



## Parish of Finchampstead and California

# THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

18 - 23 MAY 2020

## INTRODUCTION

This week's Bible passages are taken from the NT readings set for Morning Prayer each day. We continue our progress through Luke's Gospel, with a diversion to Hebrews for Ascension Day on Thursday. Each day's thought is based mainly on the passages in bold type.

## MONDAY - Luke 6:27-38

Jesus continued speaking to his disciples, <sup>27</sup> 'I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. <sup>29</sup> If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. <sup>30</sup> Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. <sup>31</sup> Do to others as you would have them do to you.

<sup>32</sup> 'If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup> If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. <sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. <sup>36</sup> **Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.**

<sup>37</sup> '**Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; <sup>38</sup> give, and it will be given to you.** A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.'

## ***Thought for the day***

*There's a danger that we take Jesus' words about judgement and forgiveness simply as moral or ethical truths. To do that robs them of their power, for Jesus is talking about our relationship, not just with other people, but with God our Father. Verse 36 makes this clear, as does the use of the 'divine passive' in v37 and 38; eg 'You will not be judged by God'. These verses are thus an expansion of 'Forgive us our sins (trespasses) as we forgive those who sin (trespass) against us' in the Lord's Prayer. Next time you say those familiar words why not pause and reflect on our readiness to judge and condemn others, and our own need for God's forgiveness and mercy.*

## TUESDAY - Luke 6:39-49

<sup>39</sup> He also told them a parable: 'Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? <sup>40</sup> A disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher. <sup>41</sup> Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? <sup>42</sup> Or how can you say to your neighbour, "**Friend, let me take out**

**the speck in your eye”, when you yourself do not see the log in your own eye?** You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour’s eye.

<sup>43</sup> ‘No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; <sup>44</sup> for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. <sup>45</sup> The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

<sup>46</sup> ‘Why do you call me “Lord, Lord”, and do not do what I tell you? <sup>47</sup> I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. <sup>48</sup> That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. <sup>49</sup> But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house.’

### ***Thought for the day***

*It's clear that Jesus was happy to use exaggeration to make his point. The difficulty for those reading or hearing his words two thousand years later is to know when they are to be taken literally and when with a pinch of salt. Fortunately here it's very clear - there's almost a cartoon-like silliness in the idea of someone having a log in their eye. But the underlying point is a serious one, reiterating what we read yesterday about the propensity of most of us to see and magnify the faults of others while ignoring and minimising our own. What kind of self-discipline is needed to overcome this tendency?*

### **WEDNESDAY - Luke 7:1-10**

<sup>1</sup> After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. <sup>2</sup> A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. <sup>3</sup> When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. <sup>4</sup> When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, ‘He is worthy of having you do this for him, <sup>5</sup> for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us.’ <sup>6</sup> And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, ‘**Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; <sup>7</sup> therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed.**’ <sup>8</sup> For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, “Go”, and he goes, and to another, “Come”, and he comes, and to my slave, “Do this”, and the slave does it.’ <sup>9</sup> When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, ‘I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.’ <sup>10</sup> When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

### ***Thought for the day***

*The centurion's way of thinking seemed to strike Jesus like a breath of fresh air. This soldier understood how his military world worked and applied the same principles to the itinerant healer's ministry. Jesus had only to speak the word of command and the servant would be healed - no need for unnecessary flattery, unnecessary incantation, or unnecessary personal contact. And, once again, this insight is hit upon by an outsider, a foreigner. As Christians we are just as much insiders as were the Jews of Jesus' time. Do we have the centurion's confidence in Jesus' words of authority and healing? And who are today's outsiders and what should we learn from them?*

## **THURSDAY - ASCENSION DAY - Hebrews 7:23-28**

*Luke is the only evangelist to describe the Ascension of Jesus. He offers two variants in Luke 24:44-53 and Acts 1:1-11, both of which are used at the principal service of Holy Communion on Ascension Day. For Morning Prayer a complementary passage from Hebrews contrasts the qualities of Jesus as an exceptional High Priest with those of all other high priests.*

<sup>23</sup> The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; <sup>24</sup> but Jesus holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever. <sup>25</sup> Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. **<sup>26</sup> For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.** <sup>27</sup> Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself. <sup>28</sup> For the law appoints as high priests those who are subject to weakness, but the word of God's oath [*Psalm 110:4*], which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect for ever.

