

St Luke's Day 2020: Isaiah 35.3-6, Psalm 147.1-7, Luke 10.1-9

Over the past few weeks we have considered a number of themes touching on creation, stewardship, thanksgiving, "all other benefits of his passion" and living in unity whilst living with and working through conflict. These themes emerged through our keeping of Creationtide, Harvest Thanksgiving and the readings appointed. Today we add to that number the ministry of healing by our observance of St Luke's Day.

Luke is best known to us as the writer of the gospel named after him and the Acts of the Apostles. Scripture witnesses that he was a physician (a doctor) and tradition claims that he painted a portrait of Jesus making him also an artist. Two of these aspects of his life are picked up and joined together to shape the collect (the prayer) appointed for his day, which always falls on 18 October.

In the collect we pray, "Almighty God, who calledst Luke the Physician, whose praise is in the Gospel, to be an Evangelist, and Physician of the soul; May it please thee that, by the wholesome medicines of the doctrine delivered by him, all the diseases of our souls may be healed; through the merits of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

The collect makes a number of points, but the most important one is that through the wholesome medicines of the doctrine (teachings) delivered by Luke God may be pleased to heal all the diseases of our souls. This summary leads me to make the first point of this address. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is Good News and when applied to our lives its effect can be likened to a medicine that brings healing to the soul. Notice the author of the collect speaks of medicines. The teachings that Luke conveys are medicines ministering to different ailments. The ailments may all have a root cause our estrangement from God, our estrangement from one another, our estrangement from our calling to be good stewards of our bodies and creation, but different medicines of the teachings of Luke handed down may be applied.

One of the medicines is Jesus' instruction not to worry. Not to worry about anything. Another of the medicines is that God in Jesus has vanquished sin and death. Another is the instruction to the earliest post-resurrection disciples as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles that they and we as a community have a purpose that is greater than ourselves and greater than this church. It is a purpose that we must constantly hold before us that we in the words of Luke "bear witness to Jesus in Jerusalem, and throughout all Judea and Samaria, and even in the farthest corners of the earth."

When we lose sight of this purpose, then churches lose direction. Here at Christ Church our purpose is to make known Jesus and enable those who gather here to

grow in faith, as we prayed last Sunday through the collect appointed, “Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us thy gift of faith...” Considering this week’s collect we will be praying that the God of all mercies “through the Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts”. The call is to lay down oneself, one’s self-absorbed ego and to open oneself to God’s direction and rule, which is a medicine that brings healing. Not all growth comes without pain. Think of the phrase *growing pains*.

I always welcome St Luke’s Day falling on a Sunday, because it allows us to recall that Jesus exercised a healing ministry and that his healing ministry in many different guises has always been an aspect of the Church’s ministry down the ages. What the purpose was of Jesus’ healing ministry is not always clear, but it existed and it exists. When we considered the healing of the ten lepers a few weeks ago Jesus heals them because they appeal to him. Their sorry state means they can turn to him and appeal to his mercy and be healed by him. Sometimes the healings recall Old/First Testament healings. Often they are performed because a person has faith. “Go, your faith has made you well!” About the centurion who comes to Jesus on behalf of his slave who has fallen ill Jesus says, “‘I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.’ When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the centurion’s slave in good health.”

Our readings today all touch on healing. In today’s gospel towards the end we read that the seventy who have been commissioned by Jesus are “to cure the sick who are there”. Let’s hear that phrase in context, “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.’” Jesus commissions the seventy to cure the sick. This commission stands today and how we ourselves accept it, engage with and live it out is worth considering.

Turning our attention to the scroll of the prophet Isaiah we hear words that are well known to us.

- ⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
⁶ then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

The eyes of the blind being opened, the ears of the deaf being unstopped, the lame leaping for joy and the tongue of the speechless singing for joy all make an appearance in the Good News of Jesus Christ and in His Church, which filled by God, with the Holy Spirit proclaims, makes known and heals that men and women the world over may know that the kingdom of God has drawn near that they lay down

worry, anxiety and bitterness. How bitter are you? At Easter we normally bless Easter eggs. This year the blessing didn't happen. I bought a whole bunch of Easter eggs at the time. Here they are... All out of date... Why I'm alluding to them is because when I bless the eggs at Easter I do so with one leitmotif in mind. May the sweetness of the chocolate eggs remind us that God in Jesus through becoming one of us, by sharing in the life of humanity embedded in creation has removed the bitterness of sin and death by his passion, death and resurrection and ascension as Jesus says in St John's Gospel to the disciples when he says that he is going before them to prepare a place for them in his Father's house. Life has a sweetness because of Christ.

In the psalm appointed we hear that God heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds. The context of this Psalm is the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the Deportation of the Israelites to Babylon. The people have been scattered. God gathers them together. People have been downtrodden. God casts the wicked to the ground. God heals the broken-hearted by binding up their wounds. This threefold divine ministry as encapsulated in Isaiah continues in God's Church and where people continue to turn to God in praise and thanksgiving today. In former times the singing of the liturgy was the medium of song. In later times it was in the Protestant world the singing of psalms and then hymns and today worship songs of which we know only a few, but many people, esp. young people find in song a way to God in Jesus, which often touches them where it matters that Christ may rule in their hearts.

During the pandemic and very early on I heard myself saying to myself and those who had ears to hear that it wasn't only a matter of bodily health, but also a matter of mental, emotional and spiritual health. We are social creatures. Some more needy than others. Health and healing are too often seen as only physical in a material sense, as if we were car engines. There is a pill for this, a remedy for that, an operation for whatever, but as Christians whilst welcoming modern medicine, but not uncritically, we must be attending to the medicines of the gospel. We must be attending to the whole person. A people without a hope, a people without a future to the Christian is a forlorn people. This is our perspective.

The person is a unity of body and soul. And the Church confesses in her wisdom down the centuries in the words of the Apostles' Creed "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting". Matter matters. Our bodies matter. Paul speaks of the Christian body using the term "temple of the Holy Spirit", not a statue which has neither speech nor understanding. Let us hear the phrase "temple of the Holy Spirit" in context " ... do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?" Paul, seeing our earthly bodies within the movement of salvation, goes on to write: "For you were

bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.” This glorifying of God in our bodies has implications for our health and well-being as well as being members of the Body of Christ.

There are many healing techniques that have been developed over the centuries or have been discovered or rediscovered in recent times, which the Church can call upon as she remains faithful to and develops her ministry of healing while being faithful to her calling and being empowered by the Holy Spirit. There is the ministry of touch. Jesus was a physical person. He was touched by some and he touched others. He laid on hands and commissioned his disciples to do the same, as well as anoint. We read in the letter to James, “Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.” There are music and dance therapy and we see beautifully painted word pictures of God’s people singing and dancing before the Lord in the Psalms. Both Miriam and David would dance before the Lord, while one led the singing and the other played the harp.

But to complete the circle let us consider Luke as an artist, which will lead us to think of art therapy (Kunsttherapie). Luke as an artist will have used the techniques, the paints and the materials available to him at the time. The picture of Jesus that he painted – would it have been simply a portrait that was as true as possible to his particular human likeness, made like you and me in the image of God, or would it have been a portrait of who Jesus is, as Luke records in the wholesome medicines of the teachings delivered by him? I would think the latter. What do you think?

As each of us paints our picture of Jesus in community always particular to each one of us and incomplete let us keep close to the Scriptures, let us keep close to the Tradition, let us keep close to living communities of faith where bread is broken and wine outpoured, as we learn to paint a picture of Jesus that is faithful to this witness down the ages, while being attentive to the Holy Spirit in our age that empowered by the Holy Spirit we might come to say in the words from the Acts of the Apostles “it seemed good to us and the Holy Spirit” that here we may find healing and wholeness through the administration of grace in the midst of this transitory life. “For in him [Christ Jesus] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.” (Colossians 1.19-29)

Know yourselves reconciled to God, which is healing that comes from above through a life lived that is not of our making, but of God. Amen.