

## Is there doctor in the Church?

Our gathering words for worship today:

We are called to be people of faith in the midst of the world, and so we mix our worship and our work, our faith and our life. We gather as people who live in the world and yet, we gather as people who have been called to see the world from a different viewpoint.

God has called us together to be part of a community. God challenges us to consider questions of priority as we engage with the world. In this time may God open our hearts, minds and eyes, allowing us to see deeper, helping us to live in the world while still offering a challenge to the ways of the world.

Join in this **prayer**:

I fix my eyes on you Jesus, my Lord, my Saviour and King. Come fill my heart with your endless love and send the wind of your Spirit to blow new hope through my life. Come light up my soul to rise in faith, to stretch out and take in your kingdom. Come pour out your Spirit upon me as I stand together as brother or sister in the Lord. Come lift up my head, brush away the shadows of guilt and shine your grace into my mind.

Gracious God, you have blessed me with the entirety of your creation and I have taken it all and tried to place it in a box that I can control rather than manage. When I go against your will I wonder why life does not work out for me. In my brokenness, I seek happiness and joy in things and expectations. Then, outside of your hope, I am crushed by the world around me and my own inward thoughts. Lord Jesus, shine your light into the dark days and nights of my life. Forgive me for falling from your love and blessings, restore in me the joy that only comes through your Spirit living in me and through me.

And so Lord, I arise to worship. I shake off the shackles of a fallen world and join with heaven to sing your praise. I will declare your goodness now and celebrate your greatness forevermore! Amen.

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We have two **Scripture Readings** today: the first is from the book of Acts 16:1, 5-12 taken from *The Message* a contemporary English version by Eugene Peterson.

Paul came first to Derbe, then Lystra.

As they travelled from town to town, they presented the simple guidelines the Jerusalem apostles and leaders had come up with. That turned out to be most helpful. Day after day the congregations became stronger in faith and larger in size.

They went to Phrygia, and then on through the region of Galatia. Their plan was to turn west into Asia province, but the Holy Spirit blocked that route. So they went to Mysia and tried to go north to Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus wouldn't let them go there either. Proceeding on through Mysia, they went down to the seaport Troas.

That night Paul had a dream: A Macedonian stood on the far shore and called across the sea, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" The dream gave Paul his map. We went to work at once getting things ready to cross over to Macedonia. All the pieces had come together. We knew now

for sure that God had called us to preach the good news to the Europeans.

Putting out from the harbour at Troas, we made a straight run for Samothrace. The next day we tied up at New City and walked from there to Philippi, the main city in that part of Macedonia and, even more importantly, a Roman colony. We lingered there several days.

And then from the gospel of Luke 1:1-4, also from *The Message* translation, we read,

So many others have tried their hand at putting together a story of the wonderful harvest of Scripture and history that took place among us, using reports handed down by the original eyewitnesses who served this Word with their very lives. Since I have investigated all the reports in close detail, starting from the story's beginning, I decided to write it all out for you, most honourable Theophilus, so you can know beyond the shadow of a doubt the reliability of what you were taught.



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### Luke, the Physician

In many parts of the world, particularly Africa, India and South America, Christian mission work often took the form of mission hospitals and the mission staff regarded their medical work as a threefold ministry. Firstly, medicine is considered as a means of evangelism, with many have found Christ through the medical ministry of the hospital as patients and families regularly joining services held on the hospital's veranda or grounds. Missionaries, some being doctors, have gone out from the hospital to teach Bible classes in the schools or conducting Sunday services in outlying villages. Secondly, the hospital provides medical care for believers, especially new converts who need somewhere to go when they turn their backs on the witch doctors with their sorcerous cures. Thirdly, the hospital tries to care for the physical ills of Christian workers as they engage in witness and service.

As we continue to explore the early church apostle's for Christ Jesus, we learn that even Paul had his own personal physician from the middle of his second missionary journey until the end of his life. This man was Luke, and we know this when Paul writes from prison to the believers in Colossae and ends his letter saying Luke the doctor sends his greeting. (Colossians 4:14) What do we know about Luke?

