

SUNDAY REFLECTIONS

Sunday 18 October 2020 | Luke the Evangelist

TODAY'S READINGS

Isaiah 35 | Psalm 147 | 2 Timothy 4.5-17 | Luke 10.1-9



'Saint Luke'
by El Greco (1541-1614)

+ In the name of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Over the last few weeks its been a joy to spend a great deal of time in our parishes' schools, at what remains a challenging time for students and staff as they navigate, as we all are having to do at the moment, a different way of doing things. One of the delights of seeing our schools back up and running with enthusiasm and confidence is that it brings back memories of my own time at primary school, which I still like to think isn't that long ago, and how from an early age we are encouraged to know that collaboration, working together, supporting each other is important.

In all the lessons that I've observed and taken part in these weeks, the children have all been asked in discussion and in completing tasks to work together in pairs; sharing ideas and supporting one another in what they've been asked to do. A reminder that as individuals, even though we might like our own company and prefer to get on with things ourselves, there's an inherent beauty in being asked to commit to doing something together. We might not always think its a good idea, it might demand more of us, we may have to practice the virtues of patience and humility more intentionally, but more often than not, the result and effect will be all the better for it.

Today, we remember the witness and example of the evangelist Luke, who alongside the apostle Paul is one of the chief authors of the New Testament. Evidenced in the gospel that bears his name and continued through the Acts of the Apostles where Luke charts the early history of the Christian Church; as in the light of Jesus' resurrection, the gospel begins to be preached to all people and all nations.

Luke's writing is evocative and dramatic, richly pictorial and lyrical, with a consistent emphasis on what it means to welcome the outsider, prefer the marginalised, lift up the poor and needy and how practically and personably the love of God revealed in Jesus the Messiah is indeed for all people. It is Luke who gives us the beautiful account of Jesus' nativity, the faith-affirming post-resurrection appearances ending with the wonder of the ascension. If you have a favourite parable, it's probably found in Luke's gospel. And its thanks to him, through his record in the book of Acts, we know of the trials and wonders through which Jesus' earliest followers began to change the world for ever; testifying that the kingdom Christ had made real and proclaimed was indeed here.

It is therefore fitting, I think, that the gospel story set for Saint Luke's day, reminds us of an event unique to the evangelist; as Jesus, after concluding his ministry in his native Galilee, sets off on his

journey towards Jerusalem, the holy city, where God's saving plan for the world will be realised through his death and rising again. Following on from Jesus' birth, the gospel has previously told us of Jesus' teaching ministry, his power to heal and restore, his command over evil powers and forces, and how through the calling of twelve rather suspect followers he's commissioned so-called apostles to collaborate with him in the work of God's kingdom.

The scene is set, salvation has dawned upon the world, Jesus is here and bringing about the transformation that the prophets long ago had foretold; here was the Lord walking, talking, living, breathing amongst his people and as the prophet Isaiah had predicted long ago: *'the wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing'*. The kingdom of heaven that Jesus made real would be seen visibly, embodied not just in the natural world, but through real lives set on fire with love for God, for the world, bringing transformation in practical and purposeful ways.

But more than that, such with the importance and immensity of the mission, that there was a need for everyone to play their part. Just as the twelve had been appointed and sent out earlier in the gospel, today we are reminded that as Jesus' sets out towards Jerusalem, he appoints a whole host of others to participate with him in the task of revealing the good news of the Lord. *'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few'* Jesus says, *'therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest'*.

With this in mind then, Luke tells us of the calling or the sending out of the so-called *'seventy'* (though interestingly, some of the early manuscripts of Luke's gospel say its actually seventy-two). A comparatively large group of Jesus followers, beyond the twelve apostles, who are set apart literally to prepare the way of the Lord; emissaries and witnesses of Christ who are to go, so the gospel tells us, *'to every town and place'* where Jesus himself intends to go.

On first reading it sounds simple enough, yet as we discover, the mission that Jesus entrusts the seventy with is more than simply arranging hospitality - ensuring that there will be a bed to sleep in or food to eat - rather these disciples are to share together in the ministry, the activity of Jesus himself. They are given a manifesto for mission in which God's love is made real in tangible and practical ways.

The work is too important to be left to a select or small group, a holy huddle who know what they are to do and how they should do it. The kingdom Jesus heralds requires everyone to offer what they have, summoning out what is good and holy in each of us so that God's glory might be discerned and

realised. Those appointed are, as Luke's gospel reminds us, to be spirit-filled messengers, sent out into the world. Prefiguring how in the wake of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit would take the Christian community beyond the confines of Israel and out into the world; reminding us that God's horizon is always grander and more expansive than we might first imagine.

