

Holy Trinity 18<sup>th</sup> October 2020 St Luke the Evangelist Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity

Readings: Isaiah 35:3-7 and Luke 10:1-9

Today is the day when we remember St Luke the Evangelist. Luke the Author of the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. His epithet is 'the Evangelist' – (a word meaning, 'Someone who brings good news') – because that is what he was good at - and what he longed to see happen.

And we see that in today's Gospel reading. I think many of us would sympathise with Charles Schultz's sentiment when he wrote: 'I love mankind... it's people I can't stand.' We live in a world it seems dominated by bad news. Some of us would eagerly put our heads in the sand – and say 'Stop the world: I want to get off.' But the Christian Faith is about Good News to such a world. The challenge to all of us who claim to be Christians is 'How can I be Good News to those I live among?'

Let me start with the Gospel reading. Here Jesus sends out the 72. It is generally agreed that the number of missionaries sent out (much larger than the group of 12 apostles sent out in chapter 9) matches the number of nations thought at the time to exist – namely 72. That is Jesus was symbolically stating that the Good News is for all.

Jesus instructs them when they enter a house, first to say, 'Peace to this house.' (Luke 10:5) Clearly this is more than simply a polite greeting. 'If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you.' (v.6) We need to see ourselves as bringers of 'peace'. Whatever context we find ourselves in, to ask, 'How can I bring peace to this place?'

Something else that strikes me in the instructions that Jesus gives – and can easily miss our attention is repeated twice: In verse 7 he says, 'Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you...'. In that verse he goes on to say, 'for the worker deserves his wages', so perhaps it's more about not being guilty for enjoying people's hospitality.

But then in verse 8 Jesus adds, 'When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you' – without qualification. It seems to be that Jesus is teaching them to sacrifice personal taste for the sake of the Gospel. A similar point is made by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:27: 'If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go,

eat whatever is put before you...'. Paul is concerned about the spread of the Gospel to Gentiles. So assuming that Paul is building here on the teaching of Jesus – we see that Jesus was laying down a principle. The vast majority of Jesus' first disciples were Jews and Jesus knew that they'd have real issues about eating Gentile food. And it's as if Jesus were saying – don't let your personal preferences be a stumbling block to getting alongside people with the Good News.

Before turning to the OT reading – my last observation is simply to round off with Jesus' final teaching here: 'Heal the sick who are there and tell them, "The kingdom of God is near you."' (Luke 10:9) It seems to me that Jesus was telling them in effect to be practical and if necessary to get their hands dirty! Bringing healing to people – isn't just a matter of clicking your fingers! Often it takes time and engagement with people. That's how Christians should be known. As people who bring peace, who don't judge others (for what they eat etc) and who bring healing – getting involved in people's lives.

Which brings me to the passage from Isaiah. What is so interesting is the way in which the ministry of Jesus and His purpose for the world is foreshadowed in the OT – not least in Isaiah.

It's been said that we currently face three pandemics: Covid-19, Racism and Climate Change. I think that somewhat sums things up.

So how are we as Christians to bring 'peace' to such a world? There's no quick or simple answer. But this passage (Isaiah 35:3-6) gives us a glimpse. Note the positive tone of verses 3-4: 'Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come."' Isaiah speaks of three aspects of our frailty:

- 'feeble hands' – we can feel powerless
- 'knees that give way' – we can feel physically weak and exhausted
- 'fearful hearts' – we can feel mentally traumatised.

Life can just seem so awful that we don't know where to turn. Isaiah's answer is, 'your God will come'. In fact, the Hebrew is pleasantly and strikingly succinct: literally, 'Behold God'. That is, when we're at our wits end – look to God.

I hate to leave out, when preaching, the difficult parts of Scripture. The second part of verse 4 might raise a few eyebrows: '[God] will come with vengeance; with divine

retribution he will come to save you.’ But what Isaiah is saying is that all that is evil and all that is anti-God (who embodies Love and Goodness) will be done away with – that must surely be Good News!

The NT letter to the Hebrews sums up the thought well (Hebrews 12:2-3), ‘Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him [He could see things from an Eternal perspective] endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him [Jesus] who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.’ So what was the ‘joy set before him’? Passages such as the one today in Isaiah, may have been in mind. The rest of the verses we heard earlier read, ‘Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.’ All that is evil is transformed into good! In fact, the chapter continues in similar vein.

Intriguingly, in Luke the Evangelist’s Gospel, Jesus Himself alludes to this passage as being fulfilled in His actions: John the Baptist in prison sends two disciples to ask Jesus: ‘Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?’ (Luke 7:19-20) To which Jesus replies, ‘Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.’ (Luke 7:22)

In Jesus we begin to see the promise of a new heaven and a new earth. I don’t know if you’ve watched any of the David Attenborough nature programmes. It’s hard not to find oneself uttering the word ‘Wow’. YET, there’s natural disasters to contend with:

- Floods, Famines, Droughts

Some of them undoubtedly linked to our abuse of the planet

- Plastic waste
- Pollution
- Destruction of the rain forests
- Animals being made extinct for the purposes of pseudoscience.

What a relief it is to see the promises of God: ‘Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the

thirsty ground bubbling springs' and so on. That's the Good News. God has not abandoned His world. 'Behold God!'

I want to end with one further point – that the NIV glosses over in verses 5 and 6, by leaving out a word that is in the Hebrew. The NIV has it, 'Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and the streams in the desert.' But it's left something important out. It's left out translating the little word 'ki' which means 'because'. So the verse actually reads like this, 'Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. BECAUSE [w]ater will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool...' and so on. I hope you can see the difference. Because the 'joy' is based on fact. The world has changed. The 'new heavens and the new earth' – will be without the negatives of the current world. In Isaiah 65:17 we read, God announces, 'Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.' Similarly, in the last book of the Bible we read that in this new creation, 'there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' (Rev. 21:24) This is no wishful thinking. This is how it will be.

That's the Good News that the Christian has to share with the world. That's the Good News that will bring peace to the world. God is in control – and however the world feels and looks now – God has a wonderful future planned.

#### PRAYER

Collect

O God, forasmuch as without you we are not able to please you;  
mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit many in all things direct and rule our hearts;  
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 forever.  
Amen.

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,

your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all evermore. Amen.