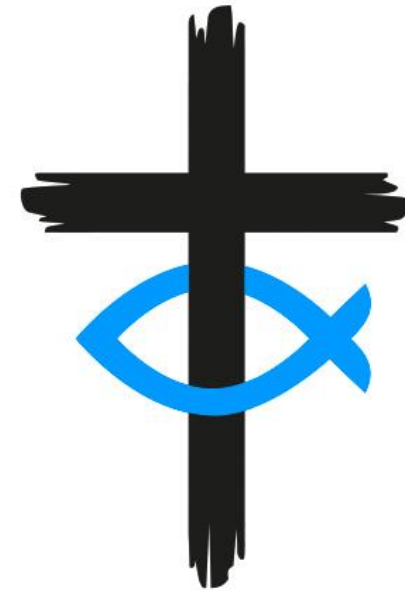


Daily Devotions from the URC

1st – 16th February 2019

St Luke (4)



Introduction

We continue with our journey through St Luke's Gospel.

Andy Braunston

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Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

Reflection

Janani was fond of an expression which he learnt as young man "The best way to show that a stick is crooked is not to argue about it or to spend time denouncing it, but to lay a straight stick alongside it." We can see this fixity of purpose as a mark of discipleship 'where I am, my servant will be there also'. When many of his friends within Uganda and from around the world could see the storm clouds gathering they begged Janani to escape from the country. He gently refused , saying 'if I, the shepherd, flee, what will happen to the sheep?'

It is easy for us to be moved by the self-sacrifice of another. The question comes as we attempt to live the life of Jesus today in the power that the Holy Spirit gives, in what area of life are we called to put the needs of others above our own.

Lord Jesus,
Some said it was thunder,
We know differently, we hear you,
Grant us the grace of self sacrifice,
In the small matters of life as well as in the great,
So that when opinions are loudly voiced,
We testify with our lives,
To the truth we see in you, Amen

Saturday 16th February Janani Luwum, Archbishop of Uganda

The Rev'd Richard Church, member of Streatham URC, Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

Information

Janani Luwum was born in 1922 at Acholi in Uganda. His childhood and youth were spent as a goatherd but he quickly showed an ability to learn and absorb knowledge when given the opportunity. Soon after he became a teacher, he was converted to Christianity and was eventually ordained in 1956, becoming Bishop of Northern Uganda in 1969 and Archbishop of Uganda in 1974. Idi Amin had come to power in Uganda in 1971 as the result of a military coup and his undemocratic and harsh rule was the subject of much criticism by the Church and others. After receiving a letter from the bishops protesting at the virtual institution of state murder, Janani and two of Amin's own government ministers were stated as having been found dead following a car accident. It emerged quickly that they had in fact died on the implicit instructions of the President. Janani's enthusiasm for the good news of Jesus, combined with his willingness to sacrifice even his own life for what he believed in, led him to his martyrdom on 17th February in 1977.

Reading St John 12. 24-32

Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

“Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

Friday 1st February The Parable of the Sower

The Rev'd Joshua Thomas is minister of Petersfield and Liss URC with the Beacon Church Bordon

St Luke 8: 4 - 15

When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: ‘A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold.’ As he said this, he called out, ‘Let anyone with ears to hear listen!’ Then his disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, ‘To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but to others I speak in parables, so that “looking they may not perceive, and listening they may not understand.” ‘Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.

Reflection

What is there left to say about a parable that is so clear and concise in its message and that so many people have had so much to say about throughout the Centuries?

The gist of this parable is simple and relatable. The seed represents us telling people the Good News of the Gospel. The various places in which it is scattered, represent different situations and challenges we might encounter when trying to help people develop in their faith and discipleship journeys.

As a denomination, we are being challenged to think about how we encourage discipleship and how we help people on their faith journeys. How can we

effectively reach out to those who most need to know the love that God has for them? How can we break down the barriers that have traditionally been the things that have stopped people wanting to seek a relationship with God? What obstacles might people encounter in their walk with Christ, both in the early days of seed germination but also when their faith becomes a strong and established plant?

