

**St Luke's Enmore.**  
**Sermon for Patronal Festival 15 October 2023.**

Jeremiah 8.22-9.3. Psalm 145.10-18. 2 Timothy 4.9-17a. Luke 10.1-9.

+In the written word and the spoken word, may we behold the Living Word, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Thank you for your welcome today as together we give thanks for your life together in Christ and your special relationship with St Luke the Gentile evangelist and healer.

I have many happy memories of my time here and of the special people who have made this community their spiritual home. Like you, I was shocked and deeply saddened when the wonderful Fabian Lo Schiavo died so unexpectedly in May. This place is not quite the same without that piano accordion being played. Perhaps we will hear an echo as we join the hymn of eternal praise! I have never forgotten Fabian's brave speeches in Synod, and I am glad his role in the days of AIDS was recognised in the ABC series *In Our Blood*. Watching that drama, it was hard to be reminded of how many young lives were lost, among them young men here, dying, until the revolutionary Australian response took effect.

Treating AIDS as an illness and not the result of an alleged 'crime' made all the difference back then. That difference is at the heart of Jesus' words in today's gospel.

Luke, the evangelist says that Jesus sent out seventy-two ahead of him, in pairs. Too many people think Jesus told them, 'Tell everyone you meet what terrible sinners they are, and how displeased with them God is.' Does that sound like a version of the 'good news' you might have heard? Jesus, on about what miserable sinners we all are? Yes, I thought you would have come across it. There are people who think that way. Alas, we western Christians usually think of sin as 'breaking God's rules' rather than the much more ancient view of the Church that sin is an illness at the heart of the world, an illness with which we are all afflicted one way to another.

In sending out seventy-two to ahead of him, Jesus is drawing into his purposes, his mission, women and men who will prepare the way for him

to come *bringing and being* good news about God's generous love. Jesus tells them, 'Cure those who are sick.'

The more ancient tradition of the Church is to think of 'sin' as an infection which shows itself in various ways – in putting ourselves above God, in envy and greed that lead to violence, in behaving like bad tenants of God's creation and plundering, not sharing justly, the good gifts of the earth, and in not trusting God's love for us and so devaluing our lives.

You don't need me to recite for you all that is amiss in our world. That's the stuff of the evening news. That's the stuff that lies in our hearts alongside our longing for God when we pray. *Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts*, we say in the opening prayer of the Eucharist, *that we may perfectly (fully) love you...*

Part of that cleansing is to clear away the debris of the open wound of human sin. It is to embrace the healing of heart, and mind, and life that God enables through Jesus, who takes away the sin of the world.

Jesus is sending people ahead of him as he himself is walking to Jerusalem, from the north of the Galilee. Jesus tells these seventy-two women and men – scholars are confident women were among them - take only the barest essentials. *Go with peace in your heart as you meet people, don't use booking.com, just see who welcomes you, eat what you are given: I am sending you like lambs among wolves!*

*I am sending you like lambs among wolves!* Chilling isn't it? Not how we like to live, certainly not my preferred way of living! These days Jesus would not pass a risk audit. He would be in strife with professional standards for a lack of due diligence. And yet, Jesus comes to humanity as a lamb among wolves.

So, if we think of sin as an illness, how does God cure us? What are God's means to bring us to a healthy relationship with God and with each other? The first step is our faith, our trust in the good purposes of God to bring us to new life. We take that step every time we trust that God is Christ-like and that in God there is no un-Christ-likeness at all, to use Michael Ramsey's marvellous phrase. Although *now* we cannot plumb the depths of who God is, we can trust that in Jesus, flesh of our human flesh and risen Christ, God withholds nothing of God's self from us. *In him the*

*fullness of God was pleased to dwell*, says the writer of the letter to the Colossians (1.19).

We take another step whenever we open our heart to God in prayer and reflection. It is in that vulnerability that God shows us kindly what is amiss; shows us without overwhelming us; shows us through insight into our patterns of behaving just what is our particular form of the world's harm. In quiet and contemplation God shows us unconditional love which is compassionate and allows us to receive God's forgiveness and, just as necessary, to forgive ourselves. Through our prayer, and the wise counsel of trusted others, with a right diagnosis of what ails us, we can be enabled by God's grace to grow healthier, to grow into the likeness of Christ promised in baptism.

We take more steps whenever we come to the sacraments. Beginning with the cleansing of baptism, the first washing of the wound, and taking God's holy medicine in bread and wine we are held by the frequent feeding of our souls, as a nursing child is fed in body and soul by the mother's frequent embrace.

By anointing with olive oil in times of serious illness or distress we are strengthened to face what must be, paradoxically given strength and hope by acknowledging our utter dependence on God.

And we grow in wholeness, in holiness of living every time we allow God to be God rather than hoping God will step aside so that we can do a better job! We heal very time we act in loving ways towards others, even if we do not feel like it! Love is how we behave before it is how we feel. Our healing grows a little more every time we care for God's fragile creation; when we sort the recycling, speak up for the vulnerable, or contact our member of parliament about an injustice. Every time we bring the kingdom that bit nearer by our actions, and sometimes by what we say.

The symbol of the Luke gospel is an ox. Why an ox, aren't they a bit dumb? For thousands of years the ox has symbolised patience and calm in daily life. It's not too difficult to see why such an ordinary, humble creature symbolises aspects of our life in Christ. Oxen work in pairs, and sometimes in teams. They are yoked together so that they pull in the same direction. By patience and persistence, they achieve what is needed: a field plough, a load moved.

It is no different with us. By patience and persistence, by the constant balm of God's care we are brought from illness to health in Christ who bears our wounds to heal them.

The Church is not a gathering of the perfect, but a hospital for the convalescent. Here we are aided by the prayers of others and our own; here we are fed by the words of scripture and the sacraments of the gospel, both of which bring to us the Word made flesh; here we welcome others also in need of healing. Yoked to them in love we pull together to accomplish what God makes possible through us, and in us, and between us.

Luke the gospel writer wants us to be clear that the walking with Jesus, being sent by him ahead of him in twos or teams, means the gospel is preached in community, in vulnerability, and in giving and receiving hospitality.

It's as simple as that, and it is as demanding and as compelling as that. Be among the women and men Jesus sends.

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