18 October 2026 – St Luke's Day

2 Timothy 4.5-17

As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.
As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.
Do your best to come to me soon, for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry. I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will pay him back for his deeds. You also must beware of him, for he strongly opposed our message.
At my first defence no one came to my support, but all deserted me.
May it not be counted against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

GOSPEL: Luke 10.1-9

The Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you.'"

Today we commemorate Saint Luke. He was Greek, and he wrote over a quarter of the New Testament; and much more than anyone else. His writing was scholarly, well researched, well organised, and drew on a number of different sources; written and oral.

Much of Luke's writing concerned healings of various types. I suppose it would, considering he was a doctor! In fact, that's the one thing most people know about him. Luke's Gospel has a whole lot of healing in it!

So, I thought I would prepare for this sermon by reading the whole of Luke's gospel. It took longer than I expected! And because our Gospel reading today involves healing, I particularly looked for how Luke understood sickness and healing.

One of the first things I noticed was Simeon's prophecy when Jesus was presented in the Temple. My eyes have seen your salvation. And there are quite a few other places where this word is used. The Greek word used is sozo, which means healing, being made whole, complete restoration of body mind and spirit. Our English word salve is embedded in the word salvation. So, for Luke, healing was much bigger than just having your body fixed. It involved transformation of life.

There were a lot of conditions Luke might have considered sickness. Greed, guilt, selfishness, oppression, control all might be among them. Wherever there was lack of humanity, there was sickness. So, there are people like Zacchaeus, the tax collector, who when he met Jesus, decided to repay everyone he had defrauded. And Jesus declared that salvation; healing; had come to his house. He wasn't physically healed, but his humanity was restored.

And we have the story of the friends of the paralysed man who brought him to Jesus for healing. And Jesus told him his sins were forgiven. That's healing; salvation.

And let's not forget the Pharisees! Luke records Jesus as saying that basically they were like the walking dead! Their need for control over people was a sickness.

I could go on, but I think I probably need to focus on our Gospel reading!

This sending out of 70 followers of Jesus follows the same pattern as the chapter before, when Jesus sent out the 12

disciples. Now it wasn't just the special ones, everyone got to take part!

There is a significance to the number 70 in Hebrew thought. It means completeness, wholeness. Some manuscripts list the number as 72, which I actually prefer, because it speaks of everyone plus the dog, the cat, and your Great Uncle Fred who everyone forgets exists! It's messier and more inclusive. More open-ended.

So, Jesus gathers up all his hangers on, all the ones who weren't in the inner circle, and sends them on a mission. To bring healing; salvation.

The astonishing thing is he doesn't send them on any training first. They'd seen Jesus heal people, obviously, but he didn't tell them his secrets. There was no mission plan, no instruction book. In fact, Jesus deliberately sent them out completely unprepared. He insisted on it.

To be effective, they had to be vulnerable. Like lambs amongst wolves, Jesus said. They had to put aside any self-sufficiency, any ideas that they were in any sense qualified. They weren't going as experts; they were going dependent on the kindness of strangers. There's humility here. Shared humanity.

What they absolutely didn't do was show up and run some sort of healing miracle crusade. It wasn't about how spiritual they were, or important, or knowledgeable. It was about vulnerable human beings encountering other vulnerable human beings. Staying with them, eating with them, talking face to face. And if you were to read on in Luke, you would see that in the context of these simple things, healing happened.

When it comes to healing these days, we are expert driven. And we have a mindset that means when we go to a doctor, we expect to be fixed so that we can carry on with our lives as before. Luke seems to have had a very different approach to healing.

In Luke's gospel a story is told about 10 lepers who were healed by Jesus. Nine of them simply went back to their normal lives as though they'd never been ill. But one returned to Jesus, praising God for his healing, and kneeling before Jesus in thanksgiving. And Jesus told him his faith had made him well. His faith had healed him, inside and out. The other nine simply received physical healing, not a complete change of heart. He had received sozo; salvation.

For Luke, healing happened when people were real and vulnerable with each other. And our gospel reading today challenges us all to be part of God's work of healing in the world, God's salvation. Not going as experts, but genuinely meeting people where they are, without fear of vulnerability. Not to fix them, but to be with them in their suffering.

One of the things I love about our particular Christian tradition here is that we make room for sadness and grief. We allow God to meet us where we are, and we are learning to bear each other's burdens. We are not a church of unrelenting joy. I've been in churches like that and they can be hard places to thrive. Our liturgy allows for confession and forgiveness, for the healing of relationships, for remembering the death of Jesus as well as his resurrection. And through the year, there are times when we are able to particularly share the hard times of life together as a faith community. Ash Wednesday. Holy week. The longest night service. Lent and Advent.

Probably the most common form of sickness in our contemporary world is loneliness. And as faith communities, we are uniquely placed to bring healing in this context by being family to those we encounter. Those who come here, often not knowing why they've come. Knowing all the answers can be counter-productive when people actually just need to talk and be listened to.

I want to finish by telling you a story.

Dymphna was a 7th century Irish princess. Her mother was a devout Christian, and at the age of 14 Dymphna consecrated herself to Christ and took a vow of chastity. Shortly afterwards, her mother died, and her father's mental health deteriorated to the point where she was no longer safe.

Dymphna fled to the town of Geel in Belgium where she took refuge. Once she was there, she began to care for the poor and sick of the region. But her father learned where she was and went to Geel to try and force Dymphna to return to Ireland with him. Dymphna refused, and her father killed her. She was said to be 15 when she died.

In 1349 a church honouring Dymphna was built in Geel and she became known as the patron saint of those with psychiatric disorders. Pilgrims arrived from all over Europe, seeking miraculous healing for their mental health problems. By 1480 the church ran out of room,

and the townspeople began taking them into their own homes.

This began a tradition for the ongoing care of those with psychiatric conditions that continues today. The sufferers are referred to as boarders and are treated as ordinary and useful members of the town. They work if they are able, and become part of the community. Some stay a few months, some decades, some for their whole lives. At its peak in the 1930s, over 4000 boarders stayed with the town's inhabitants.

The townspeople now work in partnership with the professional psychiatric care bodies, who provide 24/7 support by caseworkers and medical professionals. The boarders are carefully screened to ensure they don't pose a danger to the host families. But the care in the community continues.

The town's unique treatment of those with mental health problems has been recognised by UNESCO and by various psychiatric bodies. In 2001 the WHO described Geel foster family care as a "best practice" and an excellent alternative to "institutional psychiatry".

Instant miracles may not be much in evidence, but a whole town made a commitment to care for those who came, and over time, many of them experienced significant healing. That in itself is a miracle. People with people. Sharing life together. This is transforming lives and restoring human beings. This is salvation. And I think Doctor Luke would have approved!

Amen.