We live in a world in which people are desperate to find meaning in their lives; we as Christians have found meaning. We have a purpose and we have a hope for the future. Our job is to go out and make disciples, to show them this hope that we have and to foster in our churches a spirit of acceptance in which people are encouraged to ask questions and to explore what this faith thing might mean for them. Let's ask the questions of our church communities that need to be asked, be intentional about why we are doing the things we are doing. Most importantly, let us be a welcoming church from which warmth and goodness permeate into our world allowing for the most effective seed growing conditions.

Prayer

Creator God, we thank you that you provide all that is needed for seeds to grow. We thank you for the sunlight, the warmth and the nutrients that you give to us so freely. We pray that our churches can become places which encourage growth in you and that we might be open to your prompting over how we might best do this. Amen.

[Saturday 2nd February A Lamp under a Jar](#)

Linda Rayner is an elder at Bramhall URC and URC Coordinator for fresh expressions of church

St Luke 8: 16 - 18

'No one after lighting a lamp hides it under a jar, or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a lampstand, so that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is hidden that will not be disclosed, nor is anything secret that will not become known and come to light. Then pay attention to how you listen; for to those who have, more will be given; and from those who do not have, even what they seem to have will be taken away.'

Reflection

Luke writes of a great crowd, this is a few days after Jesus fed the five thousand, so we may be safe to assume that it was a crowd of several thousand people. How did Jesus even hear the voice of one distressed father in such a crowd? It shows how carefully He listened with a compassionate ear and He heard the cry of a person in distress. Did Jesus show a sign of temper when he said "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you?" as Luke records the disciples being given authority over demons in verse one of this chapter and perhaps He is speaking to them or perhaps to the large crowd who follow, listen, see miracles but show no sign of faith. Jesus shows compassion on the father and spoke firmly to the unclean spirit and healed the boy.

Who are we like today? Are we like Jesus annoyed at the lack of faith that we see around us? Are we like the father bringing problems to Jesus and begging for help? Are we like the large crowd, standing by and watching but showing no evidence of faith or belief in Jesus? We should be a mixture of the first two we should be concerned that in our world today there are many people who reject the truth of the gospel message and who use every opportunity to decry those who believe. We should also be like the father and bring our concerns to Jesus secure in the knowledge that He will help us deal with them. We certainly must not be like the large faithless crowd who listened and did not believe. We should also be like the boy, transformed by our contact with Jesus.

Prayer

Loving God

I thank you for your compassion

I thank you for your love to me

I thank you for your patience with me

I thank you that Jesus showed your love to the world

I ask that you give me compassion, love and patience

as I try to follow you in my daily life. Amen.

for it, take our lessons from it...but at the same time we need to look forward. We need to look to the future and to God's promises.

We should help our churches do the same. To celebrate what has gone before, to celebrate what is happening now but, most importantly, to look to the future. It is easy to understand how Peter felt; awed by the appearance of Moses and Elijah, the vision of Jesus dressed in dazzling white. It is easy, perhaps, to understand why he wanted to build three dwellings and to stay on the mountain. That wasn't the future God had planned for him; it was not what Christ was calling him to. Like Peter we are called to go out into the world; to leave our dwellings, our churches, and to shine with the dazzling hope of Christ for the people we meet.

Dazzling Christ,
We give thanks for that which has gone before,
for the people and communities that have made up our past.
We give thanks for what is to come,
for those we will meet and journey with.
May we shine with your promise and hope for them. Amen

Friday 15th February Jesus heals a boy with a demon
John Collings is a Lay Preacher and member of Rutherglen URC

St Luke 9: 37-43

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, 'Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It throws him into convulsions until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.' Jesus answered, 'You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.' While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

Reflection:

The first part of this passage seems straightforward with its strong message about mission: once you've discovered the love of Jesus, you cannot hide it – love will shine from you. In fact, love will shine so brightly that there will be no secrets, no dark corners...therefore, other people will understand. In other words, we ought to lead our lives in such a way that other people see that light shining within us and think to themselves 'I'd like some...'.

Simple! This is the heart of missional discipleship.

Yet, there's a second section (verse 18), which is easily overlooked.

