

‘...you called Luke the physician, whose praise is in the gospel, to be an evangelist and physician of the soul...’ (Collect)

It is very timely to be celebrating the feast of St Luke amid renewed & heightened concern about coronavirus. Luke was called the ‘beloved physician’ by St Paul and he is the patron saint of doctors. We continue to pray for doctors, nursing & medical staff and carers, for their ministry to the sick and for their own wellbeing.

St Luke was an evangelist as well as a physician. There are thirteen occasions when people are healed by Jesus in his gospel. People are not only brought back to physical health; there is restoration to mental and spiritual health too. Sometimes the people Jesus healed were suffering because of the difficult social, political and economic situation. We became acutely of the impact of lockdown on these areas of people’s lives earlier in the year and we need to be alert to those who will be in particular need at this time. The churches are open and can provide a place for people to pray and to draw strength from each other. In the reading from Luke’s gospel the disciples are sent out to heal and to proclaim the kingdom: – what can we do to help our friends and neighbours find hope and healing in these difficult times?

We can see why the story of the mission of the seventy (with its focus on evangelism and healing) was chosen for the day when we celebrate St Luke. It might be less clear why the reading from the Acts of the Apostles has been chosen. Well, Luke wrote Acts too – he is original in having written a work in two volumes. (The Gospel and Acts should be read together).

But why this particular passage? Let’s take a closer look. St Paul was on his second missionary journey. Something was keeping him from travelling into the Roman provinces of Asia and Bithynia. It may have been the word of a prophet. It may have been a vision. It may have been

by some inner conviction. There is also the possibility that what kept Paul from travelling into these provinces was ill health.

What makes that quite likely is that in verse 10, suddenly and without warning, the story begins to be told not in the third person, but in the first person: there is a ‘we’ passage (‘When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia’). That tells us that Luke was there; - he was an eyewitness and a companion of Paul.

Why should Luke so suddenly emerge on the scene? Well Luke was a doctor. He probably met Paul then because Paul needed his professional services.

It was the sight of a man from Macedonia (northern Greece) that finally gave Paul his guidance. Who was this man Paul saw in the vision? Some think it was Luke himself, for he may have been a Macedonian. Some think the question should not be asked since dreams don’t need explaining. What we can say is that this chapter from Acts tells of a decisive moment for Christians and for Europe. Macedonia was across the Aegean Sea, across one of the great frontiers in the ancient, as in the modern, world. But Paul and his companions set out on a journey across the sea that was to lead to the Christianisation of Europe. Read on from chapter 16 in Acts.

So we thank Luke for the story of how the good news of Jesus Christ came to this continent; as we do for his account of the life of Jesus in his gospel. Luke is a believer as well as a historian and his writing draws the reader into the action and our own encounter with the living Christ. As we celebrate his feast may we be inspired to re-discover that story for ourselves and re-tell it with his passion and skill. **Amen**