



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

25 - 30 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 each day's thought being based mainly on the passages in bold type.

MONDAY - Luke 7:36-50

³⁶ One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. ³⁷ And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. ³⁸ She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner.' ⁴⁰ Jesus spoke up and said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' 'Teacher,' he replied, 'speak.' ⁴¹ 'A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they could not pay, he cancelled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?' ⁴³ Simon answered, 'I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the greater debt.' And Jesus said to him, 'You have judged rightly.' ⁴⁴ Then turning towards the woman, he said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.' ⁴⁸ **Then he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.'** ⁴⁹ **But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?'** ⁵⁰ **And he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'**

Thought for the day

Scholars debate whether this incident in Luke is his version of the anointing accounts placed in the other three Gospels in Jesus' final week before his arrest and crucifixion (see Mark 14:3-9; Matthew 26:6-13; John 12:1-8). But the emphasis here in Luke is not on the anointing itself but on the character of the un-named woman and the comparison between her love and the insulting attitude to his guest of the apparently upright host. Jesus discerns what is in both their hearts as he tells the brief parable in v41-43 against the Pharisee. Moreover he interprets the woman's action as acknowledgement of her sin and, without seeking anything further from her, forgives her completely. Looking into our hearts, does Jesus see our recognition of our need for forgiveness, or the self-satisfaction of our own good lives?

TUESDAY - Luke 8:1-15

¹ Soon afterwards Jesus went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, ² **as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, ³ and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.**

⁴ When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: ⁵ 'A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. ⁶ Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. ⁷ Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. ⁸ Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold.' As he said this, he called out, 'Let anyone with ears to hear listen!'

⁹ Then his disciples asked him what this parable meant. ¹⁰ He said, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but to others I speak in parables, so that "looking they may not perceive, and listening they may not understand."

¹¹ 'Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. ¹² The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. ¹³ The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. ¹⁴ As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. ¹⁵ But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.'

Thought for the day

The short preface in v1-3 to the familiar parable of the sower and Jesus' interpretation of it is unique to Luke. We hear of the importance of three named women 'and many others' to Jesus' itinerant ministry, not simply in accompanying Jesus and the male disciples, but by funding them. We probably see nothing out of the ordinary in this. But in Jesus' time this involvement of women in such ways would have been surprising, if not shocking. We'll see the same emphasis later on when Jesus praises Martha's sister Mary for neglecting her role in the kitchen to join the men in listening to Jesus' teaching (Luke 10:38-42). In spite of the church's almost exclusively male leadership for most of its 2000 year history, it has often been the faithfulness of women which has carried it forward; perhaps it is such women that Jesus has in mind when he talks about 'bearing fruit with patient endurance' (v15).

WEDNESDAY - Luke 8:16-25

Jesus continued, ¹⁶ 'No one after lighting a lamp hides it under a jar, or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a lampstand, so that those who enter may see the light. ¹⁷ For nothing is hidden that will not be disclosed, nor is anything secret that will not become known and come to light. ¹⁸ Then pay attention to how you listen; for to those who have, more will be given; and from those who do not have, even what they seem to have will be taken away.'

¹⁹ Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. ²⁰ And he was told, 'Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.' ²¹ But he said to them, 'My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.'

²² One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side of the lake.' So they put out, ²³ and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A

gale swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. ²⁴ They went to him and woke him up, shouting, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. ²⁵ **He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?'**

Thought for the day

Jesus' question to the first disciples, 'Where is your faith?' is as relevant to us as it was to them. For some of us we will know that we deserve the implied rebuke, just as they did. It is still possible for us to recognise the hand of God in all that Jesus was and is (which is what the disciples' correspondingly rhetorical question means), but not to act on it. But if Christians don't bring the light of the Gospel (v16) to a world still so full of darkness, who will? Apart from its overwhelming scale, the virulence of the coronavirus and its effect on our world is not that different from an unexpected and potentially catastrophic storm on a small boat on the sea of Galilee. So Jesus' question has more relevance to us than we might be comfortable with.

