

St Luke's Day – Sunday 18th October 2020

18 th October S Luke	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	II Timothy 4 vv 5—15 p1197 Luke 10 vv 1-7 p1041
------------------------------------	--	--

ALMIGHTY God, who calledst Luke the Physician, whose praise is in the Gospel, to be an Evangelist, and Physician of the soul; May it please thee, that, by the wholesome medicines of the doctrine delivered by him, all the diseases of our souls may be healed; through the merits of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

It was Sunday 7th February 1988 (Sexagesima) when I put our organist off her Sunday dinner. The theme was *Christ the Healer* and I was talking in my sermon about my recent operation and treatment for an awkwardly broken shoulder. I had been in a motor accident in September 1986. Medway Hospital had decided that an operation was unnecessary because, as I was a clergyman, I didn't really need a functioning arm. The consultant said that, had I been a bricklayer, he would have operated. As it was, I was prescribed a course of physiotherapy, which did quite a lot of good, but still left me unable to use my right arm normally. When I got a bad back as well and starting moving like a deformed crab, my mother persuaded me that this was not good enough and I asked my GP for a referral to S Luke's Hospital for the Clergy. I didn't quite like asking for treatment which was not available to the general public, but I went ahead anyway and did so, wanting to get fully well if at all possible. I did not attend at S Luke's Hospital itself, but they arranged for me to see a consultant at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital. He quickly decided that an operation was necessary and I was booked in for October 1987. It was when I was recovering from the anaesthetic that southern England experienced the Great Storm which Michael Fish had said definitely would not be a hurricane and was nothing much to worry about. I didn't really know much about how serious it had been until I came home from hospital and saw the devastation. All I really knew at the time was that, when I complained about being offered salad for my dinner after hours of *nil by mouth*, I was told that I was lucky to get anything at all considering that the whole of southern England was without power.

What the brilliant orthopaedic surgeon did was to use pins to fix together the broken parts at the top of my right humerus in order to allow the bone to grow back together. Some time later, he called me in again and removed the pins. And here I am with two functioning arms.

It was a children's service that Sexagesima and I thought it would be good to bring some visual aids. I brought the pins themselves which had by this time been withdrawn. I also made a point of having shoulder of lamb for dinner the previous week so that I could save and dry the bones to show the congregation what a shoulder joint looks like. It was the visual aids which put our organist off her dinner.

Christ the Healer. I made the point that the healing of physical illnesses can happen in three ways. First of all, most things get better on their own. That is the way God has made us. Our bodies have an amazing capacity to self heal. The Dean of the Middlesex Hospital Medical School used to tell aspiring doctors to get their medicines in quickly if they wanted the credit for curing their patients' diseases because most things clear up on their own anyway. The second way in which we get well is with medical assistance – perhaps an operation or pills. By and large, as with the pins in my humerus, medical treatments augment the body's natural healing processes. My arm bone could grow back together naturally once it had been pinned in the right position. There is not much the doctors can do

for you if your body has completely given up. Antibiotics and antivirals supplement and enhance our immune systems. They cannot replace them. Dead bone can't be repaired. Digitalis like drugs strengthen the heartbeat, but there has to be a heartbeat to be strengthened.

If I am ill or if I know someone who is ill, I pray for recovery. Probably, in the vast majority of cases, Christ heals me or the someone else I am praying for either by using our bodies' natural God-given ability to heal themselves or else through medical intervention. This is as true of mental illness as it is of physical.

But then there is miracle, when God cures someone who is not expected to recover by natural means. Some people only think of divine healing in the sense of miracle. This is surely wrong. God can heal in any way He pleases and I am sure that He usually uses what we might regard as natural mechanisms. Our bodies heal themselves, maybe with the aid of sufficient sleep, healthy exercise, hygiene and a good diet. Doctors and other medical practitioners use their God-given talents, techniques, skills and resources to bring about a cure or at least to relieve distressing symptoms. These gifts are God-given and we should thank God for all the dedicated professionals who look after us when we are sick and for the many equally God-given treatments at their disposal. We pray for them in their work. In turn, medical professionals and scientists ought to recognise that all that they can do, they can only do because God has provided them with the means.

I do believe in miracles. I do believe that sometimes God heals us in ways which are unique to our particular case and which are inexplicable in terms of scientific medicine. I do not, however, want to draw a fixed line between natural and supernatural cures. Everything is of God. *Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.* It may be that what we think of today as miraculous will turn out to have a natural explanation which future students of medical science can explain and replicate. Or there really may be no explanation in a particular case in accordance with the laws of science. That is not the point. What is the point is that healing comes from God. It is what we pray for and it is what we give thanks for.

Healing of body, mind and spirit. All three are closely bound up together. The healing of the spirit very often is the healing of fractured relationships with God or with other people. In today's epistle, there are rifts in the friendships between Paul and some of his companions. That is very sad. It ought not to be so within a Christian community, but it is very hard to prevent entirely. There is good news, however. Previously Paul and Mark had fallen out because Mark had turned back on their first missionary journey. Now, not only are they reconciled, the rift healed, but Mark is a great help to Paul. Rifts in relationships can be restored whether between people or between people and God.

The Church is commissioned, as in today's Gospel, with Good News, to bring peace and health to the world, to proclaim the Kingdom of God, to prepare the way for Jesus. This is what Luke did as a doctor and an evangelist and it is our calling today.