In yesterday's passage, Jesus explained about good soil that will "bear fruit with patience and endurance." Still talking to his friends, he continues that explanation with the important analogy of the lamp on the lampstand, and then what he says is crucial:

"Pay attention to how you listen; for to those who have, more will be given...".

Jesus is saying that responsibility lies with the listener. How we listen to Bible stories is key. Our response will shape our discipleship. Thinking, studying and wrestling with the message will mean we have more to share. If we don't respond, we're unlikely to understand, will have little to share, and eventually, all will be lost, and the light will go out.

It's a big challenge to church in the time-poor busyness of the 21st century. Disciples must shine so that everyone can 'see the light', and to shine brightly, we need to keep learning. That's what Jesus meant by "bear fruit with patience..."

Engaging with the message from worship leaders is a good start! Talk about what has been said in your worship gathering. Check it out when you get home. Try to attend a few discussion groups or Bible studies.

Let's keep learning, put those lamps on the lampstands and shine brightly!

Prayer:

Lord,
Help us to set aside time in our busy lives
to learn more about your love,
to think and wrestle with the familiar stories.
Help us to face the challenge
of being disciples in the 21st century.
May your love shine
through everything we do
for all to see and share. Amen

[Sunday 3rd February Psalm 84](#)

The Rev'd Carole Elphick is a retired minister and member of Muswell Hill URC in London.

1 How delightful are your dwellings,
O Almighty LORD, to me!
2 For your courts my soul is yearning;
in your house I long to be.
Heart and flesh cry out aloud
for the true and living God.

3 Even sparrows find their dwelling,
and the swallow builds a nest
Near your altar, LORD Almighty,
where her offspring may have rest.
4 Blessed whose home is your abode,
they are ever praising God.

5 Blessed are those
whose strength is in you,
those who have a pilgrim's mind.
6 Pools from autumn
rains refresh them;
springs in Baca's vale they find.
7 Strength increasing, Zionward
they go on their way to God.

8 Hear my pray'r, LORD God Almighty,
and receive the plea I make.
Listen to me, God of Jacob;
hear me for your mercy's sake.
9 Look upon our shield and bring
favour to your chosen king.

10 One day in your courts is better
than a thousand days elsewhere.
Let me stay in my God's temple—
let me be a doorman there—
Rather than find happiness
in the tents of wickedness.

11 For the LORD gives grace and
honour;
God will be a shield and sun.
He will not withhold his blessing
from the just and blameless one.
12 LORD Almighty, great and true,
blessed the one who trusts in you.

[Thursday 14th February The Transfiguration](#)

The Rev'd Jo Clare-Young is a URC minister in the North Yorkshire Coast Pastorate.

St Luke 9: 28 - 36

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake,] they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah'—not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!' When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

Reflection

I sometimes wonder if we shy away from the Transfiguration a little; a mystical event on a mountainside, Moses and Elijah, dazzling glory, a cloud and the voice of God. It's a lot to process; all this glory, the glory of Christ. Yet there beside the glory is the reminder of the Cross, the humanity, the sacrifice, the promise.

Hills and mountains are so often places of encounter with God. This is the story of a moment; a moment linked to the past and the future by its location on a mountain. We are reminded of other 'mountain moments' by Moses and Elijah both of whom encountered God on a mountainside. We are rooted in the past but we are also pointed towards a future hillside and Jesus's departure. When we think about God as outside of time it can change our perspective on events in our own lives.

We are located within our own stories, we are rooted within our own past; we are heading towards our own future. We can remember the past, give thanks

who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.'

Reflection

The cat's out of the bag. Having been identified as 'The Messiah of God' Jesus candidly explains to his Disciples for the first time what lies ahead for him – suffering, rejection and death, and following that, on the third day, resurrection.

Furthermore, Jesus tells them that if anyone wants to go after him, follow him, walk his way, they too must take up their cross daily, and live, not for themselves, but for his sake alone. This is the Way of the Cross, the way of discipleship, the calling of every Christian.

