Daily Devotions
from the United Reformed Church

St Luke's Gospel Part 4



Tuesday 1st – Saturday 12th February 2022

Introduction

For the church year which started in Advent and runs through to November the Gospel of Luke will be the main Gospel that is read in church on Sundays. The Gospel itself is anonymous but early on in the Church's life it was attributed to Luke, the companion of St Paul – but there's no evidence that he wrote it. Scholars think it might have been written as early as the 30 years between 80 and 110 whilst other scholars argue for a later date well into the 2nd Century. As in other Biblical texts we don't have the original manuscripts – the earliest documents we have date back to the 3rd Century and these are fragments – the earliest complete text we have dates to the 4th Century. The writer used St

Mark's Gospel (it's almost entirely included) and some other sources – one which looks like it is also used in Matthew (but not in Mark) and his own sources for material which doesn't appear in any of the other Gospels. Luke was written to be read aloud to early meetings of the Church gathered in peoples' homes. The author writes that his purpose is to present "an orderly account" of "the events that have been fulfilled among us" ie Jesus' life and ministry. Luke's purpose is not to justify the faith but to encourage it – to answer the questions: what happened and what did it all mean?

Table of Contents

Introduction ***1***

Tuesday 1 February St Luke 8: 16 - 18 ..... ***3***

Wednesday 2 February St Luke 8: 19 - 21 ..... ***4***

Thursday 3 February St Luke 8: 22 - 25 ..... ***6***

Friday 4 February 2022 St Luke 8: 26 - 39 ..... ***7***

Saturday 5 February 2022 St Luke 8: 40 - 56 ..... ***9***

Sunday 6 February 2022 Psalm 78 ..... ***11***

Monday 7 February 2022 St Luke 9: 1- 6 ..... ***13***

Tuesday 8 February 2022 St Luke 9: 7 - 9 ..... ***14***

Wednesday 9 February 2022 St Luke 9: 10 - 17 ..... ***16***

Thursday 10 February 2022 St Luke 9: 18 - 20 ..... ***18***

Friday 11 February 2022 St Luke 9: 21 - 27 ..... ***20***

Saturday 12 February 2022 St Luke 9: 28 - 36 ..... ***21***

It's about acting on what we hear and what we see. This means having faces that shine with God's glory, so that we are witnesses to God's power and God's love.

The transfiguration also speaks about the role of fixed places, as places that hold the memory. It's good to have church buildings, as a visible sign of God's presence in the community, and to remember all that has happened in the building. But after the transfiguration Jesus and the disciples went from the mountain to the valley.

God calls us to journey on, to be where the people are, to reach out in sharing in God's work of loving and forgiving and healing.

Prayer

Transfiguring God, open my eyes to see Jesus as he is.
Free me from all that constrains me from being open to where you are present.

Help me to wait and listen and trust, especially in uncertain times.
May my face shine with your glory and my life witness to your love.
Open me to journey where you lead. Amen

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

The story of the Transfiguration, in which Jesus in his prayer is transfigured, comes with challenges and debates. The disciples see two people by his side, Moses and Elijah and listen to the conversation going on between the three of them.

Peter immediately wants to take action, and erect three dwellings, in honour of the three people. Then a cloud comes and overshadows them and the result is that they are terrified. They hear the voice of God. This encounter silences the disciples and they do not speak of what they have seen and heard.

It's a reminder that encountering God isn't just an easy or simple matter of God fitting into our experience. Encountering God is about being taken out of ourselves into the presence of the mystery and power at the heart of the universe. Such an encounter can be very challenging.

It's about the possibility of seeing God with new eyes in new ways. Seeing God isn't always simple or straightforward, it can take some wrestling with; it can happen in unexpected ways.

It's about trusting God and that God does speak. Sometimes this means we need to wait and to listen, and be open to be filled with awe and wonder.

Tuesday 1 February St Luke 8: 16 - 18

John Ellis, Synod Area Leader for West Kent & East Sussex

'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

These three statements do not have an obvious logical flow. Fortunately, the scholars assure us we can treat them as three bullet points, each capable of being expanded but not following on from one another. In fact, Luke himself repeats each of them later and clarifies them with some more context (see 11.33; 12.2; 19.26).

Perhaps the middle statement is the hardest to make fit with our experience. Our culture assumes it is acceptable not to be honest as long as you don't get found out. Most people seem to get away with it. We feel relieved and cleaner when some longstanding injustice is finally put right by our courts but we wonder how many others remain hidden. As well as falsehoods and crimes undetected, some of us watch painfully as someone wholly innocent has their lives put on pause - or worse - while investigation processes grind on interminably, not helped by Covid backlogs.

