Service of Healing and Wholeness

Sheffield Cathedral Sunday 18 October 2026 at 10.30

Readings Isaiah 35:3-5 and Luke 10:1-9

Sermon Revd Canon Mike Reeder

On 1st October 2026 St Luke's Hospice celebrated the 55th anniversary of it's opening

On the 1st of October 1971 Professor Wilkes (Professor of GP medicine at the Sheffield University) opened St Luke's with a band of handpicked paid staff, volunteers and 10 borrowed beds from the Northan General Hospital, because the beds he had ordered had not arrived.

St Luke's was the first Hospice to be built outside London, and was only the third Hospice to be built in the country, following St Joseph's in Hackney and the well-known St Christopher's in Sydenham, opened by Dame Cicily Saunders, a pioneer along with Professor Wilkes, of the modern day Hospice movement.

On the day of opening the Sheffield Star headline was: "Lose hope all ye who enter here". One of the earlier headlines in the Sheffield Star, had been: "Sheffield does not need a death house". All of this meant that when the Hospice was first opened it was known as 'St Luke's Nursing Home' in order not to use the word Hospice.

In our Gospel reading today we have seen something of a similar pattern: Jesus' ministry was making waves within society, he was challenging the status quo, his teaching was making people think.

The sending out the 72 was a natural progression of Jesus's ministry, but it was also making each and every one of the 72 vulnerable, pushing them into experiencing things that were seemingly impossible. Not least the instructions set out in verse 9 of our Gospel reading: " Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'"

I do not know about you, but as the Gospel reading was read by Genevieve, I was feeling something of the 72's vulnerability and fear, as we too are encouraged to seek to live out Jesus' call. A call to show those who we come into contact with something of the saving grace of the Gospel message of forgiveness of sin and the privilege of eternal life in a place that will be free from illness and all of the pressures of life that each and every one of us are expecting this very day.

This service is a precious gift to each and every one of us who is seeking to find forgiveness, healing, hope, and courage to live a life that is centred on Christ. For as we read in verse 2 Jesus said "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field".

Professor Wilkes spoke in an oral history interview in 1995 of an incident that changed his view of care for the sick and dying. Professor Wilkes had a cottage hospital in his area which he was the visiting GP for, and this was an account of an encounter he had:

> "I remember one very simple, but not stupid, man I admitted to the cottage hospital to die, because he hadn't long, the conversation was a 'How not to give bad news.' He obviously knew he was very ill and he wanted to share it with me, and I didn't feel I was ready to share it with him, so I hedged and I said, "We'll do our best and we'll see what happens", and all the meaningless palliative

phrases which attempt to conceal a doctor's embarrassment"

Professor Wilkes went on to say "…there was a look on his face which was not contempt, but which was fear, which I had not dealt with. I had dealt with it in words, but the non-verbal communication was a disaster. And I said to myself, Eric you must not go on like this because you may not get a second chance." And so I think it's very important to take your chance while you can then"

I had the privilege of getting to know Professor Wilkes in his retirement, on my appointment as Chaplain of St Lukes's in 2007 when he asked me to go out to see him in his home. He said "I cannot dismiss you, but I would like to get to know you". There followed some remarkable visits, and I was able to support Eric and his wife Jess in their own end of life care.

Professor Wilkes' encounter with the man in his cottage hospital helped him to see the care of people in three ways which makes a triangle of care.

One side is the medical interventions that the medics have at their disposal which address physical symptoms such as pain, low mood, nausea etc.

Another side is the need for good psychological care from a healthcare professional, and lastly but not least he saw that the spiritual care of each person was so important. Each person is spiritual but not everyone has a faith. A person's spirituality is what makes us unique. Professor Wilkes had placed at the centre of the Hospice, the Chapel, as place for all to find peace and quiet, a place to discover strength and courage.

If I was to ask you what is the first thing that comes into your mind when you hear the word Healing and Wholeness, I am

sure we go to physical healing straight away, to be made physically whole so we can going on living as we have always done. But in our Gospel reading we hear Jesus say in verse 5, "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.'"

One of the most surprising revelations to me over the years I have been at St Lukes, is how when a person experiences spiritual and/or psychological healing this gives a courage and a greater strength to cope with the physical side of their illness. It is the gift of peace of body, mind and spirit that makes the triangle of healing that is both psychological, spiritual and physical.

My belief in God has given me the strength I need to be strong, positive and to smile"

So, wrote Grenville a patient I had the privilege of journeying with on his journey of faith and discovery as his physical life was coming to an end

Grenville had a partner and a young son who had just started at Secretarial School. Grenville went on to write in the Book of Reflections that is placed in the Hospice Chapel

"I lost God for many years, or at least I thought I had, but now I realise that he was always by my side. There are good days and there are bad days, but with a positive smile on my face I get through them all. This is not a prayer, just a small reminder to all of you that being strong, positive and smiling will give you that inner strength you need when the chips are down and life is hard"

Grenville would be the first to say that he had lived life on the edge of society and that he was not proud of his actions which took him into some very dark places, it took his illness and the reality of his death to bring him inner peace and ultimate healing at the end of his life.

One of the privileges of being a Hospice chaplain is that I am with people who, faced with death look for meaning in what life has been, they also often look for meaning in what is to come.

Often it is unspoken or something that comes out in putting in place the practical things of life and death, putting funeral arrangements in place for example.

Sometimes it is a putting right the things that have caused offence to others or themselves.

Martin Luther, the 16th-century German monk and theologian said This life therefore is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness, not health, but healing."

And so, Jesus sent out the 72 in their vulnerability and encouraged them to trust in him. Though we have not read this today, it is later in Ch 10 that they came back with joy and through their experience are told by Jesus that their names were written in heaven.

Whatever has brought you here today, it is my prayer that you will find a welcome and healing that gives you hope and courage. As you physically hold your hands out to take bread and drink wine, or come up to ask for God's blessing, may you receive the gift of our Heavenly Father's healing, that is physical, psychological and/or spiritual, and may we all have the strength to leave each day in the hands of the one who knows us better than we know ourselves.

Amen