



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for Luke the Evangelist

(Book of Common Prayer)

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.

As in the case of most Saints' days, when the Reformers of the sixteenth century wanted to avoid any suggestion of praying for the aid of saints, a new English collect was substituted for the Latin collect for the day. This collect started life in 1549, but it was altered to its current form in 1662. Of the few changes involved, the most notable was the addition of "Evangelist" to Luke's description as a "Physician". The father of early church history, Eusebius (260-340) wrote a description of "Luke the Physician" which included the words *"in two books (he) left us examples of the medicine for souls"*. This phrase seems to be the ultimate source for the wording and the central idea of this collect.

The two books in question are the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, which together amount to a quarter of the New Testament. There is sufficient continuity of language, style and theological interest between the two books to confirm the likelihood that they have the same authorship. Was that author, however, "Luke the Physician"? As early as the second century the two books have been attributed to the 'fellow-worker' of Paul mentioned in Philemon 24 and to *"Luke, the beloved physician"* of whom Paul writes in Colossians 4:14. Whether or not this attribution is correct, it is striking how often medical terminology and the interest in healings occur in the two books. I think it is telling that the words *"Physician, heal thyself"* (Luke 4:23) and *"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick"* (Luke 5:31) do not appear in the other Gospels. Also telling is a comparison between Mark 5:25-29 and Luke 8:43-44. It is the story of the healing of a woman who had suffered from a flow of blood for twelve years. In Mark she *"had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse"* (5:26), whereas in Luke the criticism of physicians is toned down: she *"had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any"* (8:43).

It is, though, helpful to look beyond the question of authorship and the interest in healings in Luke and Acts to consider the work of the books as a whole.

Consider the distinctiveness of the Gospel of Luke in particular. Where would we be without the birth narratives of Jesus in the first two chapters? Apart from the wondrous nature of those chapters, they also set the scene for the special interest in the role of women throughout the Gospel. And where would we be without the great parables that appear in this Gospel and nowhere else? They include the parables of the Rich Fool, the Unjust Steward, the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Godless Judge and – the best-known ones - the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. These unique features of the Gospel of Luke remind us that Jesus imparted the Kingdom of Heaven not only through healing, but also through his preaching and teaching. The Apostles pick up and continue that healing, preaching and teaching in Acts. We need to tap into all the themes and revelations of these two books in order to benefit from their “wholesome medicines” whereby “all the diseases of our souls may be healed”.

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