

St Luke's Sunday

Reading: Luke 10:1-9

They call it cold calling. Knocking on someone's door without an appointment. I heard of a young life insurance salesman. He was given a street to cold call on to try and sell life insurance. The first door was opened by a 99-year-old man. "Son," he said, "at my age I don't buy a green banana."

Jesus in our Gospel for St Luke's Day is sending out the 72 for some cold calling. They are to travel in pairs, and they are given an exit strategy: if they stop paying you, then move on. The number 72 for Greek speakers means the whole inhabited world. Genesis 10 has the number of all the nations of the world at 72. In other words (and this is a hallmark of Luke's gospel) the good news of Jesus is for everyone. Not just a chosen few.

As we come to celebrate this festival of St Luke, the patron saint of this church, we need to pause and ask ourselves, what is the good news? Another way of asking this question is what do we, the people of St Luke's, have to offer the world? We better get this straight before we head off, otherwise there isn't a lot of point in heading off at all.

Luke is very clear what the good news is. Verse five says when you enter a house first say peace to this house, peace be to this house.

We know from reading Luke's gospel that peace was central to Luke's thinking. At the birth of Jesus, he puts on the lips of the angels, Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace. Simeon's canticle begins, "Now master you are letting your servant go in peace." To the woman forgiven her sins and weeping at his feet Jesus says, "Go in peace." And the greeting of the risen Christ to his disciples right at the end of his Gospel is (you guessed it) "Peace be with you."

Peace is much more for Luke than the absence of war or conflict. It is something deep in our innermost being. Paul describes it as the peace of God which passes all human understanding. In the recent arguments between the EU and Britain over Brexit, fishing has taken on an even greater complexity. In fact, one fisherman described trying to work out what he could catch and not catch as the piece of cod beyond all human understanding.

But what does this peace look like?

I have a really great job. I get to talk to people of all types. I think I must have one of those faces because people tell me all sorts of things. This suits me because I'm naturally nosy. This one man, let's call him Michael, told me something of his struggle. It was between the wedding which I had taken and the meal which I was hanging out for. Michael had he told me been the most reluctant convert to Christianity there had ever been. He had felt inside of him a big void. And he had tried filling this hole with all sorts of things, but mostly alcohol. It numbed the pain for a while but slowly and with a predictable ending he had become an alcoholic. Even with the intervention of his family and his friends and the breakup of all his relationships, the loss of his job and his sanity, he didn't seek help. Finally facing taking his own life he reached out to an Alcoholics Anonymous group. He had begun a 12-step program. The first step is to acknowledge that he was powerless over his addiction. He knew that for sure, but the next step was the hardest. He needed to hand his life over to God. That took him months. As he said he was the most reluctant convert. Surely there must be another way. But eventually he did it. As the programme said, he handed his life over to God. A remarkable thing happened. The more of God he had in his life, the less the hole inside him ached. The more he prayed, the less he drank. Eventually he discovered something he described as peace. Or as John's Gospel puts it the Peace of Christ was indwelling him.

In our COVID world, in a world of unrest, aggression and uncertainty do people need this peace? Do they ever!

It's we, the followers of Jesus, who have this peace as our gift to the world. This is the good news we have to share: whatever we try and use to fill that void within us, be it over eating, or over shopping or over exercising or drugs or violence or whatever, real peace can be only found in the Prince of Peace. The deep peace of our longing, the deep peace of our need is found only in Him. For Michael, the equation was simple: with Jesus life makes sense, without him it doesn't.

With peace as our calling card, the calling that God has put on my life and yours makes sense.

I received a call once from a man whose wife was dying. I braced myself to go and see her and offer words of comfort. As it turned out she was the one who was going to minister to me. "I have asked you here today to thank the church. To thank you all for taking me in and offering me love. Because of the care you have shown me, I have hope again in God." She had come back to church after many years of absence. "I will die in peace knowing that my Saviour is waiting for me," she said. What do you say? I mumbled something I can't remember. Later I was reminded of another part of Simeon's beautiful canticle "Lord now you let your servant go in peace. Your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people, a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel."

Today we celebrate, not a saint long dead, but an abiding peace that is ours, and ours to share.

Let us pray:

Faithful God

You gave St Luke a gospel of peace.

*Take from us all worry and
insecurity,*

*Fill the void inside us with your
peace,*

*a peace beyond all human
understanding.*

Let us be agents of peace.

*Let us bring your gospel of peace to
others that they too might abide in
you,*

now and forever. Amen.