

St Luke
'physician of the soul'

18 10 15

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.

Our text may be found in today's reading from Acts, chapter 16 and verse 10:

'we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia.'

How awake are you ? When you read something, anything, are you aware of what is actually being said in what is actually written ? I love detective stories on TV: 'Morse'; 'Lewis'; 'Foyle's War'; 'New Tricks'. And the reason I enjoy them so much is I love looking for clues as to what is going on and who has really done what to whom. The same with language: the obvious might not be so obvious to the casual, careless reader. So take this mornings reading from Acts chapter 16 and verses 6 - 12. Paul's Second Missionary Journey is going nowhere and the subject of the verbs are in the third person plural - 'they': 'they went'; 'they had come'; 'they attempted'; 'they went'; till verse 10 and our text: 'we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia.'

So what's going on? Simply the fact that the author of Acts is now himself part of the action. 'They' refers to Paul's party: 'we' marks the fact that Dr Luke, the author of Acts, is on the act himself. From here on in, 'they' is now 'we'.

Today, Sunday 18th October, is the day we remember St Luke, doctor and writer, evangelist and friend of St Paul. Luke from here on in is himself a part of the story of how the gospel, the good news that Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ, the Messiah, was spread. And today, on St Luke's Day, I'd like to briefly consider what we owe to him.

Well, in the New Testament, two books: the gospel that bears his name and 'Acts' the account of the birth and growth of the Church and our faith from Jerusalem out through Judea and Samaria to the Gentile world, to Rome, the heart of the Empire, and ultimately on to the ends of the earth. Only Luke gives us the story of what happened, taking us from the Ascension through to Paul's imprisonment in Rome. It is a story of how the disciples, now apostles, are sent out in the power of the Holy Spirit to change lives; the story of how first Jews then Gentiles became followers of the way and were later to be called Christians.

But it is the gospel that Luke wrote that I love because Luke gives us stuff the other gospels don't. Don't get me wrong: I love Mark's brevity and attention to tiny detail; I appreciate Matthew's Jewish spin; I love John's spiritual take on the story. But Luke offers us an insight into the Virgin Mary: the Annunciation; the visit of the shepherds; the visit to the Temple with the baby Jesus just 40 days old

and the meeting there with Simeon and Anna; then twelve years on Jesus going AWOL telling his distraught parents he had to be about his father's business. Don't you love the Magnificat and the Nunc Dimittis ? And what about the parables unique to Luke: my two all-time favourites – 'the Good Samaritan' and 'the Prodigal Son'. Then there's Luke's emphasis on Jesus reaching out to the outsider: Samaritans, lepers, tax collectors like Zacchaeus who short-changed folk, calling him home as a true son of Abraham. And there are the miracles of healing of foreigners: the Centurion's boy; the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter, and actually touching the corpse of the widow of Nain's son. With Jesus, the outsider is welcomed home as one of us.

There's so much in Luke for us to discover, an inestimable debt we owe him – but let me leave you with another unique story in Luke – the road to Emmaus. Just one sentence from this post resurrection appearance where Clopas says, '**Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking on the road ?**' Here there is a real sense of excitement at being in the presence of God – that is a gift Luke conveys to us. And my prayer: that it may be true today for all of us here.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Mary the Virgin and All Saints', Potters Bar

18th October, 2015

