

Sermon – Sunday October 18th 2020 – St Luke

Readings: Acts 16:6-12a and Luke 10:1-9

So – in no particular order: Emergency Ward Ten. ER. Mash. The Royal. Surgical Spirit. Doctors. Casualty. Grey's Anatomy. Peak Practice. House. Holby City. Scrubs. Doc Martin. And the very best of all - Dr Finlay's Casebook.

So many television series – very popular television series – and all about doctors. I wonder why that is. What makes them so popular? What is the fascination?

Maybe it's the mystery – puzzling out what's wrong with the patient, puzzling out the right treatment. Or maybe it's the thrill of the chase – the patient's symptoms don't make sense, time is running out, and just on the brink of disaster the doctor realises it's a very rare case of . . .

Or maybe it's just the complicated love lives of the key characters. Will they? Won't they?

Which brings us to St Luke, whose feast we celebrate today. Not that we know anything about St Luke's love life. But we do know that tradition has it that Luke was a doctor - that he was the colleague St Paul described as the 'beloved physician'.

Which, they say, explains why he so often focussed on the healing miracles, on Jesus' care and compassion for the sick, his concern for the suffering of the people.

Of course Luke was not among the original twelve disciples – he joined up a bit later. Teamed up with St Paul, travelled with him in his demanding and often dangerous missionary journeys all over the Mediterranean and Middle East. Some of which we heard about in our first reading this morning.

And then he wrote it all up. Two books – the gospel according to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. Which makes him the author of more than a quarter of the New Testament. More than anyone else, even St Paul.

The gospel - he based on Mark's work, adding further eye-witness accounts. He took great care to make it as accurate an historical account as he could, put events in chronological order, recorded details of people and places.

He tells us why he writes in the dedication at the beginning of his gospel. Luke 1:1

'Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for

you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

So far, so good. But I've been wondering why Luke signed up as a Christian in the first place. What was it that appealed to him? We don't know, he doesn't say – the books aren't about himself. But we can wonder.

The scholars tell us that Luke was probably born in the city of Antioch, in Syria, part of the Roman Empire. Greek. And a Gentile. Or – perhaps not, perhaps a Greek Jew. Anyway, a city man, an educated man. Not an illiterate peasant.

But if Luke was the beloved physician – why does he sign up as a Christian, why does he give his allegiance to Christ, even though it will lead to his own death, a martyr's death.

Maybe it was that Luke simply recognised in Jesus a fellow healer. Someone who cares, someone who out of compassion reaches out to touch, to soothe, to reassure, to heal.

Or maybe it was that as a doctor dealing with physical ailments he recognised that people also suffer from a sickness of the soul – that guilt and shame also take their toll on our lives, on our wellbeing – and that we all need a different sort of healing. The sort of healing only Jesus could offer.

Or maybe it was that as a doctor dealing with different sorts of people he recognised that people also suffer from the sickness of injustice – that the poor suffer from more diseases than the rich – diseases caused by poverty, poor housing, malnourishment, anxiety, despair.

That the poor are more likely to be wounded, maimed or killed by accidents and injuries caused by dangerous working practices inflicted by unscrupulous employers.

And that the poor then, and often still now, can't afford the treatment they need, always pushed to the edge, to the margins, always at the back of the queue.

And maybe Luke recognised in Jesus someone who challenged the status quo, who had a different view of what makes men and women valuable, who didn't discriminate, between rich or poor, men or women, Jew or Gentile – had a very different idea about our places in the queue.

Maybe that's why Luke in his gospel includes not only the Beatitudes, but also Mary's song:

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,

and lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things,

And sent the rich away empty.

Or maybe it was something more personal: less of the mind, more of the heart.

As one of the four gospel writers, the four evangelists - St Luke is often represented as a winged ox. The imagery is a reflection of the four living creatures around the throne of God, each one representing an aspect of Christ and one of the four evangelists.

The ox is a beast of burden, a servant creature, a lowly animal that carries the load.

As Jesus said:

‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’

So maybe in Jesus Luke recognised someone who invited him to share the load: Jesus offering to walk alongside Luke, Luke invited to walk alongside Jesus.

When I was putting the service booklet together for today I was struck by a phrase in the collect for today: the wholesome medicine of the gospel.

Today’s gospel records the disciples being sent out by Jesus, as we are sent out at the end of this eucharist. We are sent – like doctors - carrying the wholesome medicine of the gospel - a medicine that has the power to heal the individual soul and also has the power to heal society.