

CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL

Date:	18 October 2026
Service:	Eucharist, Luke the Evangelist
Preacher:	The Dean, The Very Revd Dr Edward Dowler

St Luke, whom we celebrate today, pursued what we might now call a portfolio career, bringing together several different callings. I would like us to reflect on three of them—evangelist, physician and historian—and on how each reveals something of the life to which Christ calls us.

First and foremost, Luke was an evangelist. That word ‘evangelist’ is made up of two Greek words: *eu* which simply means ‘good’ and ‘angel’, which originally means messenger. So an evangelist is the messenger, the bringer of good news. The writers of the four gospels, Matthew, Mark and John, with Luke himself, are often known as the four evangelists because they bring us the good news of Christ to us in their writings.

And in our gospel reading today, we hear about the task of evangelism as Luke himself describes it. He recounts Jesus sending out the seventy as evangelists, to spread the good news: ‘the harvest is plentiful’, he tells them, ‘but the labourers are few’.

When I was at university and thinking about being ordained, I went to seek advice from the Vicar of one of the city centre churches. He asked me why it was that I wanted to be ordained and I came up with some rather feeble and halting reasons because I wasn’t quite sure how to articulate a sense of the vocation I felt. In the end he got a bit frustrated with me and said, ‘you’ve got to believe that this is the best news in the world’.

It's the best news in the world that Luke and the other evangelists were burning to tell people: good news of God fulfilling his ancient promises; good news that the creator of all things has known and loved his people since the time of Adam, and now has come to be with us in Jesus his Son; good news of sins forgiven and new life restored; of the poor raised up and the humble lifted high; good news of a crucified lord who had risen from the dead, good news of God's coming Kingdom; good news that we meet the risen Lord Jesus in the Scriptures and the breaking of the bread. All this and more was the good news that was spread by the seventy whom Jesus sent out, and that Luke conveys in his gospel to all who have heard and read it, and that we ourselves are called to receive and share.

Secondly, Luke is described by St Paul in the letter to the Colossians as 'the beloved physician', indicating that he was a doctor. Today's first reading from Isaiah deliberately takes this up: 'strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees'. It's sometimes assumed that religious faith is simply about something that we might call our 'spiritual life', which exists on a high and exalted plane, separate from the rest of what we are and do, and that what's important about us is really our souls and not our bodies. The Greek philosopher Plotinus, not long after the time of Jesus, taught his followers that 'the body is to be fled by all'. As he saw it, our highest calling was to escape from the life of our bodies and move on to a more spiritual plane in which our bodies are no longer important. Indeed, Plotinus's disciple Porphyry is said to have burst into tears when his lunch was brought to him because he was so upset to be reminded that he had a body and had bodily needs.

St Luke the physician reminds us that Christianity is in fact a very bodily religion. The Scriptures teach us that God has created the physical world and continues to hold it in being; they teach us that Jesus came in a body: incarnate in human flesh from Mary; that he performed healings, strengthening weak hands and making firm feeble knees; that he rose from the dead in a body and he has made

us members of his body: the Church. At this and every Eucharist, we share in Christ's body and blood under the sacramental signs of bread and wine.

And the New Testament gives us hope for the future of our bodies: not, as Plotinus thought, that one day we're going to get away from them for ever, but that they will be transformed, renewed and resurrected.

Thirdly and finally, in addition to being an evangelist and a physician, Luke was a historian. He wrote more of the New Testament than any other writer, because he wrote both the gospel that bears his name, and also its sequel, the Acts of the Apostles. He addresses both books to a friend named Theophilus, whom he tells that his aim in writing them was to create an accurate historical record of Jesus's life, death and resurrection and what came afterwards in the earliest days of the Church; to provide what he calls 'an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us'.

History is important for Christians, just as it also is for Jews. For members of both faiths, God, although he is greater than anything we can ever comprehend, does not exist on some remote plane above and beyond us, but has involved himself in human history. Throughout the books of the Old Testament, we hear of God guiding and leading his people through their glorious but troubled history. And in the New Testament, Luke and the other evangelists tell us that in Jesus Christ, God has actually entered into that history; become a player within it so as to bring it back to where it should be.

And as Luke unfolds this history, it's as if he invites us to become part of the story that he's telling. A modern theologian called Stanley Hauerwas has said that we in the modern west have 'a story that we have no story'; in other words that we think of ourselves as disconnected both from past and future. To us perhaps then in particular, St Luke calls out: come and be part of this story of Jesus,

the Church and the Kingdom of God; come and take your own place within it.

Beloved and glorious St Luke: physician, evangelist and historian: may we indeed hear your call today.