



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

20-25 APRIL 2020

INTRODUCTION

This week's Bible passages are taken from the readings set for Morning Prayer each day. The Thoughts that follow are based on the verses in bold.

MONDAY - Colossians 1:1-14

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

² To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

³ In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel ⁶ that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. ⁷ This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow-servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, ⁸ and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. **¹¹ May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. ¹³ He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.**

Thought for the day

Today's reading is the start of a short letter of encouragement to the young church at Colossae. Paul's prayers for the church start with thanks (v3-6) and move on to wisdom, bearing fruit and knowledge (v9-10). Finally in today's passage he offers the hope of patient endurance, enabled by God's glorious power (v11) and guaranteed by Jesus' victory over sin on the cross (v14). The Easter message of light overcoming darkness (v12-13) never fades, even in the gloomiest of times, and Paul, who was no stranger to hardship, nevertheless always grounds his prayers in thanksgiving and in joy. This is a good model for us to follow in our own prayers.

TUESDAY - Colossians 1:15-29

¹⁵ Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶ for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

²¹ And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him— ²³ provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.

²⁴ I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. ²⁵ I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me.

Thought for the day

The idea of Jesus being the image of God (v15a) is so familiar that it has perhaps lost some of its power. But it means that everything we read or hear about Jesus in the Gospels and other NT books tells us also about what God is like. Many of us will find this an easier way of understanding God than any other. But Paul doesn't finish there - he goes on to place Jesus with God at creation (v15b-18), an idea picked up in the way John starts his Gospel (In the beginning was the Word ...), before reminding us that through Jesus' sacrifice of himself on the cross, we are all put right with God (v19). Please do find some time today to reflect on these truths, which are fundamental to our shared Christian faith.

WEDNESDAY - Colossians 2:1-15

¹ I want you to know how much I am struggling for you, and for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me face to face. ² I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴ I am saying this so that no one may deceive you with plausible arguments. ⁵ For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, and I rejoice to see your morale and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

⁶ As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. ¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh

in the circumcision of Christ; ¹² when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

Thought for the day

Another theme that runs through Paul's letters is the need for Christians to test out the prevailing culture against the truth of the Gospel. Specifically in verse 8 he suggests that we need to be aware of dark forces (elemental spirits of the universe) in the world around us. Such forces must be identified and confronted if we are to be true to Christ. Almost every day we see or hear examples of abuse of power in high places, injustice in allocation of the world's resources, lies and fake news, violence and oppression. These things are obviously wrong and it is not only Christians who would identify them as such. But there are many other issues where society seeks to diminish or ridicule Christian contributions to public debate (assisted dying, abortion, immigration among them). What are the areas in which you feel a Christian perspective needs to be more clearly articulated?

THURSDAY - St George's Day - Ephesians 6:10-20

¹⁰ Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹ Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ **Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵ As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**

¹⁸ Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

Thought for the day

This passage does little to support the traditional image of St George as a slayer of dragons and rescuer of damsels in distress. Indeed it has often been noted that God's armour as Paul describes it here is almost exclusively defensive - only the sword, the word of God, is a weapon of attack. It's worth running through the list and thinking about what the separate parts of the armour are for, and how we might use them effectively in our everyday lives: belt of truth; breastplate of righteousness; shoes of gospel proclamation; shield of faith; helmet of salvation; sword of the word of God.

FRIDAY - Colossians 3:12-4:1

¹² As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint

against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**

¹⁸ Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly. ²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart. ²² Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, ²⁴ since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. ²⁵ For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality. ^{4.1} Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

Thought for the day

On days when we are tempted to be gloomy, which perhaps happens more than usual at the moment, verses 16 and 17 are a wonderful tonic. Savour them, perhaps even learn them, and let them infuse your soul. They remind us of what it is to be part of Christ's church, even when we can't gather in one place. For we are bound together by God's word and wisdom in our hearts and lives. And all this is a cause for celebration (whether by actual singing or not!). Finally the climax is the idea that everything we do, even the most menial, apparently boring task, can be transformed if we do it in Jesus' name. George Herbert put it like this:

*Teach me my God and King,
In all things Thee to see,
And what I do in any thing
To do it as for Thee.*

SATURDAY - St Mark the Evangelist - Acts 12:25- 13:13

²⁵ Then after completing their mission Barnabas and Saul returned to Jerusalem and brought with them John, whose other name was Mark.

^{13.1} Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul. ² While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' ³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

⁴ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵ When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John also to assist them. ⁶ When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they met a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet, named Bar-Jesus. ⁷ He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and wanted to hear the word of God. ⁸ But the magician Elymas (for that is the translation of his name) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul away from the faith. ⁹ But Saul, also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰ and said, 'You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? ¹¹ And now listen—the hand of the Lord is against you, and you will be blind for a while, unable to see the sun.' Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he went about

groping for someone to lead him by the hand. ¹² When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was astonished at the teaching about the Lord.

¹³ Then Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. **John [Mark], however, left them and returned to Jerusalem.**

Thought for the day

Later in the Acts of the Apostles we read how Mark's action of deserting Paul and Barnabas was the cause of a complete rift between the two missionaries (Acts 15:36-41); they each went their own way, breaking up what until then had been a successful partnership. If this John Mark was the same Mark who wrote the Gospel that bears his name, and if the tradition that he relied heavily on Peter's testimony in writing it is accurate, then perhaps he needed to be separated from Paul and freed from his influence. Painful though it may be at the time, sometimes disagreements are necessary. Separation from former friends or colleagues may be part of God's plan. Often it's only with hindsight that we can put things that have happened to us or to members of our families into the right context. But we're in good company - it's not long ago that we were reminded of how Easter Day and what followed transformed the disciples' view of Good Friday.

JRE / 16.4.20