depth, or character ever grows inside pure comfort. The moments that truly made you who you are—the callings, the deep relationships, the times you had to trust God when the ground was shaking—none of those happened while you were comfortably sitting on the couch eating chips.

I actually saw that quote recently posted on display at the Food Bin in Santa Cruz. Now, if you know Santa Cruz, you know the Food Bin is an absolute historic local institution—a beacon of neighborhood wisdom for decades! I used to live right near there, and every time I drove or walked past, I'd slow down just to see what new pearl of insight they had put out on their sign. Once again, the Food Bin did not fail! In its own quirky way, that sign was doing a form of street evangelism, nudging every passerby to wake up and look for life beyond the easy path.

Today, on this **Feast of Saint Luke the Evangelist**, that local sign connects straight to the heart of our readings and what it means to follow Jesus.

I. Leaving the Comfort Zone: Luke vs. Demas

In our Epistle reading today from 2 Timothy, the Apostle Paul is writing from a dark Roman dungeon. He is an old man, facing execution under Emperor Nero. And in verse 10, Paul utters one of the most heartbreaking lines in the entire New Testament:

> *"For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica."*

Demas loved his comfort zone. When following Christ meant enthusiasm, fellowship, and spiritual excitement, Demas was all in. But when the path turned toward a Roman prison—when following the Gospel meant hardship, public risk, and suffering—Demas pulled back. He chose the safety and comfort of "this present world."

And then, just one verse later, Paul writes four quiet words that stand in dramatic contrast:

> *"Luke alone is with me."*

Saint Luke was a physician—an educated, highly capable professional in the ancient world. He could have easily built a comfortable, lucrative, risk-free life for himself. He could have stayed home and lived a quiet life of ease. But Luke stepped far outside his comfort zone. He chose to stand beside an imprisoned, dying apostle. He chose to travel dusty roads, brave shipwrecks, and endure hardship—not for personal glory, but for the sake of Christ.

In Lutheran theology, we call this the **Theology of the Cross** (*Theologia Crucis*).

The world tells us that a good life is about maximizing comfort and avoiding pain. But Jesus says: *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*

Luke understood that true life—resurrection life—doesn't mean clinging to self-preservation. It begins precisely where our self-reliance and earthly comfort end. For Luke, stepping outside his comfort zone wasn't about self-help grit; it was simply his baptismal vocation. It was showing up, standing by those who suffer, and bearing witness to the Savior who gave everything for him.

II. The First Gulp vs. The Bottom of the Glass

That brings us to a second quote I've been weighing alongside today's texts. It comes from the pioneer of quantum mechanics, Werner Heisenberg, who famously wrote:

> *"The first gulp from the glass of natural sciences will turn you into an atheist, but at the bottom of the glass, God is waiting for you."*

Picture a deep glass of water.

That "**first gulp**" is the realm of bare facts and raw intellect. Whether we are talking about natural science or historical data, that first gulp gives us information. In biblical studies, that "first gulp" is the historical data itself—what both Luke's research and the modern "Historical Jesus Movement" look at.

The modern "Historical Jesus Movement" takes that shallow first sip and stops right there. It gathers first-century historical facts, but then tries to lock Jesus inside them. It strips away His divinity, dismisses His miracles, and discards the resurrection, leaving behind nothing more than a first-century teacher or social reformer—a human figure who might offer good moral advice, but who certainly cannot forgive your sins or raise you from the grave.

Saint Luke takes the facts of history, but he drinks all the way to the bottom of the glass.

Look at how Luke opens his Gospel:

> *"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us… it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught."* (Luke 1:1–4)

Luke doesn't ignore the historical facts; as a physician and researcher, he meticulously collects them! He interviews eyewitnesses, names Roman emperors like Caesar Augustus, identifies governors like Pontius Pilate, and logs specific dates and places. He grounds our faith in real, objective, verifiable human history.

But Luke doesn't stop at historical interest. Historical facts are just the first gulp. Luke takes us to the *bottom* of the glass, where historical facts meet **divine revelation and faith**.

In Luke 24, the Risen Christ opens the minds of His disciples to see that these historical events were not just random occurrences in 1st-century Judea. They were the fulfillment of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms! At the bottom of the glass, the facts of history

blossom into **faith:** the historical Jesus is the eternal Christ, the Son of God, crucified for our transgressions and raised for our justification.

Luke gives us a faith anchored in real history, so that we may have total **certainty** (*asphaleia*) that God has entered space and time to save us.

III. From Intellectual Inquiry to the Table of Grace

So where does this bring us today?

We spend so much of our lives living up in our heads or clinging to our comfort zones. We analyze, we question, we worry, and like Demas, we often shrink back when faith demands sacrifice or takes us into uncomfortable places.

And that is why Jesus gives us the Holy Scriptures—and why He gives us the Holy Eucharist.

In a few moments, we will move from the pulpit to the Altar. And when you walk up those steps to receive the Lord's Supper, notice what happens: **Nobody is asking intellectual questions at the rail.**

At the Altar, we leave the debate behind. We don't come to the Eucharist to solve a historical puzzle or analyze an academic theory. At the Altar, it is a moment of pure, sacred faith.

When the pastor places that bread in your hand and says, *"The Body of Christ, given for you,"* and offers the cup, *"The Blood of Christ, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,"* you aren't drinking a "first gulp" of intellectual theory. You are receiving Christ Himself.

In the Holy Supper, the historical Savior who died on a real cross outside Jerusalem comes to meet you right here, right now, in real time. He gives you His very life to forgive your sins, quiet your doubts, and give you strength for the journey ahead.

IV. Conclusion: A Playful Push into the World

Brothers and sisters, as we celebrate Saint Luke today, we leave here with both our minds grounded and our hearts nourished.

Don't be afraid to drink deeply of God’s Word, moving past shallow surface skepticism until, like Luke, you see the living Christ at the bottom of the glass holding you with absolute certainty. And when you leave the Altar today—fed by Christ’s true Body and Blood—don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone!

The next time you drive past the Food Bin in Santa Cruz—or pass any little display of street-corner wisdom in your daily life—let it give you a playful smile and a holy nudge.

Real life doesn't happen when we play it safe in the shallows. Real life—Christ's resurrection life in you—begins when you step out in love, take up your cross, and share His free forgiveness with a world that so desperately needs it.

May the Lord give us the mind of Saint Luke: to seek God's truth deeply, to feast at His table with simple faith, and to step boldly beyond our comfort zones to serve our neighbors.

Dr. Thomas Lucking, PhD, LMFT is a psychotherapist and coach who preaches at Mount Calvary Lutheran Church in Soquel, California. More sermons and information about Christian counseling: **thomaslucking.com/sermons**

© 2026 Dr. Thomas Lucking. You are welcome to share this sermon for non-commercial use with attribution.