

Saint Luke:

Carrying a message of hope & deep peace

- *I'd like to invite you all to discover the chat function in Zoom - there's a little box which should be at the bottom of your screen. If you have any responses to what I say in this short reflection, I invite you to put something into the Chat and in a few moments we will pick that up and that can shape where I then go as we explore the challenge to carry a message of hope and deep peace.*

Our society is facing a precarious time, as the small balls of Covid continue to wreak havoc with social structures and norms, bringing sickness and fear into every town and place.

Into this very situation, our Gospel today is set for the feast of Saint Luke, the physician, urging us to be carriers of a message of hope and deep peace. It's a well known passage, but with lots of hidden bits within it. Many of us will be familiar with 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few' - though we tend to miss the humour in the original where 'send out' is actually 'cast out', like 'toss out' or 'chuck out' labourers into the harvest.

In the middle of the passage Jesus says he is sending us out like lambs into the midst of wolves. The word here was used for anything shaped like a hook, or a noose. So Jesus is saying we need to beware of the things that can catch us.

The text urges us to pray that God will send more workers into the vineyard - this is a key text for us. We need to be praying in the workers to come to the vineyards of our benefice, and to take the opportunities we come across to engage beyond our walls and structures, even at this challenging time. For the third time in recent weeks, we hear of the image of the vineyard, another simple agricultural image so resonant for Jesus' listeners.

The urge to pray for more labourers to be sent into the vineyard reminds us that the power of prayer and our requests to God are important. For

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the Christian faith is beautiful. And it is one that is rooted in the discipline of prayer. I don't know what that means for you - maybe you can put something about that in the Chat function.

Thomas Merton and Margaret Silf are two examples of people of wisdom who have discerned a deep sickness of an age alienated from itself by its enslavement to technology, materialism and the pursuit of power. To counteract this, we need to recapture a contemplative, reflective spirituality based in deep listening. We need to help each other to learn to pray more - that is to enjoy the company of God. To watch, to wait, to look...

Now importantly you may have noticed that the first thing people do when they are welcomed is to 'sit and eat'. Joanna picked up on this at our Tuesday meeting and it leads on beautifully from the Herbert Love Bade me welcome last week. And it is important for us to recognise how poorly we can do this during this Covid time, and how our lives are lessened because of that. Luke then recounts Jesus saying next at the beginning of verse 9, that we are to, 'cure the sick'. Importantly, the original word doesn't mean to miraculously cure, but rather a sense of 'heal the sick' by being alongside them in their sickness, a kind of drawing near to those who are unwell, rather than a wand waving magic removal of sickness.

This sickness is important for us at this time, as the reality of Covid is that it reminds each of us in a very personal way, that one day we are going to give up breathing. We will leave this mortal life and receive our ultimate healing, as we make the journey from creation to the creator. Covid has meant that the things we normally rely on have been taken from us. But what still stands firm, is the hope that we find in Jesus, the hope that the Kingdom of God has truly come near you. This hope is that the reign of God *is* breaking in - even in ordinary people like me and like you, and in the ordinariness of our every day lives.

Today as we focus on S Luke and his passion for healing. We pray for the healing of our world in this time of pandemic and we pray that we may find ways to stand alongside others, and to help others come to know for themselves (as well as to learn afresh for ourselves) that each one of us is truly beloved of God.

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Yes, our society is facing a precarious time, as the small balls of Covid continue to wreak havoc with social structures and norms, bringing sickness and fear into every town and place. Yet, into this very place the message of Jesus stands firmly: we are to speak peace, be heralds of hope, and remain aware of the task to pray through the suffering and pain as once again God breaks in among us and speaks words of hope and comfort into the depths of our very being.

So, now I'm going to respond to some of the ideas which have come into the Chat function as we continue to explore this passage.