

Sunday Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – 18th October 2020 – St Luke

Isaiah 35.3-6; Psalm 96.1-9; 2 Timothy 4.5-17; Luke 10.1-9

St Luke is one of the giants of the New Testament. He wrote both the book of the Gospel that bears his name, and he also wrote the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. That puts the volume of his writing on a par with St Paul, though their styles could not be more different. St Luke is a storyteller whereas St Paul is a theologian. St Luke is a doctor with a deep concern for people especially marginalised people, including the women of his time, whereas St Paul is passionate about the radical nature and intellectual coherence of Christian faith. Both these giants of the New Testament, however, share a deep love for Jesus and an unshakable conviction that the message of Jesus is deeply world-changing, and good news for everyone. St Luke wants to tell us what happened so we can draw our own conclusions; St Paul wants to teach us what it means.

We have St Luke to thank for most of the Christmas story, and for many of the best known parables of Jesus. We have Luke to thank for the vivid account of the risen presence of Jesus on the road to Emmaus, and the astonishing account of the gift of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. We have Luke to thank for the first historical account of the very early Church. What St Luke does, is tell stories about how Jesus transforms people's lives, and it is this which makes him such an effective evangelist.

Telling people about how Jesus transforms lives is what evangelism is all about. Few people are converted by mere theology. Rather, people are drawn to following Jesus because Jesus gives them hope. One way or another, that's why most of us are gathered here this morning. Because Jesus gives us hope; hope for our own lives, hope for those we love, hope for our neighbours, and hope for the world. The values that Jesus teaches, about being loved by God, about being at peace with one another and ourselves, about having real worth and purpose despite all our stupidities, failings and mistakes; these values give us real hope. And evangelism is about telling the stories of hope.

Our country and our communities are a bit desperate for hope at present. The coronavirus is reasserting itself in a more virulent way than expected. People lives and livelihoods are threatened in a deeper way than in the first wave. The nation is divided, as some areas face harsher restrictions than others. We are anticipating a long and depressing winter. We are also, I think, facing an even deeper challenge; in that the English character of rugged individualism, fiercely defended liberty, and a cynical distrust of those in authority, is not exactly helping the nation at present in the fight against the virus. We are not a happy nation.

So what is the message of hope that Jesus gives, that St Luke proclaims in his writings, and which is our call to proclaim too; what is the gospel message of hope that we have to tell people about in our day and at this time? It is that, ultimately, we are all in the hands of a God who deeply loves us, and on whom we can deeply depend. It is that when we live our lives, fully in the light of this life-changing revelation, the world is indeed different place.

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Our view of the world is changed, and we are changed ourselves, and we are inspired to change the world, all because of the hope given us in Jesus. And there is, always, hope, whatever the challenges. This is the world view that underpins all of Jesus' teaching. This is what all the writings of St Luke witness to. That when we live in the light of the radical love of God, there is always hope and new life.

Such love changes everything. There is hope for ourselves, because our individual worth is so deeply affirmed whatever our failings. There is hope for our neighbours because their worth is affirmed too, whatever their failings, and we become brothers and sisters sharing the burdens of this life, rather than complaining about one another and distrusting one another. And there is hope for the world, because when people realise that the fundamental meaning of the universe is love, and not merely self-interest and survival, a new dynamic in human affairs emerges, which leads to new life.

The message of the Gospels is that love changes everything, God's love changes everything. The challenge of the Gospels is learning to live in the light of such love. And the work of an Evangelist is so to live that love, so to have confidence in that love in everything we do, that others are drawn to its light.

The Gospel reading about the sending out of the seventy models this closely. The disciples are to go in peace, i.e. not ranting. They are to go trusting God to be generous to themselves as they engage in God's work. They are sent to demonstrate the love of God in ministering to those in need. They are to seek to inspire generosity in others as they witness to the loving generosity of God in the Kingdom of God.

There is much talk these days of enabling the church to grow, and there are huge amounts of activity that churches are engaging in, in order to do so. But it is all worthless, it is all futile, unless in all our ministry and evangelism we are inspiring hope, because of the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. This is our call. This is our mission. Let us go to it. Amen.

CJ. 18.10.20