It seems to me that we can dress it up however we like. We can make worship inspiring (it should be), Bible study interesting (this too) and involvement with a church community a joy rather than a chore (of course), but at the heart of our faith, the crux of the matter, so to speak, is the call to sacrificial living, humility and walking a counter-cultural path.

Discipleship is demanding, the rewards are not always ours to see, and yet we are compelled, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to try and live the life of Jesus today, in our families, our churches and our communities.

How this looks to each of you will be different – no two people live out their faith in the same way, and we will all be aware of our human tendency to do all the things that Jesus tells us to guard against.

Thank God then that our invitation to see the Kingdom of God depends not on the quality of our discipleship, but on the grace of God, who, in Jesus, took up his cross and died and rose again to save us all.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles: Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you. Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom where you live for ever and ever. Amen.

Reflection

When Johannes Brahms wrote his 'German Requiem' around 1865 he chose to use several verses from Psalm 84 as part of the text. Written after his mother's death, and that of a close friend, he used words from the Luther Bible in German rather than words from the traditional liturgy in Latin so the music could be immediately understood by his audience. 'How lovely are thy dwellings' is the text of the fourth movement and possibly the best known section of the work. Brahms paints a striking picture in sound of the beauty of God's dwelling place and later on in the piece portrays the complexity and interdependence of all aspects of God's Kingdom by the interplay of voices and accompaniment. You can find it on YouTube sung in English (for accessibility to the words) by the Mormon Tabernacle choir or by the Westminster Abbey choir at the Queen Mother's funeral. Either version is worth listening to whilst reading the Psalm reflectively.

Music can take words and lift them still further as we enter, with the Psalmist, into the indescribable and the ineffable. Here is a place of safety, security and delight where all of creation down to the tiniest bird is welcome in this vision of homecoming. Just as the Cornish 'Dewhelans' (return or come back - which sounds very much like 'dwellings') calls the people back to where they most belong so we too are destined to live in those places of delight and security. There are many promises here of reassurance and anticipation. This is not the much despised 'Pie in the sky bye and bye' theme designed to keep people in their place. This is a living promise, yearned for and cried out for, that God will not withhold any blessing to those who trust. It is the promise that autumn rain will refresh after a hot sticky summer and that even the smallest of birds will build a nest close to the most sacred space of all.

Let us pray

that we too can express and interpret
the welcoming love of God to those in our audience,
in language that everyone can understand,
striving to describe the indescribable,
finding words to show the overwhelming love of God to those around us.

In life and in death

Blessed is the one who trusts in you Amen

Monday 4th February True Kindred of Jesus

The Rev'd Peter Meek, Moderator, East Midlands Synod

St Luke 8: 19 - 21

Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, 'Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.' But he said to them, 'My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.'

Reflection

Who Belongs to Whom?

At first reading this short passage seems to hold an astonishingly callous saying of Jesus. Is he disowning his own mother and his brothers? Is he writing them off? In fact Luke softens this saying, which in Mark is presented in even harsher tones following Jesus's challenge against blaspheming the Holy Spirit by calling God's work, the work of Satan! Luke's version still packs a punch though, coming after a series of parables about the Rule of God and telling us Jesus' family are "outside". The message here is clear. The Jewish people assumed that they belonged to God's kingdom by birthright. They were Abraham's children - nothing more to be said then. This isn't the only place Jesus challenges that view. It is those who hear God's word in and from Jesus - and do it - that belong to Jesus' family. In other words, there are no second generation disciples, only first generation. Many of our churches are grappling with what it means, therefore, to share the Good News of Jesus with their neighbourhoods and wider; that wrestling must go on.

Church tends to elevate "Family" to a high degree, but let's become more aware of those for whom the words "mother, father, brothers and sisters" are not good news. And let's, as a Christian family, do all we can to nature and care for each other in ways that some folk have never known in their childhoods. Let us never make assumptions but listen and embrace and be those open communities that those seeking Jesus find easy, not difficult to join.

'John the Baptist', says James. Hmm, we've all heard folks say that, but ... really? His cousin? I check the other disciples. No-one's buying that.

