

Collect, Readings and Sermon for Sunday 18th October 2020
Luke the Evangelist

Collect

Almighty God,
you called Luke the physician,
whose praise is in the gospel,
to be an evangelist and physician of the soul:
by the grace of the Spirit
and through the wholesome medicine of the gospel,
give your Church the same love and power to heal;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

2 Timothy 4:5-17

As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Do your best to come to me soon, for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry. I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will pay him back for his deeds. You also must beware of him, for he strongly opposed our message.

At my first defence no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

Luke 10:1-9

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the

labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you."

Sermon

I have a friend who is in the process of becoming a published author, and a week or so ago she sent me an early draft of her second novel. It is an extraordinary privilege to read a book so close to its inception. What is really striking me is the vivid portrayal of characters. How an author allows their readers to get to know the characters – and the ways in which our initial assumptions can be challenged. It's really very true to life. I wonder how often you have found that discovering more about a person gradually changes the picture you might have initially created of the "kind of person" they are.

Of course this happens because as human beings we seek to make sense of the world, and one of the ways we do that is to use our experience to guide us. What matters is that we don't allow those initial assumptions to prevent us from changing our understanding as we get to know people better. Where skilful writers can help is that they understand the value of story. We are all storytellers in one way and another, making sense of people and events by placing them into a bigger narrative. And within our lives, those stories grow and develop, recognising that things change and our understanding can deepen.

This morning we celebrate Luke the Evangelist. One of my favourite get-out clauses for any Saints Day is that well-worn phrase: "we don't know very much about, in this case, St. Luke." In part that is true. But it doesn't make for a very long sermon. So I'm going to try to do just a little better.

It seems that Luke was a good friend of St. Paul – he appears three times in Paul's letters, one of which we heard in this morning's first reading. It's such a brief mention, but tells us that only Luke remained with Paul during his imprisonment – no doubt a mark of his character and the depth of their relationship. Paul tells us that Luke is a physician, and tradition recognises Luke as the author of both the gospel of that name, and the Acts of the Apostles. It is from those works that we perhaps find out the most about Luke.

We know that each of the four gospels is unique, recording the life of Jesus differently, appealing to different audiences and emphasising different things. Two things in particular stand out about Luke's gospel. The first is that he was a tremendous storyteller. And the second is his unwavering commitment to those who were more marginal within society.

Most of our Christmas story comes from Luke's gospel. Only Luke and Matthew say anything about Jesus's birth, but most of the story comes from Luke. And he doesn't even begin with Jesus, but with Elizabeth and Zechariah, the parents of John the Baptist. It's significant because Luke chooses to focus on the women – so much so that Zechariah is in fact struck dumb. It is Elizabeth who has faced the harsh judgement of society because she did not bear a child who takes centre stage when she conceives.

Isn't it interesting that, as Luke tells it, the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah to tell him that Elizabeth would bear a son, but he wouldn't believe him. When Gabriel appeared to Mary, she declared herself a servant of the Lord. Luke is letting us know that the world is not as we might perceive it. That those who are on the margins, perhaps even insignificant, in the world's terms are often the closest to God.

We know that Jesus himself was a storyteller – much of his teaching was in parables. Two of the best known of Jesus's parables appear only in Luke's gospel – the parable of the Good Samaritan, and the Prodigal Son. It is not unusual for us to be challenged by Jesus's parables, and these are no exception. In the Good Samaritan, Jesus forces us to see beyond our own immediate circle of friends and acquaintances when we consider what it means to love our neighbour. It seems that our love really must extend beyond our expectations. And entering into the parable of the Prodigal Son is something that never ceases to enrich our lives and understanding as we are faced with the extent of the father's love.

So Luke was a storyteller, and his particular concern was for those on the margins of society. Women, the poor, those without any power, position, authority or status. And Luke was also an evangelist.

I wonder what that word means to you. Evangelism can have particular connotations for us all. Within the Church of England, we can all too easily fall into the trap of making distinctions, using labels to define different parts of our own tradition. Yet the word evangelist is really very simple indeed. It means that Luke was a bringer of the good news. And it is something that we are all called to do.

So, if we are going to be faithful to St. Luke the Evangelist on this day, it is worth considering what it would mean for us to be bringers of the good news. And in the current climate it is arguably more important than ever to know what the good news is.

I sometimes wonder whether the reason the word evangelist has become problematic for some people is just because each of us is going to understand the good news in different ways – so we're not going to tell the story the same. And that shouldn't be a source of tension, but rather of rejoicing.

There is nothing wrong with those evangelists who find public places to tell others about Jesus – it is a form of evangelism, and no doubt those individuals are being true to themselves in the way that they tell others the good news.

And others do it differently. If I asked each one of you to find words to describe the importance of your faith, I expect you would find very different ways of doing it. Perhaps some of you would mention comfort and reassurance; others perhaps challenge and conscience; many might refer to relationship; some to salvation, or indeed other ideas like resurrection. Whatever it is that is good news for you in your faith, that is what you are called to share with others, in whatever way you find most appropriate. And St. Luke's day is a good day to take some time to think carefully about that good news.

And there's one other thing to remember, too. If you're struggling to see the good news right now, that's ok too. It's why we come to church. Because sometimes others bear the good news on our behalf – just as we sometimes bear the good news on their behalf – until we can see it again for ourselves, and are ready to share it once more.

Amen