If Jesus was thinking of false religious teachers, it is equally hard to see the evidence that they are exposed and removed. The first Easter may have settled where the Pharisees had got it wrong. It did not stop all sorts of horrors in the name of distorted religion.

This is one of those sayings of Jesus that doesn't work. Or more

accurately, if we want to believe what Jesus is saying, it forces us to reassess our timeframes. There is no promise that everything will be instant, however much Amazon wants us to believe that is life's gold standard. Fighting for justice is often about shortening the time frame before right prevails; finding peace is often about accepting God's time frame is longer than ours.

But if we are tempted to abandon justice in the hope of finding a version of peace, we better read the first and third statements again.

Prayer

Lord God
We are glad that you are, somehow, in final control of our world.
We are glad that what Jesus promises will come about one day.
Help us never to make that an excuse for hiding our light or not using the gifts you have given us.
Use us to hint at what will one day be.
For your Kingdom's sake. Amen.

Wednesday 2 February St Luke 8: 19 - 21

Gordon Woods, Elder, St. Columba's URC, Oxford

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

I don't think it would have been easy to be a member of Jesus' close family. A few chapters earlier, we read the story of Jesus hanging on in the Temple, talking to the teachers, and when challenged by his parents saying "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be

whole way of life. Written with a proverb-like quality containing a kind of truth born out of experience and observation which speaks into a variety of cultures. First, we learn the general truth that self-centredness is, in the end, counter productive severing us from the resources which give life. Second, we observe instances of greed and meaninglessness in lives lived in pursuance of wealth and power. Third is a reminder that the one of whom we have been ashamed today will be our judge tomorrow. The challenge is to discipleship, a life in which we are called to follow in Jesus' footsteps. The challenge is to acknowledge that in answering such a call we may face tough decisions. But the reward comes in the hope of peace and freedom as such action enables us to glimpse signs of the Kingdom around us.

Prayer

Loving God,
life can be tough,
the world around us,
seems to reward those who find wealth and power.
You call us to a life of discipleship,
following in the footsteps of your Son.
Life may still be tough but we pray that
through our lives glimpses of your kingdom may be visible. Amen

Saturday 12 February 2022 St Luke 9: 28 - 36

The Revd Dr Elizabeth Welch, retired minister, active theologically and ecumenically, member at St Andrews Ealing.

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

Friday 11 February 2022 St Luke 9: 21 - 27

Val Morrison, Elder and Lay Preacher. Doncaster United Reformed Church

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 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

These words are amongst the most challenging we find in our Bibles. Following his talk of suffering and death Jesus then 'throws down the gauntlet' to any who want to follow him with talk of denying themselves and taking up their cross. So, what exactly is Jesus challenging us to? Maybe the first thing to notice are those action words – "take up their cross". This is not about the problems, suffering and hurt which come unbidden into all our lives from time to time. This is about discipleship which is a choice each of us must make.

Neither is this about a big once-in-a-lifetime action, this is about something we are being called to do "daily". This is about discipleship which is a whole way of life.

In verses 24 to 26 of today's passage we learn something about that

in my Father's house?". And now this story. Quite apart from the tensions that would arise by having someone so renowned in the family, might sayings like this make you feel rejected as a family member?

We often use family as an image for the Church, but it isn't one that works perfectly for everyone. If your childhood was blighted by abuse within the family, why would you want to get more of the same? Last week, as we received some people into membership, a rather drunk man arrived at the back, and started asking questions about why someone needed to be part of a local church - he didn't have much time for the family image!

I once had a teacher who asked us to define a family. Two schools of thought developed - one group tried to create a list: "People who are related by blood or marriage or…" and quickly found it was a tricky task. The others felt that a family is "a group of people who stick together through thick and thin".

Since those days, I have worked with talented lawyers who would have pointed out the flaws with both approaches, and designed an elegant way through, but I am still attracted to the latter definition both for a family, and a local church. At times when we might be tempted to see our faith as something between us and God alone, and be tempted to step away from church, what does Jesus' invitation to us to see ourselves as part of his family mean for our fellowship and commitment to other Christians?

Prayer

We give thanks for families,
for the love we have experienced,
and pray that we may express your love.
May we never take love for granted.
We bring you the hurts we feel,
and have caused.

Help us to accept your healing.

We pray for your Church.
May we stick together.
May we love you, and each other.
May we speak the truth in love,
and proclaim the truth of your love. Amen.

Thursday 3 February St Luke 8: 22 - 25

Anne Brooke, regular worshipper at Elstead URC

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

This is the trouble with God. He calls us to a mission, however small or large it might be. We respond in the best way we know how, and then – what does God do? He falls asleep and leaves us struggling. Or at least that's often how it feels to me anyway. I assume that once I respond to a call, then God is honour-bound to make it plain sailing all the way.