'Elijah', pipes up Andrew, 'or one of the ancient prophets'. More sideways glances. No-one's convinced by that either. There's an expectant buzz in the air, like when my wife was telling me we were expecting our son.

'But who do you say that I am?'

I gulp. My mouth goes dry.

I look round, but everyone is looking at me.

I lift my gaze to the brown eyes and say what we are all thinking.

Prayer

Messiah of God,
as your disciples learned to see your glory
through the dusty humanity of your earthly body,
so may we, your body on earth,
reflect your glory that all may see.
For you reign over Earth and Heaven,
who was, and is, and is to come,
eternally, the Messiah of God. Amen

Wednesday 13th February Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

The Rev'd David Salsbury is a member of Horeb URC, Dyserth and serves as Programme Manager for Stepwise.

St Luke 9: 21 - 27

He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, saying, 'The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.' Then he said to them all, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves? Those

Fay Rowland, a graduate student at Wesley House, Cambridge Theological Federation, worships at St Botolph's Church of England, Northants.

St Luke 9: 18 – 20

Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, 'Who do the crowds say that I am?' They answered, 'John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered, 'The Messiah of God.'

Reflection

This is a famous passage, and familiarity can sometime breed, if not contempt, at least a lack of wonder. Reflective contemplation can help us engage with the text.

Sit comfortably, with your hands relaxed in your lap. Read the passage a couple of times, then close your eyes, slow your breathing, and replay the scene: Hear the questions, sense the mood, notice your reactions.

I wonder what it looks like, feels like, smells like.

I wonder who you are.

I wonder what you say.

I wonder ...

There's an elephant in the room. A huge, grey, ear-flapping elephant with brown eyes and grubby feet by the name of Jesus bar-Joseph. And he's sitting under a tree right in front of me.

We're taking a break, me and the other disciples. I think we all need a bit of down-time to process everything that's been going on, you know? Jesus too. He looks worn out. Is he praying or sleeping?

Then he looks up. 'Who do the crowds say that I am?', he asks, and we all look at each other in silence. I catch the eye of James. We'd been talking about this earlier, on the way up here. I wonder if Jesus overheard. I feel embarrassed.

Prayer

O God greeting us, holding us with warm embrace, and releasing us in love to live and serve you faithfully, we pray today for those for whom family, was and is a damaging experience. We pray too for the people who you are drawing to yourself, may we never be a stumbling block in their way, but show an open door of welcome. We pray in the name of our elder brother, Jesus Christ.

Tuesday 5th February Calming a Storm

The Rev'd Martin Knight is Minister of St Paul's URC, South Croydon

St Luke 8: 22 - 25

One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side of the lake.' So they put out, and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A gale swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. They went to him and woke him up, shouting, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?'

Reflection

Just the handful of experiences in my life of being on a boat, have taught me to have a healthy respect for the sea! A walk along the rough Cornish coast or watching tsunami racing in-land on the news, will likely have the same effect on any of us.

For the Jewish audience, familiar with the imagery of the chaotic waters of creation and the violent Red Sea – Luke's unsettling storm on the Galilee would have induced the same fear and dread.

For me, the real question is not 'did Jesus still a storm?', but whether the God who delivers people from forces beyond their control still acts to deliver those who call out in desperation today.

We humans really do like to be in control – or at least to feel that we are. That said, I suspect there is a nagging realisation deep within us that a great deal is out of our direct control; things that really scare us and that cause us to shout out ‘Master, master we are perishing!’: climate change, global injustice and poverty, division within communities – whatever it may be.

This then, is a story about faith and trust, and following the way of him who stills the storms. And as we know well, ‘following’ is not a passive activity.

If I ask of God, ‘do you still act to deliver those who call out in desperation today?’, I can be sure that the question is returned to me, as God’s answer.

Prayer

Great God, above chaotic waters beyond our control,
we turn to you this new day
crying out for all who perish; tossed about in life’s boat.
Empower us we pray, to trust you more
and in that strengthened faith, to both rest in you and to follow your way.
Amen.