### ***Thought for the day***

*High Priests, the most important and powerful of all in the Temple hierarchy, remained merely human, subject to human imperfection and needing to confess and seek forgiveness for their own sins as well as those of the people. But Jesus was different in all respects - he shared God's prime characteristic of holiness and was free from all taint of sin; in other words he was perfect (v28). And so, as we remember on every Ascension Day, he was and is exalted above the heavens, 'seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty' (8:1). This is imagery which is explored further in the book of Revelation with Jesus described as the Lamb (see for example chapters 4&5, 19, 21). All these pictures and descriptions are attempts to give expression to the extraordinary love and honour shared by God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son. We may have questions about where heaven 'is', but we should have no concern about the glory we shall discover when we arrive there.*

*See also this week's Hymn for the Week (separate attachment).*

## **FRIDAY - Luke 7:11-17**

<sup>11</sup> Soon afterwards Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. <sup>12</sup> As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. <sup>13</sup> When the Lord saw her, **he had compassion for her** and said to her, 'Do not weep.' <sup>14</sup> Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, 'Young man, I say to you, rise!' <sup>15</sup> The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. <sup>16</sup> Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, 'A great prophet has risen among us!' and 'God has looked favourably on his people!' <sup>17</sup> This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.

### ***Thought for the day***

*Luke alone reports this incident and it makes an interesting pairing with the healing of the centurion's servant that precedes it (see Wednesday's reading). There the centurion's faith was commended by Jesus as exemplary. Here faith is not mentioned at all - Jesus' own compassion was all that was needed to work this remarkable miracle. He makes no bargain with the grieving mother, no preconditions or follow-up requirements. He simply did what his compassion made him do. This is almost beyond our ability to comprehend. It is Jesus showing precisely what God's grace is - not something we can strive for, or deserve, let*

alone earn. But instead it is pure gift, derived from a heart of absolute compassion. Thanks be to God for offering us through Jesus such unmerited generosity.

## **SATURDAY - Luke 7:18-35**

<sup>18</sup> The disciples of John reported all these things to him. So John summoned two of his disciples <sup>19</sup> and sent them to the Lord to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' <sup>20</sup> When the men had come to him, they said, 'John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"' <sup>21</sup> Jesus had just then cured many people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, and had given sight to many who were blind. <sup>22</sup> And he answered them, 'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. <sup>23</sup> And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.'

<sup>24</sup> When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? <sup>25</sup> What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who put on fine clothing and live in luxury are in royal palaces. <sup>26</sup> **What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>27</sup> This is the one about whom it is written, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."**

<sup>28</sup> I tell you, among those born of women no one is greater than John; yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.' <sup>29</sup> (And all the people who heard this, including the tax-collectors, acknowledged the justice of God, because they had been baptized with John's baptism. <sup>30</sup> But by refusing to be baptized by him, the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves.)

<sup>31</sup> 'To what then will I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like?

<sup>32</sup> They are like children sitting in the market-place and calling to one another, "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not weep."

<sup>33</sup> For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, "He has a demon"; <sup>34</sup> the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" <sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, wisdom is vindicated by all her children.'

### ***Thought for the day***

*At this point in Luke's Gospel there is a change of gear with the re-introduction of John the Baptist. Unlike the account of the relationship between Jesus and John in John's Gospel, which tends to underplay the Baptist's importance, Luke reports Jesus commending John and his role: that's why he spent so much time drawing the parallels between the cousins even before their births. Now Jesus reminds the crowd that they had flocked to John as to the OT prophets, and that he was more important than they because he pointed directly to Jesus himself in his own time. (When the OT prophets prophesied about Jesus, it was always in the future.) John set the scene for Jesus; he called for repentance but left the preaching about God's kingdom to Jesus. In the same way, none of us can force others to believe in or follow Jesus; what we can do, by our lives and actions, is to set the scene for Jesus to take root in their hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit.*