But life – and God – aren't like that. Once we've experienced the initial joy of responding to God, then often those joyful feelings quickly disappear and we are left uncertain, confused, bored perhaps, or sometimes terrified, as in this passage. There the disciples are in the middle of an awful storm they hadn't anticipated and what does Jesus do? Nothing. He's asleep and seems to have no idea they are about to

On this occasion Peter responds with a flash of insight and an affirmation of faith, 'The Messiah of God.' I wonder how Jesus felt hearing Peter's response?

Was there excitement, and yet relief, that someone understood, that someone had been able to put together the pieces of the jigsaw and the picture had emerged? Was there a sense of satisfaction that a marker of understanding had been achieved and it was full steam ahead with the Gospel message? Was there self-affirmation that this was the ministry to which he had been called and which he now exercised?

We cannot know the answers, but I think we can identify with the wondering, as in the differing contexts of relationships, family, employment or church we will have asked other people, 'who do you say that I am?' as we have sought affirmation, confirmation or a measure of how people perceive and understand us. I hope that often we have been affirmed, and that on occasions when we have been disappointed or hurt we have found ways to work through these experiences but on each occasion we have been able to respond by saying 'I am beloved of God, made in God's image and likeness.'

Prayer

Creating God,
you have made me your beloved, made in your image and likeness.
Help me to really believe this is the case especially when the responses of others have belittled, disappointed or hurt me.
Help me to celebrate that I am your beloved as I accept myself.
Help me to recognise this reality in others as I seek to love my neighbour.
Amen.

and how my spirit rumbles with longing
for joy and hope and peace.
I reach for sweet fixes sometimes
and I have known thin gruel that does not satisfy.
Forgive me when I leave the table too soon
or miss meals or eat the wrong things.
Let me come regularly to the table of your presence
and find the food that will truly nourish my living.
Thank you for feast days and fast days,
for daily bread and for regular communion.
Show me how to eat well in your Kingdom
and how to welcome others to the table of life.

Thursday 10 February 2022 St Luke 9: 18 - 20

The Rev'd Lindsey Sanderson, Minister, East Kilbride and Hamilton Joint Pastorate. John Young reader

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

I wonder what prompted Jesus to ask the question 'who do you say that I am?' Was he concerned about the way he was being understood by the crowds? The Gospel writers tell us that Jesus was misunderstood by people on a number of occasions - the crowds, the religious authorities, and even the inner circle of disciples show spectacular displays of misunderstanding. Did Jesus need confirmation that he was getting his message across - as Luke recounts this incident we are still quite early on in Jesus' ministry? Did he want to test the disciples to see if they had a deeper perception of who he was then those who followed at a greater distance?

drown in the lake. In fact, He's so deeply asleep that they have to shout at him to wake him up at all.

However, their desperation and terror have led them to Jesus and once He's awake, the storm is calmed and their fears are stilled. His power over the wild forces of nature stuns them, but Jesus points out their lack of faith. In my own life, Jesus has quietened many storms and provided help when I needed it most but still I forget and the next time I'm in a crisis, the terror returns and I forget who's in the boat with me! May we all have a greater confidence in the God Who travels with us.

Prayer

Dear God, help us to remember that You are always with us, no matter how silent You might seem. Thank you for the power You have in offering us peace even in the most unsettled circumstances. Amen.

Friday 4 February 2022 St Luke 8: 26 - 39

Beryl Hunt, Lay Preacher and member of Hutton & Shenfield Union Church, Essex

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 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

Volunteering at Mind's drop-in centre, I often met people who had lost all hope. They couldn't see any end to their misery or believe that life could improve. Through various activities we aimed to get them smiling or even laughing so they had some tangible proof that life could be good again.

The demon-possessed man also needed evidence that he was healed. William Barclay suggests that Jesus used the pigs' reaction to the commotion the man was making to reassure him that his demons were gone. We may dismiss the idea of demons but they were very real to the people of Jesus' day.

Today we know about the placebo effect but do we recognise how much we need tangible evidence to help us believe. In our areas of doubt God

Reflection

We all know more than we once did about how to have a good diet. We know about proteins and vitamins, about not too many carbs and your 'five a day'. There are all sorts of reasons why our bodies might not be well fed today in this world and we do well to work to overcome food poverty wherever we can.

But we also use food as a powerful metaphor for what our souls need. I remember someone once criticising sermons that seemed like 'thin gruel' (I think I knew what they meant), and I know what it means to find a sermon or a service that is truly nourishing. Like my physical body, my spirit needs regular, sustaining food and I am grateful for the times of prayer that fill me up and keep me going.

