



# Sunday Reflection

## 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 18 October 2020

**Pentecost 20**

# St Lukes Day

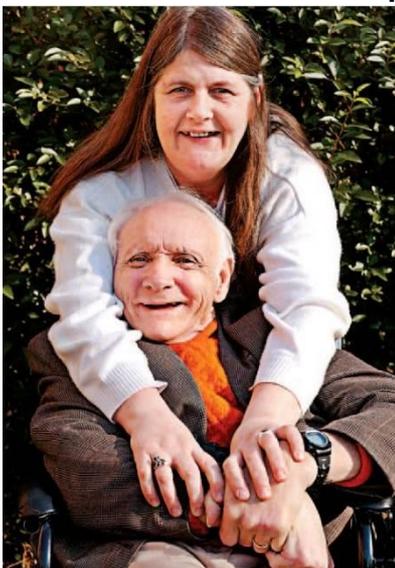
On this twentieth Sunday after Pentecost being St Lukes Day we celebrate the feast of the evangelist who wrote the gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles

## Reflection for this week's Gospel

**"... and say to them, the kingdom of God has come near to you." *Luke 10. 9b***

### An Illustration to set the scene

It was the best thing I've ever written, but the referees for the journal didn't think so. They sent it back saying it added nothing to the sum of human knowledge. A young researcher, I felt disheartened and put it away in a drawer.

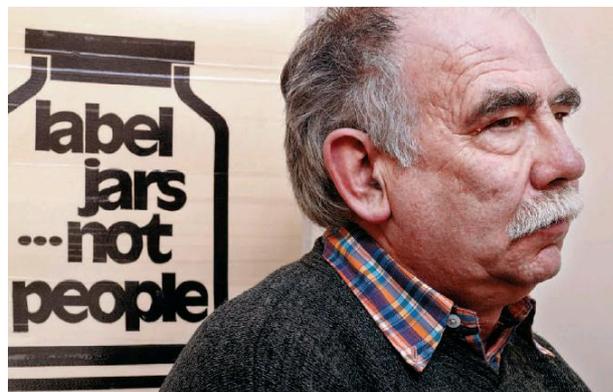


This isn't the advice you would give any new writer with their first rejection. You'd probably say, find the publisher most likely to be interested and try again.

But I guess you might know what it feels like to have what you have said, rejected. Some people decide to keep quiet, while others dust themselves off and keep going.

Keeping going against the odds was what some folks from the east of Scotland -who I

was privileged to know in my working life- always did. Jimmy McIntosh, James McNab and Fiona Wallace were lifelong campaigners for the rights of disabled people, and people with learning disabilities in particular.



Jimmy, who had cerebral palsy, was sent in 1956 to Gogarburn Hospital in Edinburgh where he remained for over 50 years. In 1982 with another patient of over 50 years, Alec Greenhill, and James McNab, a Fifer with a learning disability, they took a case to the Sheriff Court that was ultimately to change the law of Scotland. At that time people who were regarded as not having an address could not vote. After their application to vote had been rejected three times by the Lothian electoral registration officer they went to court and won that right for people living in long-term in institutions. Both Jimmy and James left the hospital to live in their own homes. Through the Lothian Rights Group James met Fiona Wallace, a young woman with learning difficulty who became one of the first directors of the self advocacy group, People First Scotland. Though a person of fragile health, she was a doughty campaigner for people's rights. Fiona was a champion of accessible information who always picked me up for using complicated words!

You won't find Jimmy, James or Fiona in the calendar of saints, though Jimmy did get an MBE for challenging discrimination. The quality of persistence, of not being put off by the voices who say you are wrong are characteristic of many of the remarkable individuals who have brought about transformations in society. And like those sent out in the Gospel they did not do it alone, but travelled together.



## Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

In today's Gospel Jesus, en route to Jerusalem sends out 70 (or 72) 'missionaries' to go ahead of him. With echoes of John the Baptist they are to go before the Lord and prepare his coming. He warns them that it will not be a picnic!

He gives them instructions on how to go about it. I counted four big points which, like all Jesus's teaching, are remarkable for the way they turn expectations on their head.

The first is to take nothing for the journey. The instructions say, go out and be vulnerable, take no provisions. Those on this dangerous mission are to be utterly dependant on the strength of the Father and Son in whose names they come and on the generosity of the people who will receive them.

The second is to turn up and offer peace to the first house you come to, before you know whether it is friendly or not. And if that peace is received, it will be effective and if not, you've lost nothing.

The third is to be a receiver, rather than a giver of hospitality. Graciously to accept whatever you are offered by way of food and drink and not to move on politely but to stay in the place of the guest for as long as you need to.

And finally, to do two things, to heal the sick and to proclaim that the Kingdom of God has come near.

St Luke, to whom we owe this insight into the early days of mission, and who we commemorate today, knew what it was to live the life of an itinerant missionary. In the book of Acts he describes the journeys of Paul whom he followed faithfully, Paul's only companion in his final imprisonment in Rome. St Luke is a towering influence on the way we have received our faith.

Without him, we would not know the Parable of the Good Samaritan or Mary's Magnificat. And the two great themes of his Gospel are that God's heart is with the poor and that the mission

of Jesus is to extend beyond the faithful Jews to the Gentiles and the whole world.

Jimmy, James and Fiona would have made great activists for the Kingdom in St Luke's book.

### **How can we reflect on the application to our lives?**

A recent study of the evangelical campaigns in Scotland in the 1950s and 60s under Tom Allan and Billy Graham concluded that, despite the thousands who made a commitment to offer their lives to Jesus, the impact was not sustained. The author attributes this to the failure to realise the plans for a strong network of lay leaders, ready to receive the new converts and mentor them as disciples. Lay people did not believe that they had the skills or the authority to be leaders in mission.

But today's Gospel seems clear - The Lord of the harvest calls for labourers in his vineyard. There's no getting away from it – you and me are 'het'! And, it's not a call to an easy life.

Yet there is much in today's Gospel to encourage us. The headline is: "It doesn't depend on us!" The way to stay on course is to accept that we have to let God call the shots, for he knows best where the harvest is likely to be brought in and God's is the strength that powers the mission. We may have feeble hearts and weak knees and not enough time or confidence. But we are only the advance party, not the main event. John the Baptist said he wasn't fit to bend down and untie Jesus's sandals. The good news from today's Gospel is that even when the missionaries are rejected, still the Kingdom of God comes near. So we shouldn't feel disheartened when we organise events in church and not many come or we talk to people about our faith and they don't seem interested. Let's do it anyway! It's the Holy Spirit, not us, who will move their souls when they are ready. But if we don't try to prepare the way, the Holy Spirit may not get in the door.

As I get to know you all better, I am finding out how many stories and different examples of service you have to share. Everyone here has something to tell, the way that faith has lit up your life, the people who have helped you know how to live. Our job is to behave as guests in the places we find ourselves and to offer others the peace of God that we have felt in our hearts. So, what story, what good news will you share? It will be enough. God and the Holy Spirit will do the rest.

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**“... and say to them, the kingdom of God has come near to you.” *Luke 10. 9b***

Please share your response to this reflection to [Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](mailto:Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk) – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God's spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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