Some scholars think Luke was born in Syrian Antioch as he certainly shows great familiarity with Antioch and with the church there. Others think that Luke came from Philippi in Macedonia, possibly the "the man of Macedonia" in Paul's Troas night vision (Acts 16:9). This is where we first cross Luke's trail as he is personally involved in the apostolic mission to Philippi. Luke apparently, was also Christian before he met Paul and it appears that he was in Philippi to strengthen the nucleus of new converts while Paul proceeded to other cities to evangelize. When Paul returned to Philippi on his third missionary journey, gleaned from a casual reading of Acts 20 onwards, Paul picked up Luke who then travelled with Paul to Jerusalem. Paul's beating outside the temple, his defence before the Sanhedrin and his three trials at Caesarea are recorded with greater detail than any other part of the history and would indicate that from then on, Luke was Paul's almost constant companion.

There is also some rather convincing evidence that Luke was familiar with the sea and with ships; and the suggestion that he was at one time a ship's doctor. For on Paul's final visit to Jerusalem and the stormy, shipwrecked Mediterranean voyage to Rome, Luke accompanied Paul, now prisoner. Interestingly, a man's wife was not permitted to accompany a prisoner, but Luke could as Paul's doctor tending to his physical needs and this enabled Luke to be an eyewitness to all that transpired.

God does use doctors, even though all healing comes ultimately from Him. Paul needed a doctor. If his thorn in the flesh was physical, Luke was there to help. Paul endured weariness, hunger, thirst, suffering in the cold and nakedness. He was frequently imprisoned and often exposed to death (2 Cor. 11:23-27). Through it all he had the solicitous and tender care of a competent doctor. So here in the early Church, we find the grand-father of all medical missionaries, Dr. Luke who not only tended Paul but also was as a spiritual paediatrician tending the growing pains of an infant church.

Would a doctor of the first century have had much medical knowledge? Medical texts before 1700 B.C. do not deserve to be called scientific because they are a mixture of home remedies, herb cures, incantations and astute observations on body functions. However, between the 6 B.C. and 2 A.D. medicine achieved advances greater than at any other period in history, except the last two centuries.

Luke was a scientific man. Science is the process of observation, comparison, control, deduction and the abstracting of principles. That method was already well known in the Greek world and particularly in the medical world with the centre of medical science was along the Ionian coast of the Aegean Sea which is where Luke seems to have spent much of his life. Luke was heir to a science of medicine that could compare favourably with any medical practice up to the early part of the last century. There existed at Rome, a medical supervision charged with the duty of examining in every city those who desired to practice the healing art. Luke must have possessed a scientific and literary culture above that of most of the other evangelists and apostles.

Luke therefore, was a well-educated man. We see this in his laborious and conscientious research as a skilful writer. He is the only Gentile author in the New Testament, indicated in Colossians, where Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus Justus are referred to by Paul as the "only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers", that is as Jews (Colossians 4:11), whilst Epaphras, Luke, and Demas were Gentiles. Luke authored the third Gospel in his name and the book of Acts. We also note that Acts 16:10-17; 20:5 to 21:25 and 27:2 to 28:16 are autobiographical, with that feeling we are looking over his shoulder and so being eyewitnesses along with him. So what of his writings, especially of Jesus whom he had probably never seen?

Luke's gospel deals with Jesus' earthly ministry while the book of Acts relates Jesus ministry after the Ascension as He continued to work by His Holy Spirit through the Apostles. Luke set about the task of first-hand investigation, conducting numerous interviews, sparing neither time nor money in the pursuit of accurate and hitherto unrecorded data on the Saviour's story. As those who had seen or heard Jesus on earth were becoming fewer, Luke set out to interview the Master's surviving family and followers as they supplied significant insights. The Virgin Mary was one of Luke's important sources. As Mary opened her heart to Luke, she recounted to him conversations known only to God, Gabriel, Joseph, Jesus and herself. Only in Luke do we have the record of the angel's appearance to Zacharias with the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist, Gabriel's annunciation to Mary of the Virgin Birth of Jesus, Mary's visit to cousin Elizabeth and the birth of John the Baptist and the birth and circumcision of Jesus, the adoration of the shepherds and Simeon and Anna, and Jesus confounding the learned temple teachers at the age of 12.

