

St Luke – evangelist and physician

Isaiah 35:3-6

2 Tim 4:5-17

Luke 10:1-9

“Don’t wish your life away,” my Mum used to say to me as a child when I “couldn’t wait” for something to happen. Half a century later I now see the wisdom in her words!

So I hope you will forgive us for leaping a couple of days into the future today as we celebrate the festival of St Luke, whose feast day falls on Tuesday this week.

St Luke the Evangelist, to give him his full title. Errrr - some of you might be thinking – I thought he was a doctor – patron saint of healing and all that. What’s this ‘evangelist’ business about?

So let’s have a quick reminder of what we know about Luke, then have a brief think about what the “evangelist” title is all about, and finally look at how it all fits together, and what it means for us.

Luke....

So, just a reminder, the Luke we are speaking of is the Luke who wrote the Gospel which we have been reading and preaching through this year. It’s generally accepted that he also wrote the book of the Acts of the Apostles, which picks up the story of what happened after Jesus’ ascension – the coming of the Holy Spirit, the early church and the spread of the gospel. Both are addressed to someone called “Theophilus”, who is likely to have been a wealthy and important man.

Luke was a Gentile (or ‘non-Jew’) by birth and a physician by profession. His writings show him to be an observer and a thinker - a clever, learned and compassionate man, with a heart for those who were excluded or on the margins.

He may have become a Christian in Philippi as a result of St Paul’s teaching there – certainly from that point in Acts the narrative changes from “they did” to “we did”, and both from Acts and from references in Paul’s letters we know he spent a lot of time with Paul and that they were good friends and co-workers. Paul refers to him as his ‘dear friend Luke, the doctor,’ in one of his letters.

And he was a gifted communicator, with a passion for sharing the Good News which he himself had found in Jesus, and encouraging and helping people to respond.

Like Matthew, he used the writings of Mark as the basis for his gospel account, re-telling the story to address the things he wanted to talk about – a bit like different newspapers today will cover the same news story from different angles.

At the beginning of his gospel he explains that he has written his own account of what he has heard from eyewitnesses to Jesus ministry “after investigating everything carefully from the very first” ... “so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.”

In other words, he spoke to people who were there with Jesus, and investigated what they said, in pursuit of the truth. (A bit like the fact-checker/reality checker articles that you see on BBC and in some newspapers.)

And all written through the eyes of a doctor. Compassionate. With concern for the excluded and marginalised. Showing God’s love and care for each individual, irrespective of wealth or status. With space for the women, the Samaritans, the lepers, the penitent thief hanging on the cross next to Jesus, the individuals. Luke alone recounts the parable of the “prodigal son,” with its beautiful picture of forgiveness and restoration.

the evangelist....

So Luke was a doctor and an “announcer of the good news of Jesus” – which is what the word evangelist basically means. Someone who announces good news.

Sadly, alongside its sister ‘evangelism’, it’s a word that in general use has come to mean a particular way of telling people about Jesus - a way which many find unhelpful and distasteful - shouting on a street corner, like the folk in the City Centre; or invading people’s privacy by doorstep ‘Bible-bashing’.

But when the Bible – or the Church – talks about “being an evangelist” it just means announcing the good news of God’s love in Jesus; and this can be in a whole variety of ways, including writing (like Luke), speaking (like St Paul), and healing (like St Peter and the other apostles).

And the early Christians would have heard another ‘meaning’ hidden within the word “evangelist”, because, in those days before instant telecommunications, it was also used for a herald who announced the arrival of a new monarch. Just as after the death of the Queen, there were proclamations of Charles as our new King, first in London, then in the other capital cities in the UK, and then radiating out to all the localities, including, of course, Solihull.

For the first Christians, that new monarch was King Jesus, - who through his death and resurrection had dealt the kingdom of evil a fatal blow - and his kingdom was the Kingdom of God, of which he spoke so often. Not a geographical place, but anywhere where Jesus is recognised as the king, or Lord, in a person’s life. Or we might say - where Jesus is at the centre.

And one of the words used in the Bible for a person accepting Jesus as their King is “salvation”. Or “being saved.”

Saved from the grip of sin, which separates us from God
Saved for “life in all its fulness” – life as God intended it to be, starting now, and continuing into eternity.

...the healer

Now here’s an interesting thing

The same Greek word is used in the NT for “to heal” and “to save”. When we call Jesus our Saviour we could equally well call him our Healer – the one who through his death and resurrection has healed the rift between us and God.

And we see this in both the OT reading for today, and the Gospel
OT speaks of God saving – and then goes on to describe what that will look like – “the eyes of the blinds being opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped”
And at the end of the gospel reading, the 70 are to cure the sick and say the Kingdom of God is near.

Saving (following Jesus/becoming a Christian/ becoming part of the Kingdom of God) and healing go together like two sides of the same coin.

And it’s also important to recognise that healing is about so much more than curing the sick – important though that is.

It’s about making whole again

Restoration

Forgiveness

Reconciliation

And peace – “shalom”.

Not just the absence of conflict

Or division

Or injustice

Or disease – dis-ease

But the deep perfect peace of knowing we are known and loved by God.

Like a baby restfully sleeping in its parent’s arms. Completely secure.

Later in this service we will be offering an opportunity to receive prayer for healing. We can pray for healing at any time, (two of us prayed for healing for someone during the Welcome Café on Tuesday) but in some church traditions there is a particular focus on praying for healing within the context of the Holy Communion, when we are specifically remembering Jesus’ healing and saving work on the cross. Theresa/Paul will explain more about the practicalities later.

But for now, I'd like to invite and encourage you to consider the areas in your own life, the life of someone else, or the life of the world, which is in particular need of God's healing at this time

It might be yourself or someone you know who is physically or mentally unwell

It might be someone who is far from God – separated and lost from God and themselves

It might be someone who is anxious or troubled, or bereaved

It might be a tense or broken relationship, a long-standing (or recent) situation of unforgiveness

It might be for a national or global issue – in the same way as it's ok to bring another person to God, it's ok to bring a need of the world to God for his healing and restoration.

[pause]

And invite you to bring that person or issue for prayer for healing later on.

So today we are remembering St Luke, physician, healer and evangelist. Someone who experienced the healing power of the Gospel in his own life, and then committed his life to sharing it with others.

May we follow his example.