

18th October 2020 – Luke, Evangelist & Martyr – Chris’s Sermon

Luke 10

Today, among other things, we gather to celebrate the feast of St Luke (evangelist, apostle and teacher). According to one of the traditions from the early Church (dating back to the 2nd century), Luke was martyred for his faith – some believe that he was hung in an olive tree in central Greece – at the end of his life – at the age of 84). But, of course, we don’t really know for sure.

Having said that, I think the faith we see in Luke (and others like him) remind us that ministry is a lifelong commitment – and it will be demanding – and it will be sacrificial. And, in a way, I think Jesus talks quite openly about this very demanding ministry in our Gospel – he encourages the disciples to be prepared for this life of hardship and sacrifice.

“...Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like Lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals... 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...”

Jesus is talking to his followers about a faith that will carry us forward - out into the world – a ministry that will set us apart. In a way, I think he’s describing a calling that goes against the grain – a ministry that won’t be easy or comfortable or even popular, at times. And, he reminds us that we are called to speak the truth and stand firm – even when the message is unpopular – even when some then turn away.

While there is much that we don’t know about Luke, the traditions of the church tell us that he was a committed disciple – the one who helped Paul to carry the gospel out into the world – to those living beyond Israel – to the gentiles. Luke was probably a gentile Christian – Greek speaking – and part of the faith community at Antioch. Many believe that he was the author of the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts (and his writings seem place a particular emphasis on good news for the poor, and the outcast and the marginalised).

And today, we celebrate his strength of conviction – we celebrate his tenacity – we celebrate the faith that’s described in our Gospel reading.

Luke is celebrated and remembered on this day as the patron saint of artists, physicians, surgeons, students and butchers.

In our reading, Jesus talks to the disciples about the joys and sorrows that we all experience, when we are guided by the peace of God – when it becomes part of our lives. (And yes, Luke embodies this calling.)

Jesus talks to the disciples about the peace of God – a grace that we carry with us out into the world, even when others can’t see it. Like Luke, we’re asked to carry no purse, no bag, no sandals - nothing more than the peace of God.

In other words, before everything else, we’re asked to find our inspiration and our comfort and our security in God. Wow – that’s easier said than done.

Jesus is telling us to look beyond our own strength – to look beyond our own plans and preferences – to look beyond the material comfort and security that we build up for ourselves in this life – to look beyond all these things - and step out in faith – to trust in a God who will provide for us.

It’s an interesting idea. Does anyone here pay bills? – or have a mortgage? – or pay rent? (We worry about these things - in our homes and in our church.)

“...carry no purse, no bag, no sandals...”

Is Jesus really telling us to carry nothing, us as we journey out into the world – to carry nothing with us except the Gospel? (Yes.)

Our reading is talking to us about our priorities – it talks about our cares and our concerns – it reminds us that these concerns can become distractions, if we’re not very careful.

In our reading, Jesus reminds the disciples that a life of faith will be difficult at times – it will be unsettling – and it will call us to accept the unknown – to take risks and have faith.

But, according to our reading, this is the road that leads to God’s peace – peace within our hearts and ultimately peace on earth. Our reading reminds us that true faith can lead us into the nearer presence of God, if we choose our priorities with care. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding - these are more than just words – this is the roadmap for disciples.

And, of course, scripture is filled with stories about people who have been transformed by this peace. This is the peace that the angels sang about when Jesus was born – peace on earth – peace given to shepherds and wise men and the world.

When Zechariah met Jesus as a child (the father of John the Baptist), he turned to God with this same peace in his heart. He cried out, ...Master, you are letting your servant go in peace...’ For Zechariah, this peace was a blessing that touched his heart and filled him with awe – he could see his part in God’s unfolding plan for the whole world – spanning years beyond counting.

When the sinful woman who wept at the feet of Jesus was told to ...Go in Peace... with her sins forgiven, we see this same blessing – this same freedom – we see a new road open up in front of her. (Again, we see transformation – peace in her heart.)

In John’s gospel, we’re told that the peace of Christ lived within the disciples - ...my peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.

Peace – this is the blessing that Jesus leaves with the disciples at the last supper.

And Peace – this is the final blessing that Jesus shares in the upper room, following the resurrection.

Yes, at times, this peace can feel like a heavy burden, especially when we’re tempted to choose priorities that serve our own interests – or our own comfort and preferences. Yes, this can be a heavy burden – we are called to be missionaries in a world that is far from peaceful.

But, today we’re reminded that this peace also has tremendous power – the power to strengthen and transform and renew. It’s the strength and the hope of the saints. This peace is foundation of a lifelong faith – a faith that endures.

The Peace that our reading describes can only be found in our prayer – in our conversations with God. We find this peace in our homes and in our church – in those sacred places where we feel the full measure of God’s blessings. And yes, today we are reminded that this peace is to be treasured above all else.

Today I’d like to finish with a short prayer:

Loving God, show us how to carry your peace to others. Take from us all worry and insecurity. Help us to begin our works with reverence, to go on in obedience, and finish them with love; and then to wait patiently in hope, looking joyfully to you whose promises are faithful and rewards infinite;

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.