

Celebrating St Luke today - 'Luke the Physician' as we read in St Paul's letter to the Colossians - we may have expected a gospel passage on healing, especially having heard those evocative verses from Isaiah 35 of

- the eyes of the blind being opened,
- the ears of the deaf unstopped,
- the lame leaping like a deer,
- and the tongue of the mute singing for joy.

Instead, though, we have a reading from Luke 10 about evangelism – recalling the more common title of Saint Luke as – 'the Evangelist': Luke who travelled and worked with St Paul taking the Gospel message to people of pagan backgrounds, as well as Jewish, and whose sequel to his Gospel, the book of Acts, focusses on the missionary activity of the first apostles.

Both these themes come together in the central message Luke is seeking to convey, and it comes in the final verse of our reading: Besides ***curing the sick*** (in the name of Jesus), to ***tell the people*** that "**The kingdom of God has come near you**".

This is about healing in its deepest sense... not just our bodies, but our entire lives being 'made whole', and thus fully embracing the 'kingdom of God' – which is truly 'good news'.

Let me explain. The image of 'the kingdom' didn't just spring out of nowhere (as things rarely do). It was what the Jewish people had long waited for with eager anticipation: the time when God would intervene and restore the nation, liberating them from their enemies. At the time of Jesus, from their hated Roman overlords. The message of Jesus was that God would indeed intervene - though not in restoring a physical country, but in liberating people as individuals from the shackles of sin and all that prevented them entering in to a full and fruitful relationship with their heavenly Father. It is through himself, and the Cross and the Resurrection, that - evil is vanquished, the barrier between God and his people is removed, the veil separating God's is 'torn in two', and our communication directly with God through the Holy Spirit and in prayer, is made open to all.

In other words, the message of the kingdom now breaking in upon the world through the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is ***for everyone***. No one is excluded from the mission of Christ. The message – not so much of judgment, but of healing and wholeness: those sent out are to ***cure the sick***, and ***tell them...*** "**the kingdom of God has come near to them**".

Perhaps the most striking aspect of his message was that this intervention was not something far away, but 'very near'. A modern day NT scholar, Howard Marshall, nicely sums up what this means, saying:

*"the kingdom is **near** – to those who hear the message and **experienced** – by those who respond to it".*

And this kingdom is revealed through Jesus, and through the message about him that his followers have preached ever since.

So the 70 are sent out to the towns and villages tell others. That number is significant *both* because it corresponds with the traditional number of nations in the entire world as set out in the book of Genesis ch.10, *and also* because it is a multiple of two numbers, 7 & 10, which themselves signify completeness. This mission now starting will then get under way in earnest from Pentecost after the empowering of the Holy Spirit, and is for continuing in every generation to come.

Upon those sent out, Jesus impresses the urgency of the message – **not** worrying about bags and money and footwear, **not** concerned about the food they are given (Kosher or otherwise) or where to sleep – just gratefully accepting traditional Middle Eastern hospitality; **nor** wasting time where the message is not to be received, but getting on with the task entrusted to them. They are to stay where they are welcomed, eat together, talk together and share stories with the people they meet – just as any of us might do in the course of our daily round, whatever and wherever that may be.

What could this mean for us today? In respect of our faith 'walking the walk, and talking the talk', to coin a modern phrase, can seem a daunting task – as no doubt it was too for the 70! Maybe like Jonah, they wanted to flee in the opposite direction! They hadn't been on courses, or been taught how to evangelise; they'd simply observed Jesus at work and used his teaching, companionship, courage, and empathy as a role model.

As always, we have a choice. We can hear today's gospel passage as an interesting historical account. Or we can recognise that we too have a mission – for our Gospel isn't just for us, it's for everyone. Perhaps our mission begins when we find ways to eat and drink with our neighbours, and to share our stories, especially with those who may not yet feel comfortable coming to church. Like the 70, let us think how we can go out and converse about our faith naturally... in the shops, at the bus stop, over a cup of tea and biscuit: listening to others, sharing stories; and, by offering our compassion and empathy, being a channel for God's healing and grace. Even in the mundane course of our daily interactions WE can show something of HIS kingdom to others! Perhaps even a foretaste of heaven!

Amen.