The ministry of the church then, Luke shows us, is nothing more than the ministry of Jesus himself. Not restricted to a certain time or place, but a ministry that we today, wherever we have been placed, continue. Perhaps not in ways the world might think of as significant, but rather in holy, attentive and grace-filled lives, centred on Christ who gives us the strength to be the means by which he can be known and his love experienced. Each of us called to be a place where the good news we profess is not hidden or obscured by our reticence, our fearfulness or our weakness, but demonstrated in every part of our being. Obedient to Jesus' command in being joyful in faith in order that others may come to believe.

For such a task then, I think to return to where I began, its significant that when Luke records the commissioning of the seventy other disciples, he sends them out in pairs. Not as lone-workers, lacking in accountability or dependent solely on themselves, but in partnership with each other. This is not the sending out of seventy solitary disciples, but thirty-five pairs of believers, partners together in the gospel, who go out two-by-two. A prompt for us to remember, should we even forget, that the gospel will always be too precious for anyone to think they can go it alone.¹

The kingdom of God will always be most faithfully and effectively experienced when, through our desire proclaim Jesus, we do it together, in relationship and friendship, and through the shared endeavours of the whole church community. Not through bickering or in-fighting, or grand-standing, through giving way to jealousy or resentment. But by letting go of our preoccupations and preconceptions and allowing the Holy Spirit to unite us through our belonging together as members of Christ's body. Who through word and example, just as the seventy we read today were commissioned to do, reveal to those around us - peaceably, prayerfully and practically - that the kingdom of God has already drawn near.

✠ In the name of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ cf. Stephen Cottrell, *'On Priesthood'*, p 32.

The Collect
for Luke the Evangelist

**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.**

Old Testament Reading

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the Lord,
the majesty of our God.

Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.
Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
'Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God.
He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.
He will come and save you.'

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

A highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Holy Way;
the unclean shall not travel on it,
but it shall be for God's people;
no traveller, not even fools, shall go astray.
No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.
And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Isaiah 35

Gospel Reading

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."

Luke 10.1-9

Prayers of Intercession

- ▶ for the Church of God throughout the world - that it might grow and flourish in its vocation to proclaim Christ's love;
- ▶ for all who study, teach and seek to live-out God's word - may we, and the whole Church, be shaped through our response to Christ, the living Word;
- ▶ for the world and for all places of suffering, violence and hatred - for God's gifts of peace and justice to abound in all places and people;
- ▶ for all who continue to suffer as a result of the pandemic, in our country and around the world, remembering particularly those areas where restrictions have been imposed in recent days,
- ▶ for our government and all local and regional leaders called to make difficult decisions at the present time, for wisdom, insight and guidance in decision making;
- ▶ for all whom we love and care for, our families, friends and neighbours - remembering those who have no-one to pray for them;
- ▶ for all who are sick or suffering, those known to us and those known to God alone, that they may know Christ's healing and wholeness in body, mind and spirit;
- ▶ for the departed, and all who mourn and grieve the loss of loved ones, that we may know the hope and comfort of Christ who is the resurrection and the life;
- ▶ for glimpses of God's grace in the week ahead, that we might see the kingdom of God in our lives and in the lives of those around us.

THE SUNDAY SUPPLEMENT

KENT ESTUARY MISSION COMMUNITY PRAYER MEETINGS

<http://bit.ly/KEMCPrayer>

The next next prayer gathering for the church communities of the Kent Estuary Mission Community will be on **Tuesday 27 October at 10.30am** (led by the church community at St Peter's Heversham). After that we will meet again on **Tuesday 10 November at 10.30am** (led by the church community at St Thomas' Milnthorpe). It is hoped that these gatherings will serve to strengthen our common faith and shared fellowship across the Kent Estuary as we look ahead to working together as church communities into the future. Everyone is always welcome!

CHURCH OF ENGLAND RESOURCES

<https://www.churchofengland.org/>

<https://soundcloud.com/the-church-of-england>

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-service-daily-prayer>

<https://www.youtube.com/thechurchofengland>



The Church of England Service comes from the Diocese of Blackburn, the service is a cross-cultural celebrate of St Luke the Evangelist, led by the Reverend Sarah Gill with contributions from the Bishop of Lancaster, the Right Reverend Dr Jill Duff and the Bishop of Blackburn, the Right Reverend Julian Henderson.

The service can be found online here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKHoFOgB6EA>

DAILY HOPE PHONE LINE

The Church of England has developed a national **free** phone line to help support those who might feel particularly isolated at this time, especially if they have no access to the internet. The phone number is **0800 804 8044** and provides a collection of readings, prayers and hymns that can be listened to, all of which are updated regularly. If you know of anyone who might appreciate this service, please do let them know the phone number and pray that it will be a blessing to many.

