

Sunday 19 October – Luke the Evangelist

Sermon by Harold Toms

An audio recording of the sermon from St Luke's will be available after the service at [Sermons \(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk\)](http://Sermons(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk)

A few weeks ago, at the confirmation service, Bishop Roger talked about how Jesus in the Gospels seems always being interrupted whilst going from one place to another. I think that might be a fair description of Jesus in Mark's, and perhaps Matthew's account, but in Luke's (whose day we celebrate today) I think Jesus is better described as either on his way to eat, eating, or just leaving the table. Food, and parables concerning food, are a running theme through both of Luke's books in the New Testament. For instance, one of the key events in the Book of Acts is Peter's dream of a feast in the town of Joppa, in which he is told to "Get up, kill and eat" from a range of forbidden foods. When he says that he can by no means comply since he has never eaten anything that is unclean or profane, he is told in no uncertain terms that:

"What God has made clean, you must not call profane." Acts 10:15

Which leads to him accepting the invitation of the Roman centurion Cornelius, in whose house Peter witnesses Gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit. This is a turning point in the life of the Church as the penny finally drops and the first Jewish believers come to realise that Jesus came not just for Jews, but also for Gentiles, the salvation He brought was for everyone.

I wonder if Peter was reminded of the commissioning of the seventy (or seventy-two), the subject of today's Gospel reading. This account of Jesus sending out His followers is given only in Luke. The clues are clearly there, if you consider Jesus' instructions carefully. For a start there is that number, seventy, a significant number in the Bible. There were traditionally considered to be seventy nations descended from Noah (you'll find that in Genesis chapter 10), then there are the seventy descendants of Jacob who go into Egypt, and the number of years of exile in Babylon is again seventy. It is a number that implies completeness, in Psalm 90, we are told that it is the span of a lifetime (three score years and ten) and an age at which we might expect to accumulate wisdom and experience, making elders respected sources of guidance.

Then there are the instructions that Jesus gives to the seventy. First He tells them to:

"Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road." Luke 10:4

which obviously implies the urgency of their task, there is no time to be lost on chatting to people they meet, or packing and making careful preparations. This is a reminder that they are to trust God to provide all that they need, and shouldn't just be taken to refer to practical things (food, clothes) but also for the words of the message they are to deliver. They are not to move from house to house but are told to stay wherever they find a house of peace. You might almost miss what Jesus has to say about the food that they eat, but in the context of the feast at Joppa from Acts, it is most important. Jesus tells them to:

"... eat(ing) and drink(ing) whatever they provide." Luke 10:7

Remembering that Jesus sent twelve disciples to preach to the twelve tribes of Israel then seventy to take His message to all the nations. All the nations means all of the Gentile nations, the whole world. So, what will be provided to eat will not comply with the strict food regulations of the Mosaic law, but they are told to eat whatever is provided.

Hospitality is a theme that runs right through the Old Testament laws, requiring farmers to leave grain at the margins of their fields for strangers in their land to eat. The law commands that food be shared, not just with friends and neighbours, but with anyone in need. We are, I am sure, all familiar with the well-known summary of the law:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind," and the second is like it, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" Mark 12: 29-31

That second command "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" is a direct quotation of Leviticus 19 verse 17. But Jesus goes beyond that in expanding it to include everyone, by illustrating in the parable of the Good Samaritan, that we should consider everyone to be our neighbour. It is a story found only in Luke's Gospel, in fact just a few verses on from our Gospel reading this morning. But Jesus is actually being less radical that

you might think, for the law in Leviticus already covers exactly the same point. A little later, in the same chapter (19) we find:

"When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself" Leviticus 19:33-34

Which gives a completely different perspective to how we should regard all those so-called aliens in our land, whom we should love as we love ourselves.

I mentioned at the start that in Luke's Gospel Jesus seems always to be either on his way to eat, eating, or just leaving the table. Hospitality is a central theme, as we've seen not just in the Gospel but also in the follow-up Book of Acts. On some occasions Jesus is the recipient of hospitality, a few weeks ago when I preached on Saint Matthew, we had an example of Jesus eating at the house of the tax collector. On other occasions Jesus is the provider, for instance in the feeding of the five thousand. It is a reminder that how we receive hospitality is just as important as how we give it, remember that instruction to "... eat and drink whatever they provide." The Jesus we meet in Luke's account is both a gracious host and a gracious guest. When Peter follows His example in the house of Cornelius, the Holy Spirit is enabled to work and the course of history changes. Like Peter, we too need to follow Jesus' example and be both gracious hosts and gracious guests, for in so doing we too may be the means through which the Holy Spirit can work in the world.

Amen.