Paul himself would also have been a major source of Luke's accounts as he learned the details of Stephen's stoning, Paul's Damascus road conversion, his ministry at Antioch and his first missionary journey and the difference with Barnabas. Luke is thought to have completed his research during Paul's two-year detention at Caesarea where Philip, the evangelist, lived and gave material to Luke. He could have travelled down to Jerusalem to talk to James, the brother of Jesus. Surely Mark, also filled in facts where needed. In 1880 a classics scholar, Sir William Ramsay, visited Asia Minor to begin research and over 30 years, discovered detail after detail, confirming that Luke was a premier historian, finding no defects in Luke's history

But Luke was not just a doctor and historian; he was a Gospeller sharing the "old, old story of Jesus and His love" in a clear and convincing way. Luke was an evangelist at heart, heralding the good news, emphasizing salvation found in Jesus Christ. Luke's Gospel contains the parables of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the prodigal son (Lk 15:1-32), the story of Zacchaeus, Jericho's crooked tax collector (Lk 19:9-10), the conversion of the dying thief (Lk 23:39-43). Likewise, the book of Acts stresses salvation from start to finish. Peter's preaching at Pentecost the Good News of remission of sin through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. Luke writes of how others spread the Gospel, like Stephen, Peter, Paul and Barnabas.

Luke wrote about women and home life. His is the only Gospel to record the birth stories involving mothers Elizabeth and Mary (Lk 1:5-2:52), the widow of Nain (Lk 7:11-17), the sinful woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears Lk (7:36-50), the women who supported Him financially (Lk 8:1-3), and the episode of Mary sitting at Jesus' feet while Martha busily prepared the meal (Lk 10:38-42). Luke recounts the popularity of Jesus as a dinner guest in Matthew's home (Lk 5:29), at Zacchaeus' place (Lk 19:5) and the Emmaus home and the upper room, eating in both spots (Lk 24:30, 42-43).

Luke's interest in healing, besides relating most of the miracles recorded in the other Gospels, Luke is the only one to relate the healing of the woman crippled 18 years (Lk 13:10-13), the healing of the man with dropsy (Lk 14:1-6), the cleansing of the ten lepers (Lk 17:11-19), and the healing of the high priest's servant's ear, cut off at Jesus' arrest (Lk 22:50-51). Luke also records physical phenomena such as Jesus sweating drops of blood (Lk 22:44) and eating food in the upper room in His resurrected body (Lk 24:42-43), and in his book of Acts, he records the healing of the lame man at the temple gate (Acts 3:1-8), the healing of Aeneas (Acts 9:33-34), the healing of the cripple at Lystra (Acts 14:8-10), the miraculous raising of Paul after a stoning when his followers thought him dead (Acts 14:19-20), the failure of a viper's poisonous bite to kill Paul on Malta (Acts 28:1-6).

Luke wrote for everybody. His was a Gospel of universality, warning against the perils of wealth; reports the poor widow's offering of two mites and Simeon's prediction that Jesus will be a "light to the Gentiles" (Lk 2:32) and that repentance and remission of sins will be preached among all nations (Lk 24:47). His book of Acts highlights a jubilant and triumphant people. Early believers ate their meat with gladness (Acts 2:46-47). The lame man was healed, entering the temple, leaping and praising God (Acts 3:9). Philip's preaching in Samaria bringing great joy to the city (Acts 8:8). The newly converted and baptized Ethiopian who goes on his way rejoicing. Paul in prison, glorying in tribulation, rejoicing in sorrow, and singing praises at midnight in jail.

Yes, Luke authored all this but what is noted is that Dr should be an inspiration and a challenge to anyone of a scientific mind, for he combines the rare gifts of scientific training and evangelical passion, the care of the body and the care of the soul. His writing emphasises joy and this should not be surprising as one who wrote to share the good-news of Jesus and his work for all who would believe on his name, the name above all names, who came as Saviour and Lord.