[Wednesday 6th February The Garasene Demoniac](#)

The Rev’d Ruth Browning is a retired minister and member of Thornbury URC

St Luke 8: 26 - 39

Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, ‘What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me’— for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) Jesus then asked him, ‘What is your name?’ He said, ‘Legion’; for many demons had entered him. They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss. Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the

Reflection

The account of the feeding of the five thousand appears in all four Gospels. John's Gospel differs from the synoptic Gospels in as much that the loaves and fish are produced by a boy (John 6 v 9). This small detail has raised the question in some people's minds as to whether or not the boy's generosity in willing to share put the others in the crowd to shame and they in turn then produced what they had brought but had been unwilling to share. This is an issue that we cannot resolve as we have only this one account of the boy's involvement.

What we do know is that all were fed with twelve basketful left over. Some are sceptical when it comes to miracles. They say that there must be some logical answer to what occurred, or is there? We recall Thomas' reaction when the Disciples said they had met with the Risen Lord in the upper room, and there are people who adopt a similar approach when it comes to miracles. But miracles do occur, I know because I once witnessed one. Bill (not his real name) was born a healthy baby but suffered a severe reaction to immunisation. He ended up on life support in intensive care. He made no progress and his parents were advised that it would be kinder to switch his life support off.

This they did, but instead of dying Bill's bedsores began to heal and eventually he was well enough to return home. Yes, he had become profoundly deaf and had learning difficulties, but in answer to the local church and family's prayers he was alive. That was many years ago and Bill, now about fifty, still worships in his local church. And they say there are no miracles?

Prayer

Miraculous God, your vision is far broader than ours we rarely see much beyond the tip of our noses. Help us to see more clearly the wonders of your grace. So that our faith may be enriched beyond our wildest dreams and our trust in you deepens, enriching our worship through our daily experiences of life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

move on to, almost, a sermon – do what God says and all will be well. (vs 8-9.) Then the final verses – a confidence that it has all come about – love, truth, righteousness, peace.

What a message for us today. There is a lot of rubbish in the world but if we can hold on to the message of Scripture seen all through the Bible and in this Psalm, we can cope. In this Psalm we are urged to remember that the result of living with love and truth is that righteousness and peace embrace.

Prayer

O Lord, our God, like your people of old we get it wrong
Help us to remember that you are our God and we are your people
Help us to live our lives in love and truth
Help us to remember the beautiful words that righteousness and peace kiss.
Amen

[Monday 11th February Feeding the 5,000](#)

The Rev'd Colin Hunt, retired minister worshipping at Hutton & Shenfield Union Church, Essex

St Luke 9: 10 - 17

On their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida. When the crowds found out about it, they followed him; and he welcomed them, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed to be cured. The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, 'Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place.' But he said to them, 'You give them something to eat.' They said, 'We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.' For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, 'Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each.' They did so and made them all sit down. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, 'Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.' So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

Reflection

Who was he, this person whom Jesus deliberately crossed the lake to seek out? Someone's son who had gone missing? Even that's probably more than we should deduce from the actual text. We can speculate (wildly) but that's not to the point and to do so only helps us miss the point. He could have been anybody. Perhaps that's why Luke records this incident, someone being held captive feeling the weight of Roman occupation in the local Legion.

Here he was, possibly an illegal alien, somewhere in Gentile territory, being sought out by a Jew whom he recognises with the only title he knows to use. A pagan title which appears to announce that the gods are walking the land. Given this title it's not surprising that the local population ask Jesus and his followers to leave.

Then there is the problem of the pigs. What threat to stability does it pose when the local herd is lost, some of which may have been used for sacrifice by the local Roman Legion? Some of the population would not have been happy in the ensuing political situation. Does Luke record this incident because the local political situation becomes a recurring theme for the apostles?

The Son responds to the title used but then teaches the man to recognise God, the Lord, not some high god over a pantheon of gods, and having done so sends him out to begin telling the story of faith. Perhaps that's why Luke records this

incident. It announces that Christ's mission to all the world has begun. It could have been anybody being sent, and it will be anyone who responds to Jesus.

Prayer

Lord, it is said that the two things which should never be discussed in polite society are politics and religion, teach us to be like Jesus: unafraid to cut across the grain of correct thinking and make splinters in the flesh of those who would sandpaper smooth the awkward questions and answers.

