

Pray for the Healing of our Nation – Reflection for the Feast of St Luke, October 18 2020

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. 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.’

Luke 10:1-9

Cathedrals have this week shared a prayer for the nation as we face tougher restrictions and coronavirus infection rates rise. Sunday is the Feast of St Luke, the patron saint of medicine and healing. It is a day to join together to pray for healing for our nation. We can light a candle for the NHS, for our local hospital, GPs, health care assistants, frontline and social care workers, for those who have to make hard decisions about public health and our economic well-being. We can pray for all who are ill and for all who are researching a COVID vaccine.

So let us pray:

Loving God, your Son Jesus Christ came that we might have life
and have it abundantly;
pour out your blessing upon our nation;
where there is illness, bring your healing touch;
where there is fear,
strengthen us with the knowledge of your presence;
where there is uncertainty, build us in faith;
where there is denial, lead us into truth;
where there is discord, may we know the harmony of your love;
this we ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.

There is much that could be said about the patron saint of medicine and healing, St Luke. A dear friend of the apostle Paul, Luke is mentioned three times in Paul’s letters. It is Paul who describes him as ‘the beloved physician’ and in his second letter to Timothy as his only companion in prison. Believed to be the author of the gospel that bears his name and also

the Acts of the Apostles, it is thought that Luke was born in Antioch in Syria. This means that he was a Gentile, an outsider. As such, Luke brings a helpful outsider's perspective to his understanding of the transforming Gospel of Jesus Christ. For Luke, the good news of salvation is for all, regardless of nationality, social position or gender. He writes about humble shepherds, outcasts from Jewish society who hear the good news of the birth of Christ. He tells us of a Jesus who understands that his mission is to bring good news to the poor, release to captives, sight to blind, freedom to the oppressed. It is Luke who has more stories about women in his Gospel than any other evangelist. It is Luke who puts the demands of justice central to the Gospel message. He makes it clear that in an unequal world, God is on the side of those who are poor, on those who are suffering, on those who feel forgotten. It is Luke who puts the Magnificat on Mary's lips which we say or sing each day in Evening Prayer whilst perhaps ignoring its significance:

'You have shown strength with your arm; you have scattered the proud in their conceit; you have deposed the mighty from their thrones and raised the lowly to high places. You have filled the hungry with good things, while you have sent the rich away empty....'

(Luke 1:51-53)

In today's gospel, Jesus sends his disciples out two by two. Working together, never alone, we too are invited to join in with sharing God's good news and living God's Kingdom values. In this time of pandemic, when social inequalities have been revealed afresh not only across our nation but across the world, Luke's priorities can inform our priorities as Christian people.

It is also right that on this feast day of the patron saint of medicine, of healing, we join together in praying for healing for our nation. Healing goes beyond wholeness of body, mind or spirit, vital though that is. Healing is also about economics, justice, peace, equality of opportunity....all those difficult things that ensure that all people can flourish and be the men, women and children that God would have us be. Healing is about our commitment to coming together to work for the common good of all God's people.

We are all in need of God's healing touch this day. With St Luke, let us pray that we too may know the love and power to heal in and through Christ Jesus. Amen.

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