

Sunday 18th October



St Luke

St Luke is the Patron Saint of Surgeons, physicians and artists and his special day is 18th October, the day when his life and work have been celebrated in the Church through the ages. His symbol is the ox, and a rather jolly flying one can be seen in the icon! St Luke, author of the third Gospel and of the Acts of the Apostles, is taken to be a doctor: in Colossians 4:14 we read, “Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you.” He accompanied St Paul on some of his missionary journeys: in several places he writes, “we” as in Acts 16:11, “We set sail from Troas,” including himself in the account.

It seems particularly appropriate to think of Luke the doctor at this time when the pandemic is increasing, as are concerns for the NHS, but I think we also need to remember that Luke was a man who had a particular awareness of the poor and the marginalised, the outcast. Only in his Gospel do we have the Parables of the Prodigal Son, (**Luke 15:11-32**) and of the Good Samaritan, (**10:25-37**) the outsider who did the will of God, caring for the stranger. Luke also includes several stories of women, and his account of the Nativity includes those outsiders, the shepherds. So that’s a second reason to be thinking about St Luke this Sunday, at this time when the divisions in society are broadening instead of lessening.

Luke seems to have been unafraid to challenge the status quo; to show that the behaviour that the world admires is not necessarily impressing God, the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (**18:9-14**) being a good example of the comparisons he makes. Such stories make us pause, too – where do we stand? Do our lives, our use of money and the status we have as consumers and as literate beings reflect God’s values or those of society? Do our prayers reflect God’s values of justice and peace for all the earth? Interesting and uncomfortable questions that are worth asking ourselves.

What we can probably agree on is that the world is desperately in need of healing. There is healing in the medical sense, the sense that’s at the forefront of our minds now. There is healing needed of the rifts in society. But healing in the psychological and spiritual sense is also vital for us all at this moment. People who have contracted the Covid virus find, in some cases, that there are unforeseen effects, “long covid”, as it’s now known. There are physical effects and mental ones, including a fuzziness of mind, apparently. But recovery from any serious illness brings after-effects; finding you’ve recovered from such as a heart attack or cancer is joyous, but many people then find it difficult to return to ‘normal’ life. Somewhere along the line, the experience has changed normality: values change, and we will all need to be gentle with ourselves when we eventually emerge from the abnormality of this pandemic to find a new, full life again.

I suspect that society will need a similar healing and gentleness. This is not so easy when an aggressive attack upon life is encouraged, but it brings us back to the values we hold – are they society’s or God’s?

Life as a Christian is not easy, nor is the way always clear, but the need for faithfulness in prayer, in study remains a constant. And, I'd suggest, the need for rest!

Luke is also Patron Saint of Artists. He is credited with producing the first icon of the Virgin Mary, the Convent of Sydnaya in Syria having what is claimed to be one of Luke's icons. Maybe the other things he's suggesting is to look at the world with an artist's eye and see the changes, the beauty and to offer it, and all we can make of beauty, to God.



Convent of Sydnaya



St Luke, Hugo van der Goes
(1490)

Note: You don't have to climb up all the steps to the Convent. There's a road the bus takes to the top!

A Prayer:

For a moment just bring to mind the doctors at your own GP practice, and doctors who have helped you through the years, maybe surgeons who have made a huge difference to your own, or a loved one's, life.

Bring, too, those you know who are ill or in any kind of distress.

Eternal, Living God our Father, you sent your Son Jesus that, through his death and rising, all may find life in all its fullness.

We praise and thank you for all those of faith and of none that you have called to work as doctors and surgeons, for the skills they offer, for their dedication to their calling.

At this time when all doctors are having to work under unusual conditions – distancing, masked when they see patients, trying to diagnose in telephone consultations, unable to offer the reassurance of touch where there is distress, we ask a special gift of your Holy Spirit to bring understanding, and the right words to say. We ask, Lord, strength when they are weary and the knowledge that people do understand and sympathise with the pressures under which all NHS staff are working today.

We thank you for the calling and skill of surgeons

and the seemingly incredible outcomes they are often able to achieve.

But we are conscious that sometimes, despite their best efforts, surgery does not succeed,

and we ask your peace and healing touch in the distress felt by patients and those close to them, when the outcome is not what they wanted, and that felt by the surgeons and their teams.

Loving Lord, we know that sometimes death is a healing, and we bring those doctors and other medical staff who work in hospices, or with the dying in hospitals, in care homes and at home. As they help people move beyond this life to the next, may it be with calm and dignity. Thank you, Lord, for those who, unafraid, help others face the end of their life here on earth unafraid and at peace, loved just as they are.

Eternal Lord, your creative love shows in all the earth and skies, a creative love that holds us always, whoever, wherever we may be. Help us absorb that same creative love and show it forth in our own lives, and encourage it in all we meet, that the earth may truly become your kingdom of peace and justice, asking this in Jesus' name, Amen

Blessings, Ruth