

THE FEAST OF ST LUKE THE EVANGELIST

Isaiah 35. 3-6

2 Timothy 4. 5-17

Luke 10. 1-9

I speak to you † in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Today, we have the privilege of celebrating the Feast of St Luke the Evangelist. The little that we know of St Luke is gleaned from the Scriptures and from tradition. He was of Gentile origin, a Greek from the city of Antioch in ancient Syria; and he made his living as a physician. St Luke was an early convert to Christianity, and was a companion of St Paul on his missionary journeys, right up to Paul's martyrdom. St Luke was also martyred for his faith several years later, which is why I am wearing red vestments today. And according to tradition, St Luke was the very first iconographer of our Lord: he drew the first portrait of Jesus that became a model for artists, both past and present.

St Luke is primarily known, however, as the author of the third gospel and of the book of the Acts of the Apostles. It is in these writings, penned with his own hand under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we find clues that help us to sketch a portrait of the beautiful interior life of this great evangelist. This morning, I would like to focus on three particular traits of St Luke.

Firstly, we know from his gospel that St Luke had a special love for Mary, the mother of our Lord. Luke gives more information about Mary than any other gospel writer; and it is thanks to him that we have special insight into the greatness and beauty of her soul. St Luke's gospel reveals Mary's simple and steadfast faith; her child-like trust and obedience to God's will; her generosity and readiness to serve others; her gratitude for the gifts that she has received; her acceptance of God's plan (even when

she didn't understand it); and her prayerfulness, which led her to ponder the ways of God and to keep the truth of God always close to her heart.

Secondly, as one reads St Luke's gospel, one discovers that he places noticeable emphasis on our Lord's compassion and mercy for the lost and poor; for the sick and suffering; and for outcasts and strangers. As a physician, St Luke was very familiar with sickness and suffering, and he himself was probably a very compassionate man. His experience as a physician was good preparation for his work as a missionary of Christ's mercy and healing. Only in St Luke's gospel, for example, do we find the account of our Lord's healing of the ten lepers; the parable of the Good Samaritan; the story of the Prodigal Son; the parable of the poor beggar Lazarus and the rich man; and the moving scene of Jesus' reaching out to Zacchaeus, the despised and rich tax collector of Jericho. St Luke, whom we celebrate today, understood how far the compassion of our Lord reached out to humanity; and St Luke saw with his own eyes individuals who were transformed by the grace of God.

Thirdly, we know that St Luke had a passion for evangelisation, with an emphasis on joy. St Luke wanted to spend his life spreading the good news about our Lord. This was evidenced in his missionary journeys with St Paul; and by his writing not one, but two books: the first, his gospel about the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the life and mission of Jesus; and the second, the book of Acts about the power of that same Spirit at work in the Church, as it faithfully lived and carried on our Lord's mission.

Today's gospel text, written by St Luke himself, tells of our Lord commissioning seventy other disciples to proclaim the good news in advance of his coming. It is commonly held that St Luke was one of these seventy evangelists. He, like the sixty-nine others, was sent out as a lamb among wolves, carrying neither wallet nor shoes; walking along the road, speaking to no-one, a man seemingly of no great importance,

treading along to the next town like a beggar. He had no entourage, no celebrity status, no perks granted because he was a member of the intelligentsia or of the medical profession. St Luke was sent out simply to proclaim the coming of one who was (and is) far greater than the greatest of the world's wealthy and powerful men. The key message proclaimed by the seventy was, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'.

St Luke the Evangelist is a model for us; and we (and all others who are members of the Church of God) are called to follow him in his mission-oriented focus. Unfortunately, for most of us, the word 'evangelist' brings to mind images of television preachers, of Bible-thumpers, of well-dressed and well-coiffed people who are crazy about Jesus, knocking on our doors, ranting on the radio and wanting to talk to us about being saved. Evangelists. Are we evangelists? I dare say that most of us would quickly reply, 'No, thank you. I don't do that sort of thing.'

I invite you to join me this morning and to put aside, just for a moment, our stereotypes of evangelists (as valid as they seem). It might help to know that the word evangelist comes from a Greek word which means 'to bring good news'. It is the same Greek word which serves as a basis for our word 'gospel'. If we go back to the Hebrew counterpart of this word, it means 'good news that is brought back from the field of battle'. Good news means that the battle is won; good news means that the prisoners of war will soon be released. Evangelists are bearers of good tidings and good news. Evangelists are people who, following the example of our Lord and of St Luke, have been to the battle, seen the victory, and have come back with a word of encouragement.

Did you know? This word of encouragement has a name. It is called 'testimony'. Each one of us here at St Stephen's has our own individual word of *testimony* that has been specifically given to us by God. Each of us has our own 'God story' to tell. In

my view, in sharing our testimonies, we are doing something that goes beyond the approach of our stereotypical evangelists. When we share our testimonies, we are actually doing a number of things: we are *reporting* back to others what God has done in our lives; we are (implicitly at least) *teaching* others about what God can do; and we are *evangelising*, to the extent that our testimonies reveal good news and present the truth about God.

When we understand testimony in this way, we begin to see that ‘evangelists’ who share their testimonies are more than journalists or historians, because the events that they describe are those through which God uniquely reveals himself. And generally, these testimonies are not something that one can be indifferent about; they relate events that call for a decision and a response. They have the potential of ultimately changing lives.

How, and where, can you and I share our testimonies today? It can be done as we offer hospitality to those who are lonely; it can be done as we come alongside people whom we know to be going through a difficult time at work or at home; it can be done as we visit those who are house-bound or in hospital; it can be done as we invite people to attend the Guernsey Chamber Choir concert to be held on 5th December at St Stephen’s; and it can even be done as we invite someone to be part of our church community one Sunday morning. Whichever of these options we choose, they all provide us with the opportunity to share a word of encouragement; to share some words from our own ‘God story’. We might not have realised it until now, but we *all* can participate in the mission of God’s church to this world.

Amen.