The story of this feeding miracle comes, in some form, in each of the four Gospels. And each time it seems as though it is about more than physical food, more than a catering triumph when the shops were far away. Jesus says to the twelve, 'You give them something to eat', and perhaps this is like that early encouragement to me to preach nourishing sermons. And the description of Jesus 'taking', 'blessing', 'breaking' and 'giving' is too like the founding stories of the Lord's Supper to be coincidence. The twelve thought they had little to give, but with Jesus' prayer there was enough and to spare.. for spirits as well as bodies.

Is this a moment to reflect on whether our own spiritual diet is right? Are we eating often enough the spiritual food that God provides? Are we starving ourselves, when God is offering us daily bread? Just how often might taking, blessing and sharing bread and wine really be right for us? And what food are we offering to others so that all may flourish? Let all eat and be filled.

Prayer

O God, you know that I'm always hungry,

Prayer

I want to be where you are, Lord.
I may run from it, I may
go toward it kicking and screaming.
But the safest place I can
be is close to Your will.
May it be so. Ase* and Amen.

Ase or ashe (from Yoruba àṣẹ) is a Yoruba philosophical concept through which the Yoruba of Nigeria conceive the power to make things happen and produce change.

Wednesday 9 February 2022 St Luke 9: 10 - 17

The Rev'd Dr Susan Durber is Moderator of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches

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.

will provide ways to reassure us, if we ask him. Pray today for the help you need to grow in faith and trust. Rejoice that God hears but prepare for an unexpected answer.

Prayer

Loving God, You sent your Son as the tangible expression of your deep love for us. Thank you for the many ways you still express that love. Forgive our weak faith and enable us to trust you more. Thank you Lord. Amen

Saturday 5 February 2022 St Luke 8: 40 - 56

The Revd Gwen Collins, retired minister, member of Avenue St Andrew's URC

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

Reflection

What does it mean to be desperate?

I think of it as a state of mind which consumes life in a frantic downward emotional spiral. Maybe something of vital importance is at grave risk. Maybe a loss has been suffered, so great that one cannot see beyond it. Maybe a realisation has dawned that one is utterly helpless to bring about a deeply desired outcome. Maybe one just doesn’t know how to find the strength to carry on.

In such a state people may find the energy to perform one last act of desperation.

Both Jairus and the woman suffering from haemorrhages did just that. Their actions in begging Jesus and in touching Jesus respectively, arose from their desperate situations.

Jesus appears not to be fazed by their desperation. He most certainly does not turn away from it. He engages. He reassures. He discerns faith. He heals.

There are desperate people out there today. Where Christ’s Church is not turning away from them, but is engaging, reassuring, discerning faith

the feeding of the multitudes. Here are two golden moments to witness Jesus at his best.

Luke writes, however, that Herod, in the comfort of the palace, desired/ tried/ strained to “see” Jesus. You’ll remember Herod’s father, whose governorship was split between his four sons. Herod the tetrarch (meaning “ruler of a quarter”) was given the shortest stick, with the indignity of lording over the non-citizens of the empire. In this text we hear for the first time that it was under the tetrarch’s order that John the Baptist was beheaded. But word gets around that the prophetic impulse has not died with John. And the tetrarch is intrigued and petrified: “John, I beheaded. But who is this…?”

Questions regarding Jesus’ identity bombard the first section of Luke. But after Herod’s question, we no longer get questions, we get answers. Nothing wrong with asking God questions. The Good News is that God will answer—just not in the way we expect.

Tragically for Herod, with a question burning in his heart, Luke says: “and he tried to see him.” It suggests some kind of genuine strain toward the holy. But as we know, when he finally meets Jesus—on the way to Calvary—Herod desires Jesus to perform. He demands a miracle, because the language of performance and phantasm is the only language through which the desperate and distracted will take notice.

Luke’s “he tried to see him” speaks to the spatial, cognitive, spiritual dissonance of the two. If he really wanted to see Jesus, all he had to do was get out of the palace. To really see Jesus, all that was needed was to go where Jesus always is: with the oppressed, the immigrant, the non-citizen.

Our proximity with those whom Jesus loves gives us the focus to see Jesus, and more than merely see, but to follow.

bereaved, the lost and the lonely, the sin-sick and the covid-sick. The countless people we encounter even in this covid-limited world. Travelling light we tread lightly on the earth, bearing the light and love that the Lord Jesus Christ has given us to share - and His authority and healing as we pray for those we meet.

