

St Luke

A sermon preached by the Rector, the Very Reverend Tim Barker at the parish church of St Andrew Guernsey on the feast of St Luke, 18 October 2020

Readings: Acts 16 vv 6-12a and Luke 10 vv 1-9

Today we celebrate the life and witness of one of the first disciples: St Luke. He wasn't one of the Twelve called by Jesus as his immediate band of disciples (with a capital D). But Luke was certainly a disciple, a follower of Jesus, who exercised a remarkable ministry as the writer of one of the gospel books and of the Acts of the Apostles.

We know very little about Luke: he is far more interested in drawing us to Jesus and his compassionate care for the lost and outcast than he is in talking about himself. Only Luke gives us the sequence of the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal son. And it to Luke that we owe the three great liturgical hymns which are staples of our daily worship: the Benedictus (the Song of Zechariah), the Magnificat (the Song of Mary) and the Nunc dimittis (the Song of Simeon), as well as the angels' song which developed into the Gloria.

If we were to ask Luke what being a disciple meant to him, he would have several answers. Throughout his gospel, Luke explains that we can be disciples in different ways. We can leave our homes and travel, or we can stay and follow Jesus in our own community. We can be part of a small group, sent out in pairs as in today's reading, or a much larger community. For Luke, women have a key role as followers of Jesus (for example, he mentions Mary of Bethany assuming a clear position as a disciple as she sits at Jesus' feet).

The main point for Luke is that as Christian disciples we are not alone. Disciples, followers of Jesus, Christians, are part of a worldwide community; although, as we find in the Acts of the Apostles, we are not immune from squabbles and disagreements. We can't be a disciple on our own. This companionship is essential both to the way we are called to live (our vocation) and how we live out our discipleship (the vision we hold before us).

In ancient times, the way a teacher lived was just as important as what they taught. This was true of Jesus – think about how he modelled an inclusive community by showing the value of children and women, the poor and the outcast. People learnt as much from Jesus through the way he lived as by what he taught.

And it is true for us too. In an island community, we know each other well. Perhaps too well. There are few places to hide. If we can't forgive each other in church, people will notice. If we don't get on within a church community and across the churches here in Guernsey, people will notice. If we don't support each other in our shared vision and our care for the whole community of this island, people will notice.

We know, as the first disciples knew, that being a Christian isn't always easy or straightforward. Today's reading from Luke's gospel includes both warnings and encouragement. Paul has no illusions about the complexity of Christian community and life. That is clear from so many places in his letters, as well as in the unexpected change of plans to which he had to adjust, as we heard in the reading from Acts. We are reminded in Paul's experience about the importance of flexibility, of being willing to adapt to changing circumstances.

In today's gospel, Jesus sends the disciples out in pairs as companions and supports to each other, to join in his work, to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God. We are called to be an all-embracing, Christ-centred church. It's important to be open to all ages – even if most of us have reached a particular point on the maturity spectrum. And to be as open to those outside the life of the church as to those who come to worship here every week.

There are questions for everyone here today. What difference does being a Christian make to your life? What is the good news for you? Because being confident of that will help us fulfil the shared vision for God's people in this island.

Be willing to think about your faith, be it strong or weak, to speak the questions you may have, and to reflect on the times when you have felt close to God or far from God, and to accept that the experience of faith will be very different for each of us. How does this church (and by that, I mean its people) work as salt and light in St Andrew and in service to the whole island community?

An English politician was ridiculed for his statement a few years ago that 'we are all in it together.' But that is a description of the Christian life, as together we seek to be faithful and courageous disciples, loving Jesus, and loving and serving the community in which we live, working with all people of goodwill in his name, whether or not they share our Christian faith.

Together, we are called to make real in our generation Jesus' words at the end of the gospel reading today: 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'