

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

Reflection – 20th Sunday after Trinity

St Luke the Evangelist

17th October 2021

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Today is officially Healthcare Sunday when we celebrate and remember all those who care for us when we are ill. It's always held on the Sunday nearest to the feast of St Luke, the physician who wrote over a quarter of the New Testament. Which happens to be tomorrow! So we are celebrating St Luke as well, rather than looking at the readings set for today.

Paul brought Luke to faith in Christ and we can see in Acts, that he sometimes accompanied Paul on his travels. He was well educated; his writing style is more accomplished than the other gospels. He was probably a Gentile, who never met Christ, and so his Gospel was based on careful historical research, interviewing people for eyewitness accounts, getting oral and written evidence. He wrote his Gospel and Acts as two volumes of the same book, and if you read them one after the other you can see themes like the salvation of the Gentiles coming through the Gospel and reaching completion in Acts. He stresses that the story of Jesus is historically factual, the gospel message is authentic, and is meticulous in dating Jesus' ministry with references to the rulers in power at the time.

The reassuring thing about Luke's gospel is that he emphasises that salvation is for everyone – outsiders too. God's salvation is there for everyone and anyone who has a repentant heart and a life of love for God and others, no matter what their background, status, gender or ethnicity.

God's love for the lost is shown clearly for example in the stories about tax collectors. Jesus's call to Levi, a tax collector, to be his disciple; the repentant tax

collector in the temple receiving forgiveness whilst the self-righteous Pharisee gains nothing (18 9-14), the chief tax-collector Zacchaeus, forgiven when he repents and turns to God (19 1- 10.) The repentant criminal on the cross was forgiven by Jesus (23 39 – 43). Have a look at Luke and see what other examples there are – it's a rich vein running throughout his writing. Samaritans were very much despised in Luke's time, but he faithfully records Jesus's pleasure at the gratitude of a Samaritan whom he healed of leprosy (17. 11- 13), and the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Women are mentioned in Luke's Gospel more often than in the other gospels – 13 of whom aren't even mentioned elsewhere. Luke has a real understanding of women – just look at the birth narrative, told from Mary and Elizabeth's point of view. What more natural from Mary than going to see her much older relative who was also pregnant in unusual circumstances? And I love the line later on after the shepherds had been to see the new born Jesus which says "All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often". That is a very feminine perspective!

Gentiles were the ultimate outsiders. Luke was probably one himself. Whilst Matthew's gospel account of Jesus's heritage goes back to Abraham, the father of the Israelites, Luke goes right back to Adam, the father of the whole human race.

He follows his gospel with his account of Acts, the spreading of the gospel from Jerusalem throughout the Mediterranean world. There's a lot of debate about when Acts was written but it seems to have been around AD 60 ish – there's no mention for example of the outcome of Paul's trial in around AD 62 as it ends before that with Paul under house arrest.

So we know why we celebrate St Luke, but why do we have a Sunday dedicated to Healthcare? Well, healthcare is important to all of us regardless of age. From the day we are born, most of us in the West will have benefited from a team of highly trained midwives and doctors making sure we arrived safely and our mothers had the best care too. This continues throughout our lives, and it's sobering to think that in the UK more people pass through the nation's hospitals than through its churches. On average the NHS in the UK deals with one million patients every 36 hours, and it employs more than 1.5 million people. Many of them are Christians, sharing the love and compassion of Jesus, bringing light and hope in the darkest of

times. At some time in our lives we all need care, whether we are ill or injured, in mind or body, or are too frail to look after ourselves.

I thought it interesting to get this insight from a Doctor on Healthcare Sunday –

What it means to be a Christian Doctor: “I chose to study Medicine, as I felt God was calling me to use the gifts and skills He had given me to help and serve other people. It is a hugely rewarding, stimulating career and it is a real privilege to care for others at the most difficult times of their lives. Nevertheless, there are many trials and challenges to face along the way. Being a doctor is more than a job. It is a vocation. By nature, most doctors are caring, compassionate and hard-working. Despite the best medical care, there will always be pain, suffering, anxiety, anger and tears. As Christian doctors, we are called to shine a light in this dark place. God calls us to love as He loves: the unkempt alcoholic, the self-harming teenager, the elderly patient with dementia, the outspoken member of the team. He teaches us to be humble (in God's eyes the cleaner is as important as the consultant) ... it is hard to deny that issues of faith and spirituality become more important to patients when faced with illness and death. ...God uses each of us in different ways to reach out to those around us.... We face tough situations and circumstances every day. But God is there with us, in every consultation, equipping us, guiding us, helping us with difficult procedures, giving us the words to say. When we are exhausted, He sustains us and gives us the energy to continue. Having had only four hours' sleep before a night shift, I opened the Bible to Psalm 18:28 "You, Lord keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light”.

Humbling stuff. In our congregations we have people from the medical and caring professions. Today's the day we should stand up and say a big Thank-you!

But we should pray for them every day too, play our part in supporting them and remembering that they too are human – they get tired, disheartened, and ill as well. As we celebrate all the advances in medical care, let's not take the wonderful care we get from our medical and caring services here in France and elsewhere for granted – let's give thanks to God for his steadfast love and presence in every care home, hospital, operating theatre, ambulance and clinic. But let's also decide to do our bit to be there for family, friends and neighbours when they need care. A small gesture like a bunch of flowers from the garden to a neighbour of ours who is struggling with cancer treatment, made the day her hair fell out a little more

bearable. A phone call, a visit, a message, a hug – all have healing power. Christ healed through prayer – we can too.

Amen.