

Sun 13th Feb - Introducing Luke

Jeremiah 17. 5-10

Luke 6. 17-26

Scientists know a lot more about the brain these days. For instance - there are different types of memory - the kind of automatic stuff like knitting or riding a bike gets stored in a different place to the "the first time we met" kind of stuff. Also the memory of events and people is actually affected by emotions - the stronger the emotion the better the memory. Plus these memories get affected by how we view the world and ourselves. So that explains why 4 people can see the same event and remember it differently - for instance the 4 gospel writers - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. But there's more - these 4 writers are also speaking to different groups, each of whom has their own specific needs and interests. As has been said before, they're like Radio 1, 2, 3 and 4 - or the Sun, the Times, and the Daily Mail.

Why am I telling you all this? Because one of the things the Church does, which you may or may not notice - a bit like the altar cloths changing colour with the seasons - ooh look - its green! Is that each year our gospel readings mainly come from one of Matthew, Mark and Luke (John is too weird / special and needs special treatment!). And this year (which started back in Advent remember, but we were too busy then) we are hearing a lot from Luke.

So what can I tell you about Luke? - or Luke the Evangelist. Well he's the only writer to have a sequel - he wrote the Acts of the apostles - and he starts in that as a companion of St Paul.

At the beginning of both books he says that he acknowledges that others have written accounts - so he knows about Mark perhaps, and he wants to set down an "orderly account", investigating the facts and talking to those who were there. So he's sometimes called - Luke the Historian. To him the facts matter. He gives the fullest account of Jesus birth and the one incident of Jesus childhood.

There are several themes to watch out for in Luke -

Roman / Gentile - all the world -

by this time the gospel has spread and Rome is not the enemy, and Roman slaves are joining the movement. Luke explicitly says Jesus if for the whole world, not just Jews. He also has details like the lowering of the paralysed man - they say they took the tiles off the roof, rather than broke through - someone in Rome just wouldn't get that they have mud rooves in the middle east!

Healing

Luke mentions more healings than all the other gospels - he wants to show that Jesus is not just about words, but also deeds. In Paul's letters Luke is mentioned as the "beloved physician" the doctor- there is an International order of healers named after him and healing services are often on the Feast of st Luke. Luke is saying that Jesus has the

power to do the things he is talking about the kingdom is coming, and has begun.

### The women

Women were half citizens in Jewish culture - you needed 2 witnesses to equal that of a man. Luke is the one who mentions Joanna and all those who are supporting Jesus financially. He names them and includes them.

### The Poor

If there was one theme of Luke, it is that God is on the side of the poor. I'll talk a bit more about what he might mean, but its clear that Jesus comes toe bring good news to the poor, the poor will be lifted up.

And of course, all these can be grouped together as outsiders, outcast, those on the edge, the margins - if you're sick, or a woman, or a not in the Roman or Jewish system - Luke is the great gospel of justice and reversals.

Which brings me to the next theme - Luke is the gospel of the Kingdom - the kingdom of God is here, its started with Jesus, its the invisible reality, its totally different from this world, this kingdom, but its the one that matters.

And finally Luke is also the gospel of the holy spirit - no other mentions the spirit as much - it is clear that Jesus works with the spirit - the 2 members of the trinity carrying out the fatehr's will.

One commentator summed up look - whose symbol is an ox \_ you know Mark's a lion and John's an eagle - well - Luke, the ox - is the one who walks with those oppressed by burdens - the sick, the poor, the women etc

And who gives us strength to bear the burdens - through the holy spirit and prayer.

And you might like to remember that the 2 most famous stories of Jesus - the good samaritan adn the prodigal son - are only in Luke!

So - which book are you going to take on the desert island? Lets hear it for Luke!

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So in this passage today, Jesus has just chosen his 12 special disciples - and now he instructs them. Adn this is Luke's version of the beatitudes. In Matthew remember its all the Poor in spirit, and hunger and thirst for righteousness spiritualised, but Luke is having none of that. This is the actual poor, the actual hungry. Luke's faith is about real, solid things that matter if you're hungry or weeping.

