

BIBLICAL REFLECTION

for the Feast of St. LUKE, Evangelist (18 October)

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COLLECT ...

*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*

In the words of today's Collect, we each of us receive a sense of commission – and at a time of change and evolution, feeling upheld by God is possibly one of the greatest experiences we of faith can be part of. The commission of Luke is as for us, in that having received the wholesome power of the gospel, we are then able to offer love, healing and God's strength to all whom we encounter on life's way. Luke, as a Gentile, brings hope to the wider world – we, as those who continue his work, bring everlasting hope to everyone.

One aspect of our Christian faith which perhaps we do not always realise the power of is precisely that: our faith. Our own personal and unique relationship with God; a relationship that we garner, evolve and stimulate throughout our entire Christian existence; a relationship which hopefully just oozes out of the edges of who we are. Living and breathing God is possibly the greatest evangelistic tool we have – going about daily life in the knowledge and confidence of God is undoubtedly far more powerful than any gimmicky worship that the dear ol' Church of England can invent! To be a part of God, and He a part of us must be the goal for all.

How that 'being' evolves will not be the same for everyone – and cloning Christians was never, as far as I can see, the objective of the Church. It is in our own personal development that the wonder that is our faith nurtures, stretches, oozes out and blossoms. Keeping that process active keeps our faith alive, so the 'rule of thumb' for all is to reflect the sentiment of today's Collect and keep the wholesome nature of the gospel alive through our love, through the power it exudes, and always being mindful of the grace of the Spirit lying deep within, fuelling our very being.

Strengthened in such a way, we realise that human precepts become rather secondary, and one of the challenges we must always hold onto is that of not measuring faith's success in those human terms. Inevitably, we fail at this on many occasions – we notice people suddenly missing from Church, we worry that we cannot afford to mend that hole in the roof, we think we should be doing something else in our witness because we are failing to impact upon the local community. These are all human methods of measuring – but are they God's? If the message lying behind our Collect is to be fully

subscribed to, they are definitely not. What He requires is simply a devotion and determination and desire to 'be' – to be the very person we are, who was called, excited, and led to view faith as a paramount virtue to be had. Excellent, if you devote your time to coming to Church regularly; Brilliant, if you are skilled at mending holes in roofs; Wonderful, if there are crowded pews – but these are second to the core desire of our personal relationship with the Living God – and through that reflection, the world at large will see – and hopefully be impressed.

We must, of course, always be genuine, and one of the mistakes each of us is often guilty of is false piety. A little bit too much 'showy' practice is never a good thing. A little bit too much 'novelty' produces what exactly? A little bit too much bitchiness undermines all else. So we strive to replace such – and like the medicine of the gospel, we are constantly offered opportunity to heal ourselves in order that we can heal others. After all, if we give off a fake image of Christ, it is little wonder that those around us receive a fake image. If we want that image to be genuine, we know what to do, and hopefully find time and energy to portray such.

But, it is more than just a PR exercise on behalf of "God plc" – it must live and breathe and exude from every living pore in our bodies. The Holy Spirit must be like toothpaste that just squirts out with the tiniest of pressure! When someone 'touches' us – in the widest sense of the word, I hasten to add – that same Spirit should come forth, and – like toothpaste – provide a cleansing and refreshing experience. What is wonderful about the universal nature of faith symbolised in Luke is that we are all counted as valid carriers of this amazing Spirit, so never forget that. As each faces whatever future that lies ahead, this same Spirit will forever be there if we want that to be. We have choice – and when we choose, so we must respond; and that choice can, if we so wish, be everlasting.

Lying at the core of this eternal concept is, of course, that most fundamental and vital element of our relationship with God, the receiving of His very self. No matter what shape or design or method we each use and develop as our unique mode of witness, the one essential and uniting factor has – and will forever be so – has to be the reception of the Sacrament. As my ministry closes, I must say that it has been the greatest of privileges to share this sensation with you. Whatever else we may have achieved in our corporate witness as a Christian community here at St. Mark's, we have always been consistent in our uniting sacramental strength. We have come together, we have shared together, we have received together – and that togetherness has revealed to the world at large the almighty power of a wondrous God, a God whose love for His people is as endless as that supply of sacramental goodness will provide.

From other hands, you will continue to receive that power – and each of you can feel confident that the groundwork we have nurtured between us over the past thirty-one years or so will be as firm as it can ever be. So, never lose heart, never allow human precepts to overshadow God, and always stay firm to that wholesome gospel medicine because through such your power will remain. God promises that – we sense within that it is true – and your witness here is as vital as anyone else's.

Fr. Ian