And yes, sometimes we will not be welcome. Our message will not be welcome. Ours not to fight or argue, but to leave quietly and move on to where we can share our message.

For we are a people meant to be on the move with our message, not hoarding it for ourselves but sharing it generously and freely - just as we have received it.

Prayer

Rekindle our desire to share Your love and light and healing in our broken world, Lord Jesus! Give us courage to venture out of our cosy church fellowships into the big wide world and risk really following you and obeying your commands. Amen

Tuesday 8 February 2022 St Luke 9: 7 - 9

The Rev'd William Young, Pastor, Covenant Baptist United Church of Christ, Washington DC, USA

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

This private scene is tucked between two famously public moments in Jesus' ministry: the disciples' first missionary journey. After today's text is

and bringing healing we can be humbly proud to be following His way. It may be that desperation is even closer to home than that. Both the Covid pandemic and the climate emergency, for example, give fertile ground for despair. If and when we ourselves experience an underlying, gnawing sense of quiet desperation or are overtaken by an acute, agonising, flaring despair – when, or if, such a thing happens - how might Jairus and the unnamed woman help us?

Simply, but not simplistically, we are invited to follow their example. We do not encounter the man Jesus on our streets as they did, but the cry of our hearts Godward brings us straight to his feet. We are heard. And by God's grace healing and hope can begin to take root.

Prayer

Beauty for brokenness hope for despair,
Lord, in the suffering, this is our prayer.

Graham Kendrick
© 1993 Make Way Music

Sunday 6 February 2022 Psalm 78

The Rev'd Andy Braunston is the URC's Minister for Digital Worship and a member of Barrhead URC.

We will tell each generation
all that you, our God, have done;
how you called and led your people,
chose us out to be your own:

2: Tell the times of our rebelling-
how we wandered from your way,
how your law our love compelling
taught us humble to obey:

3: Tell how once,
when spite and terror
threatened to engulf our land,
you defended us with vigour,
saved us by a mighty hand:

4: Tell the grace
that falls from heaven,
angels' food as faith's reward;
tell how sins may be forgiven
through the mercy of the Lord.

Michael Perry Words © 1989 The Jubilate Group
(admin. Hope Publishing Company, 380 S Main Pl, Carol Stream, IL 60188) You can hear the tune suggested for this Psalm, Restoration, here https://bit.ly/3gk66ty)

Reflection

The Jewish people see themselves, through the witness of Scripture, as God's chosen people. Chosen before the ages to tell of God's loving kindness, unity, and justice. The tales in Scripture balance, like this version of Psalm 78, this lofty calling and the reality of a fallen fallible people. The people are to tell their children of both their calling and their falling. It's something we should do more of in the Church.

Seeing ourselves as sharing God's favour, we believe we too have a calling to tell of God's loving kindness, justice, and salvation shown to us in Jesus - God made flesh. We're good at telling that story (whether we do so in effective ways is another matter.) We're less good at telling of our fallible failings; how the Church has been both a force for good and evil, freedom and oppression, light and darkness. Instead we develop a collective amnesia - whether that's about our collusion with colonialism, our support of slavery, our persecution of the Jews, or our treatment of those who believe differently.

The Psalmist, and today's hymn writer, manage to convey the desire to tell of God's deeds alongside our human failings. We can rejoice in the power of God, and repent of our own cruelty. Telling both sides of the story will, hopefully, stop us perpetuating our mistakes.

Prayer

Before the ages, Eternal One,
you chose your people to tell of your love,
yet you knew, even then, of our weakness, frailty, and failure.
Grant us the wisdom to both proclaim your deeds and admit to our sin,
that, at the end, you may unite us with all your people of old,
saints and sinners, vindicated victims and repentant oppressors. Amen.

Monday 7 February 2022 St Luke 9: 1- 6

Dorothy Courtis, elder & lay preacher, Wortwell URC

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

They've walked with Jesus for around three years. They've seen what he did. And now comes the first practical part of their discipleship. He sends them out in pairs to do what he's been doing: teaching and healing, setting people free from evil and into the Kingdom of God. They receive simple, clear instructions: travel light, don't fight about the best accommodation, accept what you find - unless you meet with a lack of welcome. Then don't waste your time or energy: simply leave and shake the dust of that place off your feet. Leave it behind and move on.

I wonder when was the last time your minister did that? Packed the congregation off with instructions like that and shut the church doors behind them?

In truth I think ministers do that every Sunday at the end of the service. 'Off you go!' the benediction really says. 'Go and share the love and blessing you've received here. Then come back and tell us what happened so we can all be encouraged - for next week when we'll do it all over again!'

What stories we have to tell of our encounters with the bruised and