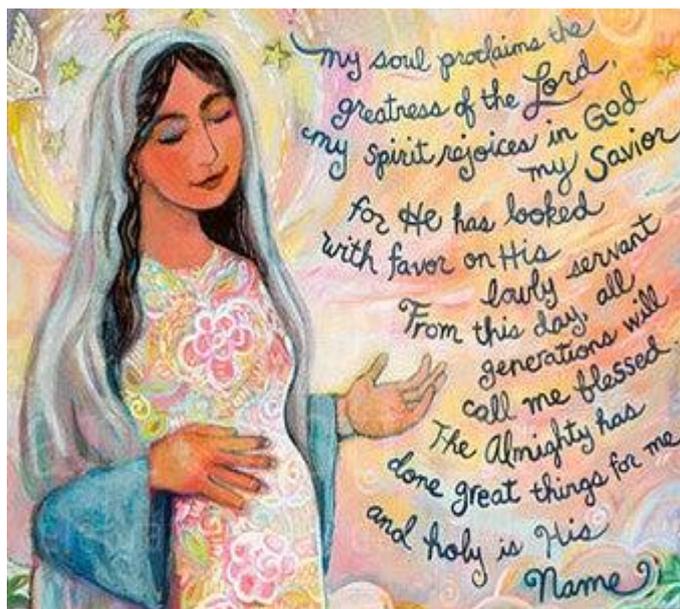
Luke as doctor and gospel writer has an appreciation of beauty which is evident but especially in the fact that he alone of the New Testament writers recorded the hymns, *Benedictus*, *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis*, hymns which have become part of the liturgy of the Church. One of those hymns the *Benedictus* we know as 'Tell out my soul' found in the **Church Hymnary 4** at **number 286**. The words we sing are written by Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926) and educated at Pembroke College and Ridley Hall, Cambridge. Dudley-Smith has served the Church of England since his ordination in 1950. The hymn is sung to the tune 'Woodlands'.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!  
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;  
tender to me the promise of his word;  
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his Name!  
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has  
done;  
his mercy sure, from age to age to same;  
his holy Name--the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!  
Powers and dominions lay their glory by.  
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to  
flight,  
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!  
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.  
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord  
to children's children and for evermore!



Join now with this prayer:

Gracious God, you are the healer. You are the One who makes bodies whole, who mends marriages, who binds up broken hearts. Though you often heal through various means – doctors, medicines, surgeries, loving friends, forgiveness – you are still the source of all health and healing. You are the One who defines wholeness and who gives it as a gift.

Loving God, I place into your care all our doctors, nurses and healthcare workers, for the technicians and the janitors, the aid workers and the caregivers. I pray, for the researchers and theorists, the epidemiologists and investigators, all in the health services, give them courage of heart and strength of mind and body. Keep them safe from harm. May they know the deep gratitude I bring for all they are doing to heal and help those affected by the coronavirus. God of all consolation may they know your protection and peace. Bless them in these challenging days and bless their families.

Jesus Christ, you travelled through towns and villages "curing every disease and illness." At your command, the sick were made well. Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the coronavirus, that we may experience your healing love. Heal those who are sick with the virus. May they regain their strength and health through quality medical care. Thank you for those who have recovered and may they daily become stronger again. I pray for those who are sick with other

illness, for all who are affected, those who have been in accidents and are injured. I pray for those in the train crash this week in Aberdeenshire; in Beirut and all around the world. I pray too for those who have died and their families as they grieve. Bring them comfort in their time of loss.

Lord I pray for our world with all the resources we have for there is enough for all. May we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked and house those without homes. May we walk with those who feel they are alone, and may we do all that we can to bring harmony and justice, equality and fairness to all who live in this world you have given to us.

Heal us from our fear, which prevents nations from working together and neighbours from helping one another. So I pray for all in authority and government in our land and around the world, that they would seek peace and healing among the nations, through wise and good governance. For those in local and community councils, I pray they would seek to serve the people of their communities, listening and sharing their concerns as they help to build a better community for all.

Lord, continue to heal me where I am broken. You see those places, Lord, even when I don't see them. Heal my fears, my sadness and make me the whole person You have created and saved me to be. Yet I know, Lord, that full healing doesn't come in this life. I look forward to the time when I shall stand before You completed, made perfect through Your grace. In the meanwhile, may I discover more of Your wholeness each day. Hear my pray Jesus in the words I bring that you taught saying;

Our Father ... Amen.

**The Blessing:**

May the love of the Lord Jesus draw you to himself;  
may the power of the Lord Jesus strengthen you in his service;  
may the joy of the Lord Jesus fill your soul;  
and may the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with you and  
abide with you always. Amen.