

## Morning Worship – Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> October – St Luke

### St Luke – Rev Paul Day

Isaiah 35:3-6

Luke 10:1-9

Today the church celebrates the feast day of St Luke. And we are marking that celebration in both our online worship, and our service in St James by focussing our prayers on prayers for healing. Why? You might ask. Why Luke and why a healing service to mark the day.

It all goes back to what we know of Luke.

If we were asked about Luke, probably the first thing we would come up with is that he wrote one of the four gospels. The Gospel according to Luke. Most of us will be aware that he also wrote the Acts of the Apostles – like a second volume to the gospel. The first volume – the gospel - tells the story of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The second volume tells the story of his ascension and then charts the way the message about Jesus spread from Jerusalem and around the Middle East. The Acts of the Apostles (or Acts as we usually call it) tells how the first followers of Jesus – Christians as they came to be known – took the message and preached to all. It tells of how those who believed were from both Jewish and non-Jewish (Gentile) background. It tells us of the beginnings of the church. The church then, of course, was very different from today. It was local gatherings of people who had each responded to the gospel message. There was no sense of any wider organisation.

But what do we know about Luke as a person? We know that he was not just the author of Acts – he was actually one of the characters in the story. If you read through Acts much of it is written in the third person – Peter did this; Paul said that; they went there. But there are a number of points in the story where it changes to **we**. Acts 16 is an example – We set sail from Troas. This is backed up by the fact that Luke also appears in Paul's letter on a number of occasions. In his second letter to Timothy, written from prison in Rome, Paul says *Only Luke is with me*. And in the letter to the Colossians, Paul refers to him as Luke

the physician, or Luke the doctor. Hence the connection between Luke and a healing service.

Luke was most probably a Gentile – a non-Jew – and if that is so, this makes him the only non-Jewish author in the Bible. His gospel seems to be written from a Gentile perspective and for a predominantly Gentile audience; he appears in Acts – as we have said some of what he writes is from his own experience. But there is no evidence that he was a witness to anything Jesus did. Much of what is in his gospel is similar to what is in Matthew and Mark. He clearly used other's memories to put his gospel story together.

So what can we learn from him today?

There are a couple of things I think it would be helpful to take with us. One about his response to the gospel – about his discipleship if you like. And the other about his attitude to healing – and in particular to God healing people.

We know nothing for certain of how Luke became a believer. It may have been through the preaching of Paul. What we do know is that he was soon part of the mission of the church. The first time a 'we' section appears in Acts is when Paul and his companions – including Luke - travel from Troas to Philippi. The next is some 5 years later in Acts 20 when Luke meets Paul in Troas, having sailed from Philippi. I suppose it is possible that Luke had been in Philippi all that time – we just don't know. If he had been he would have been one of the leaders of the church there, helping a group of young Christians grow into the kind of church to whom Paul would eventually write the joyful and encouraging letter that we know as Philippians.

After meeting Paul in Troas, Luke travels with him to Jerusalem, and eventually after various trials and hearings travels with Paul to Rome, where it appears that he stayed with Paul as a valued friend. It was in Rome whilst in prison that Paul writes the letters which mention Luke as his companion. *Only Luke is with me.*

Perhaps Luke can be an example to us here. He responded to the gospel message, and he was soon part of the work of proclaiming the gospel and nurturing others who had responded. He expressed his faith by growing as a disciple, and then by being part of helping others in their growth. If my supposition about his presence in Philippi is correct, he encouraged others in

their faith. Indeed, he helped a lively and supportive church develop. Through living the gospel he passed on the gospel and enabled others to do the same.

But more than that. He never sought the limelight himself, but was willing to be a faithful companion. The outworking of his discipleship, his following Jesus, was different at different stages of his life. And we can assume that in the latter stages of his life, he saw his role as someone who could help spread the message by writing down the stories of Jesus and the church – in what we know as the gospel and Acts.

We may not all be called to be evangelists like Paul, but I would guess that each one of us can see something that could be ours in what Luke took on – nurture, friendship and support, passing on to others what we have learned from God, encouraging others, being alongside people in their times of need.

And the other thing I would like to bring out is the relationship between medicine and what we might call supernatural healing. Luke, as we have seen, was a doctor. Clearly medical knowledge was not as great then as it is now. There certainly wasn't the expectation that every ailment could be cured, as we tend to have these days. But there were doctors, those who studied and practised medicine. Those who through skill and application brought healing. Luke was one of those.

And yet in both his gospel and Acts Luke talks of miraculous healings. Healings brought about not through medicine but through prayer and the command of God. Right at the start of his account of Jesus' ministry we read *all those who had any who were sick with various kinds of diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on each of them and cured them*. In today's gospel reading from Luke's gospel we read the instruction Jesus gave to the seventy he was ending out – *Cure the sick*. Stories of healings continue through Acts, healings brought about through the prayers and words of people like Peter and Paul.

Luke shows no surprise at these healings or the instruction to the disciples to heal – he accepts that God can bring healing through prayer as well as through medicine.

We have had a long tradition in this Parish of regular prayers for healing through our link with the Guild of St Raphael. In normal times we have had a monthly service where individuals' names are read out, and people anointed with oil and prayed for with prayers for healing and wholeness. We have

continued this through the lockdown, albeit without the anointing, with a couple of online services and one of the Wednesday morning Eucharists in St James last month.

And so today, on the feast day of St Luke, we are once again focussing our services – online and in St James – on praying for healing.

And as we do so we recognise that we cannot dictate to God what he will do. As we receive prayer for ourselves, and as we pray for others we do so with the understanding that we are placing ourselves and others in God's presence. We are entrusting each of us with confidence into God's care.

It's with this in mind that we often use the term *wholeness* in our prayers. Recognising that physical healing may not come, but that God can and will give us the strength we need to cope and thrive. And we also acknowledge, of course, the skill and dedication of medical staff as they work for healing.

As we pray for each other today we will use the words:

*May Christ bring you wholeness of body, mind and spirit ... and give you his peace.*

In praying that prayer we are asking for much more than physical healing. We are asking for a deeper healing that takes away all our fears and concerns. The kind of healing that will sustain us through times like these.

Today then, we remember St Luke. We remember his love for God, his willingness to serve God and the church in a wide variety of ways. And we remember the way he accepted and trusted that God brings healing through medicine and through prayer. We not only remember, but in both – his discipleship and his involvement with the healing ministry we follow his example.