

Isaiah 35:3-6

³ Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.
⁴ Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
‘Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God.
He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.
He will come and save you.’
⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
⁶ then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;

Luke 10:1-9 The Mission of the Seventy

10 After this 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. ² 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. ³ Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴ Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. ⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, “Peace to this house!” ⁶ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷ 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. ⁸ Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹ cure the sick who are there, and say to them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.”

Now, O Lord, take my lips and speak through them;
Take our minds and think through them;
Take our hearts and set them on fire with your love.
Amen

If I asked you to think of a parable, what would it be? I won't ask you... But I suspect at least half of us would think of the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son. Those are my go-to memories from Sunday School. (Of course, when I tested this theory on my wife, Alison, it failed miserably as she chose the parable of the sower!)

And when we think of the Christmas story, do we think of the Annunciation when the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary? The shepherds visiting baby Jesus?

What is special about these? They are found only in Luke's Gospel.

Today is a special day, as it is the festival day for St Luke, he of Luke's Gospel. Let's have a very brief history lesson, and find out who this Luke bloke is:

- Luke was a companion to the Apostle Paul
- He was a physician, and is the patron Saint of physicians and surgeons.
- We also wrote the Acts of the Apostles, meaning he wrote more than 25% or a quarter of the new testament, more than any other writer.
- A Gentile, unlike Matthew, Mark and John.
- Ancient tradition also has him as an artist, painting early images of Jesus, yet evidence of this is sparse and uncertain.
- He was regarded as an historian.

Why historian? He was so accurate in everything he said. He took great pains to correctly identify people and places. He mentions the names of all the Roman governors, the high priests. He places Jesus directly into an historical context so we cannot doubt he was there.

In the opening verses of Luke's Gospel, he addresses the book to Theophilus, a Roman official and Christian. A fellow Gentile. In this book, Luke endeavours to, and I quote, "*set down an orderly account of the events*" "*just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses*" and "*after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you*". So, Luke does a thorough investigation into everything that was passed on, and many believed he interviewed those present with Jesus. Taking into account his detail on some of the events, he possibly spoke to Mary to get her side of the story - perhaps this is why only Luke has this detail in his gospel.

Looking at Luke's Gospel as a whole, the themes it is known for are:

- The humanity of Jesus
- Accurate records through investigation
- Compassion to the poor, sick, hurting, sinful
- Love for everyone

- Emphasis to prayer, miracles and angels
- Women have an important place in his writings

And so it is worthy that today we celebrate the feast of St Luke.

Back to today's reading from Luke, there is a rather clear instruction. "The seventy" are instructed to go out ahead of Jesus. Jesus says, "*The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.*"

Of course, Jesus isn't thinking these are farmers who must go out and gather in their wheat and barley. He is talking about people. Harvesting and bringing in people to God's kingdom, into God's church. We all form part of that harvest. We are all guilty of sin. In times of trouble and distress, do we always turn to God for support? Or do we turn to ourselves, and rely on worldly things. We get angry. We get fearful. We don't always see that God's promise and God's grace is enough to see us through the dark times.

This instruction is really a part of a larger picture. We now have the advantage of hindsight to see this. God sent his Son, Jesus, to gather the harvest.

Jesus sent out the 70 to prepare and gather the harvest.

At his ascension, Jesus sent the 12 disciples out into the world - not just the local area, but into the world - to gather the harvest.

And now, through Luke's gospel, we are called to do the same. Just as we have been part of that crop, we are called to gather in the harvest to God's kingdom.

This is a theme - this calling. Just as this message is delivered in Luke, so there is the Great Commission in Matthew's gospel. "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*" This is the calling to all of us.

In today's reading, these 70 disciples are specifically instructed to "*...cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'*"

How like Luke the Physician to pick up on this. We are instructed to heal. Yet today I am not sure we can necessarily perform any miracles healing the sick. We could look at this also as a spiritual healing. A spiritual healing combined with the promise of salvation to God's kingdom. Once again from the reading: "*The Kingdom of God has come near you*".

We are encouraged to bring a spiritual blessing to all people. Just as in Matthew's great commission. Making disciples of all nations.

This is further substantiated looking at extracts from the Isaiah reading today. Isaiah says:

*Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear!'
Here is your God. He will come and save you.'
...the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
...the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.*

Such is the power of God's Grace.

Such is the power of the message we are to take out into the harvest.

Such is the power of the message we need to give to the world.

We are reminded that we are needed to be the mouthpiece of God in the world. How else will the word spread? I had lined up a saying by St Teresa of Avila, but I see Janet beat me to it on Thursday in her thought of the day.

As an alternative I have another (but similar) writing by St Teresa about us carrying on the ministry of Jesus. She writes:

Christ has no body now but mine. He prays in me, works in me, looks through my eyes, speaks through my words, works through my hands, walks with my feet and loves with my heart.

Let us pray

Dear Lord, thank you for St Luke and his gospel, that he saw fit to record with such great accuracy and detail the life of our saviour. We ask that the compassion and love that Luke conveys through his Gospel may be carried through in everything we do. May we be the eyes, the feet, the hands and the heart of Jesus here on earth, that the good word may live through us, may shine through us, and be a beacon to all those around us. Amen.