[Thursday 7th February A Girl Restored to Life and a Woman Healed](#)

Liz Kam, Church Related Community Worker, Levenshulme Inspire

St Luke 8: 40 - 56

Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. Just then there came a man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. He fell at Jesus' feet and begged him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, who was dying. As he went, the crowds pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years; and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her haemorrhage stopped. Then Jesus asked, 'Who touched me?' When all denied it, Peter said, 'Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you.' But Jesus said, 'Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me.' When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.' While he was still speaking, someone came from the leader's house to say, 'Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the teacher any longer.' When Jesus heard this, he replied, 'Do not fear. Only believe, and she will be saved.' When he came to the house, he did not allow anyone to enter with him, except Peter, John, and James, and the child's father and mother. They were all weeping and wailing for her; but he said, 'Do not weep; for she is not dead but sleeping.' And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But he took her by the hand and called out, 'Child, get up!' Her spirit returned, and she got up at once. Then he directed them to give her something

[Sunday 10th February Psalm 85](#)

The Rev'd Lena Talbot. Retired Minister and Member of Darwen Central URC

1 In times past, LORD,
you showed favour
to your own beloved land;
The prosperity of Jacob
you restored by your strong hand.
2 You forgave your people's trespass;
you were pleased their sins to hide.
3 You withdrew all your displeasure;
from your wrath you turned aside.

4 God our Saviour, now restore us;
from us turn away your rage.
5 Will your anger burn against us?
Will it last from age to age?
6 Will you not again revive us,
that we may rejoice in you?
7 Show us, LORD, your covenant mercy;
your salvation grant anew.

Reflection

What a great Psalm! Especially the lines in verse 10 where righteousness and peace embrace - in some versions this is rendered not as "embrace" but as "kiss"!

In the heading to this Psalm in the Bible it is noted that it is "of the sons of Korah." (Who? We need to go to the book of Numbers 16 for this, Korah is remembered for the rebellious action, together with his cousins Dathan and Abiram, against Moses. It's a pretty horrible account – read it for yourself. Our modern sensibilities find parts of the Old Testament difficult, but it's part of our faith history and, like the New Testament, contains God's Word.)

Anyway, here we have the Sons of Korah remembering God's faithfulness and forgiveness to Jacob (their great, great grandpa) and the people of old (vs 1–3) but with a plea for this to continue. There is always a watchful eye on the wrath of God when the people get it wrong - as their father and uncles got it wrong – a plea for mercy and forgiveness as God forgave in times past (vs 4-7.) Then we

first place. Herod Antipas, the Herod of this passage, isn't so evil as to be the son of his father, as it were, but he is nonetheless party to the dysfunctionality of that infamous family.

He has a problem of identity. Not just his own, did he but realise it, but particularly that of this young Jewish rabbi that's causing such a stir. There is a deal of gossip, as you might expect - this is surely John the Baptist. Herod has the most convincing of reasons for believing that not to be the case - he himself has had him executed. He's going to have to see for himself what, or who, this is all about.

And he's going to have the opportunity. We read, later on in this Gospel, that Pilate sends Jesus to appear before this Herod. But Herod is not able to satisfy his curiosity, even then, because Jesus gives no answer to his questions. Jesus will have realised that Herod will not understand in any case, because he is seriously out of his depth here. It's not that Herod is unintelligent, or does not speak the language. It is just that his experience and attitudes have cut him off from any sort of intuitive grasp of what is really going on.

We're sure we've got a grasp of what is happening, or does that confidence simply indicate the superficialities of our own perception? Perhaps we should devote more time and effort to our own "tuning in".

Prayer

Loving God,
You have given us our identity,
but we do not always understand it as it really is.
You have given us your Son,
as someone with whom we can identify.
We have our families, with whom we share our identity.
Lord, help us to clarify all the identities around us
so that we truly know who we are, whom we love,
whom we serve, and whom we are to follow to the ends of the earth.

to eat. Her parents were astounded; but he ordered them to tell no one what had happened.