Its also different because after the shorter list of blessings, Luke follows it with curses -  
*"But woe to you who are rich,  
Woe to you who are well fed now,*

*Woe to you who laugh now,*

And this is a classic bible technique - of pitting the benefits against the pitfalls. The bible being very unsubtle and trying to make the choices clear.

So Moses - in Deuteronomy 30 - Today I am giving you a choice. You can choose life and success or death and disaster. - if you follow God's ways, this will happen, if you disobey then this is what will happen.

Joshua does the same thing in chapter 24 - and ends with "But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

And it turned up in our Jeremiah reading today. Jeremiah - gone with the people into exile says -

*"Cursed is the one who trusts in man,  
and whose heart turns away from the Lord.*

*"But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord,  
whose confidence is in him.*

But this is more than just contrasting to make a choice - its about the great reversal - the kingdom of God that turns the world upside down -

Think of the Magnificat - (only in Luke) which echoes Hannah's song in Samuel -

*He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.*

*He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.*

(Which is the same things Luke highlights now. - the poor, the hungry)

And it comes up again and again in Luke -

He says "don't invite the rich to dinner, who can invite you back, but the poor"

or when Lazarus is in heaven the rich man goes to hell,

and of course Jesus - cursed under Jewish law for being hung on a tree, for the crime of blasphemy, and so poor that he is in another man's tomb - yet he rises to new life, to be the king and ruler of all.

Now - If this was just about money, it would all be ok, a bit new labour but kind of accepted, we should all be equal etc. And we may feel a bit guilty for being rich.

But this is more than that. In Jesus day, the religious leaders believed and preached that

wealth was a sign of favour from God. The rich were blessed. The poor, had probably done something to deserve it. You shouldn't help them because they were not favoured by God.

So Jesus is changing their view of God.

Money is not good or bad, it depends what you do with it. There were plenty of rich people who followed Jesus who he did not have a go at - the women who paid for his ministry, Zaccheus the tax collector.

But the Jewish leaders were using money as a sign of God's favour. And Jesus said - you're wrong.

This was more about the leaders using God as an excuse to define who was ok and who not - to hang on to their own power, to keep people out, keep people down, to define social class.

So this was about wealth - the poor kept out

Gender - the women kept out

Health or disability - the sick kept out

Racial purity - the gentiles, the romans - kept out

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So when Jesus is on the side of the poor, or against the romans, we read it as economic or political - but he was challenging the idea of God that the pharisees and the interpreters of the scriptures were telling.

You can argue about whether our view of God has changed - go to History and see the Divine right of Kings - the Holy Roman Emperor - the hymns that speak of the rich man in his castle as God's order of things. And Luke seems pretty relevant. God's kingdom is not like that.

And if you listen to the news you see politicians bending the truth to stay in power

You see a world obsessed by money and wealth, and fame and celebrity

And you could think that that's what matters.

But our reading today says - this is an illusion, fake

The real kingdom - is like a mustard seed growing secretly

The real kingdom has already begun in Jesus

The real kingdom the truth will be revealed.

And the church is called to work for that kingdom - to pray - your kingdom come.

And although this kingdom is brought in by God - it is his doing not ours - Jeremiah remind us that we must play our part -

"I the Lord reward each person according to their **conduct**,  
according to what their **deeds** deserve."

Our job as the church, and Luke would be proud of us - is to keep making room for those the outside, the margins, those whom the world despises, those forgotten, left by the wayside - this is what the church is for!

To work to feed those who are poor and hungry now -

To work to lift up those who are pushed out and excluded now

— women, people of colour, those exploring gender, people who live in the countryside with no bus, poor internet and lack of funding,  
all the left behind..

they are in the centre of the new kingdom,

So this is slow, and sometimes disheartening - we are battling upstream.

But with prayer and the power of the spirit, we will take our burdens to Jesus, and watch for the signs of the kingdom breaking through.

Like like the snowdrops through the frosty ground the promise of spring

there are signs of the true kingdom breaking through everywhere.

May God open our eyes to see them.