THURSDAY - Luke 8:26-39

²⁶ Then Jesus and the disciples arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷ As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. ²⁸ When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me'— ²⁹ for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) ³⁰ Jesus then asked him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Legion'; for many demons had entered him. ³¹ They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

³² Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. ³³ Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

³⁴ When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵ Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. ³⁶ Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. ³⁷ **Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned.** ³⁸ The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹ 'Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.' So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

Thought for the day

We think of Jesus as a healer and a man of peace, constantly trying to align people with God's will. But across the Sea of Galilee he was a foreigner, someone who had the power to bring a madman back to his senses, but at the cost of a valuable farming asset. No wonder there was concern over what he might do next. And so this fear of the unknown prevailed in their minds over any potential for good. Many of us have an almost instinctive fear of change which often over-rides a rational assessment of the balance of benefits that change often heralds. As we approach Pentecost, we might consider how former generations of

Christians, and indeed we ourselves, would have heard the good news about Jesus if age after age had not accepted the way the Gospel changes those who embrace it.

FRIDAY - Luke 8:40-56

⁴⁰ Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him.

⁴¹ Just then there came a man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. He fell at Jesus' feet and begged him to come to his house, ⁴² for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, who was dying.

As he went, the crowds pressed in on him. ⁴³ Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years; and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her. ⁴⁴ She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her haemorrhage stopped. ⁴⁵ Then Jesus asked, 'Who touched me?' When all denied it, Peter said, 'Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you.'

⁴⁶ But Jesus said, 'Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me.'

⁴⁷ **When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed.** ⁴⁸ **He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.'**

⁴⁹ While he was still speaking, someone came from the leader's house to say, 'Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the teacher any longer.' ⁵⁰ When Jesus heard this, he replied, 'Do not fear. Only believe, and she will be saved.' ⁵¹ When he came to the house, he did not allow anyone to enter with him, except Peter, John, and James, and the child's father and mother. ⁵² They were all weeping and wailing for her; but he said, 'Do not weep; for she is not dead but sleeping.'

⁵³ And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. ⁵⁴ But he took her by the hand and called out, 'Child, get up.' ⁵⁵ Her spirit returned, and she got up at once. Then he directed them to give her something to eat. ⁵⁶ Her parents were astounded; but he ordered them to tell no one what had happened.

Thought for the day

This account of another un-named woman's healing, sandwiched between the beginning and end of the raising of the important (and named) official's child, is one of the most touching of the stories from Jesus' ministry. And at the heart of this touching story is the actual touch - that brave, desperate act of someone with no other hope, implicitly her last roll of the dice. It worked. But the moment of healing immediately brought public identification, surely to be followed by public humiliation, possibly by the withdrawal of the cure - all her hopes for healing dashed. But Jesus is concerned not just about her physical condition, but about her as a person no longer defined by illness. Her faith and his power combined to give her what she needed. Now she can leave, not in humiliation but in peace. What are the things we could banish from our lives if we had enough courage to touch the fringe of Jesus' clothes and risk the consequences?

SATURDAY - Luke 9:1-17

¹ Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, ² **and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.** ³ He said to them, 'Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. ⁴ Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. ⁵ Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.' ⁶ They departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere.

⁷ Now Herod the ruler heard about all that had taken place, and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, ⁸ by some that Elijah had

appeared, and by others that one of the ancient prophets had arisen. ⁹ Herod said, 'John I beheaded; but who is this about whom I hear such things?' And he tried to see him.

¹⁰ On their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida. ¹¹ When the crowds found out about it, they followed him; and he welcomed them, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed to be cured.

¹² The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, 'Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place.' ¹³ But he said to them, 'You give them something to eat.' They said, 'We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.' ¹⁴ For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, 'Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each.' ¹⁵ They did so and made them all sit down. ¹⁶ And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. ¹⁷ And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

Thought for the day

In a way this sending out by Jesus to proclaim and heal (v1-6 and 10) was on-the-job training for the twelve disciples, preparing them for the time when he would no longer be with them. In fact this training was only put fully into practice once the Holy Spirit arrived on the day of Pentecost, which we celebrate tomorrow. Today could be a good day to look back on our own lives and reflect on the ways in which God has prepared us for things we might never have anticipated; and what he might have in mind for us in the future.