

Sunday, October 18th. 2020. Luke the Evangelist

Isaiah 35, 3-6a, Psalm 147, 1-7, 2 Timothy 4, 5-17, Luke 10, 1-9

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

Ten days ago, my doctor in Aylesbury retired. I shall miss her, as she has been a very good doctor and has been very supportive to me and my mum over many years. She told me, that if I am ever ill, I always do it properly!! It's always chronic!

We rely on our doctors, who are always there when we need them, not only for curing physical ailments, but in many other ways, too. The present corona virus crisis has shown how much people value the NHS and all who work in it. Even if we think that it needs some reform in order to respond to present day needs, we value it enormously, so, many people have made a great effort to raise money to support it.

In the book Ecclesiasticus, there is a passage about the doctor: 'Honour physicians for their services, for the Lord created them; for their gift of healing comes from the Most High; and they are rewarded by the king. My child, when you are ill, do not delay, but pray to the Lord, and he will heal you. Then give the physician his place, for the Lord created him; do not let him leave you, for you need him. There may come a time when recovery lies in the hands of physicians, for they too pray to the Lord that he will grant them success in diagnosis and in healing, for the sake of preserving life.'

Today, we celebrate Luke, the doctor, mentioned three times in Paul's letters. He was a close friend of Paul, who described him as 'the beloved physician'. In today's second reading, Paul is in prison and alone, except for Luke.

Luke, a Gentile, is believed to be the author of the Gospel, which bears his name, and also of the Acts of the Apostles. He is the patron saint of physicians and surgeons and, because his narrative of the life of Christ is portrayed as a picture, he is also the patron saint of painters.

The theme of healing runs through today's readings. The first reading from Isaiah is a vision of a new and restored land and a revived people, the exiles returning in safety to Zion. To those, who lack faith, there is the reassurance that God will intervene. There will be changed fortunes for those, who are distressed, and also for the land, with water breaking out and turning the land into pasture. So, God is seen as bringing the people back and healing them.

In Psalm 147, God is also seen as gathering the outcasts and caring for the sorrowful and weak. 'He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. The Lord lifts up the poor, but casts down the wicked to the ground.' God is infinite in wisdom and infinite in compassion towards the weakest inhabitants.

The Gospel tells of the mission of the 70 or 72, related only in Luke. The narrative is written to symbolise the mission of the church to the Gentiles. Traditionally, the Jews conceived of 70 or 72 non-Jewish nations.

Jesus has been teaching and healing. Many people have been drawn to him, but he has been rejected in some places, people refusing to meet him. Now the disciples have begun their journey with him to Jerusalem, where he will be crucified. The disciples are to go out in twos, which shows that the mission won't always be easy. We follow this today, for example, police officers going out in twos, and, in the Church, we are advised not to go to some places alone. We have to follow safeguarding guidelines.

The mission is seen as urgent, so the disciples won't have time to indulge in complicated greetings. Jesus tells them that he is sending them out like lambs into the midst of wolves.

They are to spend time with people, talk, eat and drink with them. The message is one of healing and wholeness. They are to cure the sick and tell them that the kingdom of God has come near.

We, too, have a mission today. How are we to tell people that the kingdom of God has come near to them? The Gospel is not just for us, but for everybody. Some may not know what goes on in a church and may feel uncomfortable about coming in. So, the Church has to go out, and our mission also may be to talk, eat and drink with other people and to listen to them. Jesus sent out the 70 to be with people, to share their lives. It's all about healing, not only in a physical sense, but in bringing people together, showing them that they are loved by God and valued equally.

Our mission, then, is not one of judgement, but of healing and peace. As that passage from Ecclesiasticus points out, our doctors collaborate with God in bringing healing and wholeness to the nation. Our mission is to try to reveal the love of God for all, and to work with God to bring his healing love to those, whom we meet.

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