Reflection

This is such a dynamic reading - there's so much packed into it and it never fails to take my breath away.

Imagine you were in that crowd, when this man you know of, this high-status man from the synagogue, starts to grovel and beg the teacher, Jesus, to come to his home and save his daughter. The thrill that runs through you as you see his pain and anguish - you're glad the teacher is there to help and sort it out.

Then suddenly there's a furore; Jesus wants to know who touched him. Jairus is desperate in his need for Jesus to come right now - his precious, precious daughter is dying!!! Can you imagine how he feels? I can't think of a worse calamity. But Jesus is distracted, intent only in finding out who, amongst the large thronging crowd, caused power to flow from him.

And then there she is, this impoverished old woman, the type you wouldn't touch even if she wasn't ritually unclean, putting herself forward. She had touched Jesus and he knew it! This could be interesting ...

But then Jesus just looks at her, calls her his daughter, and tells her to go in peace as she has been made well.

Momentarily you could have heard a pin drop. Whaat!! The scandal of it! Jairus is still waiting, agony etched on his face, Jesus, in that moment, seemed to care only for that woman.

What confusion and consternation must this have brought to the people in the crowd as their whole understanding of a person's value was turned upside down. This woman, shunned by society was, in Jesus' eyes, as of much value as the high-status synagogue man, left to wait his turn.

Jesus' topsy-turvy Kingdom actions challenged the privilege of a powerful man by giving voice and recognition to an untouchable woman. How are our churches challenging everyday injustice and enabling the voices of those oppressed to be heard?

Prayer

Shake me up Jesus,
open my eyes to everyday injustice especially if I am the privileged one.
Give me grace to step back, to allow another's voice to be heard,
and if I am the one in chains, give me the courage of the bleeding woman,
the deep knowledge that I matter and the faith to know that
that in your image I am made and loved,
that I might raise my voice for change. Amen

Friday 8th February The Mission of the Twelve

The Rev'd Stuart Nixon, SCM Pioneer minister, MediaCityUK Church

St Luke 9: 1-6

Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. He said to them, 'Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.' They departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere.

Reflection

Empty-handed mission is what our passage is about today. It is a very different model from the one we have sometimes adopted as Church. The model Jesus sets out is about entering a mission field with nothing but the clothes on our back and the love of Jesus in our hearts. We go with humility and open hands; this puts us in the position of being guests rather than hosts, of being the least rather than the entitled.

As guests at a meal we would normally seek to be gracious, polite and accept that we are in someone else's house. We would, therefore, treat our host and their house with respect and a servant heart (we might offer to do the dishes!) This humble, gracious attitude is what Jesus was telling the twelve to adopt as they went into the surrounding towns with the Good News.

Jesus also leaves us under no illusions that the task of proclaiming the Good News will be easy. He says that sometimes the message will be ignored but that shouldn't stop us from trying, we are to move on and seek new places, not say "we tried it once and it didn't work!"

The empty hands show that we are prepared to accept the hospitality of others and although we are told to go into the mission field with few material goods, we are promised that we have the power of the Holy Spirit with us. Power enough to bring healing, wholeness and a foretaste of God's Kingdom.

Take some time now to think about how you approach your mission field. Do you go empty-handed yet Spirit filled? Ask God to show you how you might be empty-handed, gracious and Spirit filled as you walk the way of Jesus in your communities this week.

Prayer

God of mission, send us out into your world,
trusting that your Spirit is already at work in us and others.
Help us to go with empty hands and loving hearts,
that the message and signs of the Good News
might flourish and grow in our communities
We ask this in the name of the one who sends us out, Jesus. Amen.

Saturday 9th February Herod's Perplexity

Ed Strachan, Lay Preacher, Heald Green URC

St Luke 9: 7 - 9

Now Herod the ruler heard about all that had taken place, and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the ancient prophets had arisen. Herod said, 'John I beheaded; but who is this about whom I hear such things?' And he tried to see him.

Reflection

Herod is puzzled, seriously puzzled. His infamous father, whom the world knows as Herod the Great, did not so much lose the plot as never picked it up in the