

Luke: Jesus' Mission

Now that we have celebrated Pentecost and Trinity Sunday, we return to Luke's gospel, and begin to read it "continuously". This means that we read it in the right order, but only selected highlights.

Our readings this month take us through the central part of Jesus' Galilean ministry. The disciples have been called, and they are travelling with Jesus throughout the region. Our readings this month take place in Nain, Simon the Pharisee's house, Geresá and Samaria. Jesus' ministry is a roving one, and his disciples have been asked to leave home and security to join him.

For Luke, like the other gospel writers Jesus has come to bring the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Luke does not want us to be unclear as to what this means, and throughout the gospel gives us reminders. Before Jesus' birth we hear the Magnificat:

*He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,
... and lifted up the lowly; ...
and the rich he has sent empty away.* (Luke 1:46-55)

At Nazareth, Jesus preaches:

*He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...
Recovery of sight to the blind,
To let the oppressed go free.* (Luke 4:18-19)

In our section of the gospel (but not included in our readings) John the Baptist sends his disciples to Jesus:

"Are you the one who is to come?"

Jesus' answer to them, and to us is to look and listen:

*"Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind
receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed,
the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news
brought to them."* (Luke 7:18-23)

Our four readings this month show us the character of the Jesus who is doing all these things, and what it means to those who choose to follow him.

We begin (Luke 7:11-17) as Jesus and a large crowd arrive in Nain. Coming out of the town is a large procession, not with good news, but in the sadness of a funeral procession. This is not a funeral of someone who has died in old age, but a young man, a widow's only son. In that society, who is to care for the grieving mother? She is left totally alone. Jesus sees, and has *compassion*. The dead boy hears Jesus' command, and immediately sits up and begins to speak. Jesus:

gave him to his mother.

and the stunned crowd echo Zechariah's words in the Benedictus:

"God has looked favourably on his people."

Our second passage (Luke 7:36-8:3) sees Jesus "*the friend of tax collectors and sinners*", eating at the house of Simon the Pharisee. A woman who is a *sinner* comes to the table and anoints Jesus, washing his feet with her tears and using her hair to dry them. Simon, the righteous Pharisee is horrified, but Jesus answers with a parable and in answering Jesus' question, Simon sees his own position:

"Which of them will love him more?"

"I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the greater debt."

We now move on to Geresá (Luke 8:26-39), a gentile area, and in the healing of the Gerasene Demoniac we again see Jesus healing, but this time he is healing a gentile. God's love extends beyond the bounds of Israel, another shocking revelation for the Jews of the time.

Our final reading (Luke 9:51-end) shows us the beginning of the next section of Jesus' ministry and of the gospel:

He set his face to go to Jerusalem."

The end is now in sight. In Samaria Jesus is not welcomed and the disciples in newly found self-confidence suggest wholesale destruction.

*"Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from
heaven and consume them?"*

Such is not of the methods and ways of the Kingdom of God, and so we see the disciples roundly rebuked.

The ways of the kingdom are not of zapping opponents, but rather makes demands of those who follow:

*"No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit
for the kingdom of God."*