



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

4 - 9 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 based mainly on the verses in bold type.

MONDAY - Luke 2:41-52

⁴¹ Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. ⁴³ When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. ⁴⁴ Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' ⁴⁹ **He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'** ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he said to them. ⁵¹ Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

Thought for the day

Most parents will have experienced that feeling of panic when a child has vanished from where they thought s/he was; similarly the feeling of relief when the child is discovered. Rarely will parents be offered the explanation that Jesus gave here. For all practical purposes Joseph was his father, so when he referred to his father's house, no wonder his anxious parents were confused, in spite of all that had gone before. Sometimes children of any age really are lost to their parents, perhaps through disagreement or by drifting apart. At this time of crisis when family relationships have assumed greater significance for most people, please pray for those whose broken relationships bring sadness and hurt.

TUESDAY - Luke 3:1-14

¹ In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ² during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴ as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

'The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

"Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.

⁵ Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;

⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

⁷ John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our ancestor"; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ⁹ Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.'

¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, 'What then should we do?' ¹¹ In reply he said to them, 'Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.' ¹² Even tax-collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, 'Teacher, what should we do?' ¹³ He said to them, 'Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.' ¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what should we do?' He said to them, 'Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.'

Thought for the day

In Luke's account, John is a firebrand, certainly not winning his hearers over by flattery ('You brood of vipers'). But he goes on, not with a general call to repentance, but with practical suggestions for faithful living. And the question of 'What then should we do?' must have occurred to most of us during this pandemic. Many people have responded by offering their services, professionally or voluntarily, their time, their skills and their energy, and giving a new spin to heroism. Others have given generously to charities. Yet others, especially those in isolation, find a real difficulty in not being able to respond in such ways. But one thing that every Christian can do is to pray for other people - family, friends, neighbours, the bereaved, and all the newly emerged heroes.

WEDNESDAY - Luke 3:15-22

¹⁵ As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶ John answered all of them by saying, 'I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'

¹⁸ So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. ¹⁹ But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰ added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

Thought for the day

Luke reduced the account of Jesus' baptism by John to its absolute essentials. But, as elsewhere in his Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles, he was at pains to emphasise the physicality of what happened at a moment of spiritual intensity. This is particularly

noticeable, as here, in relation to the effect of the Holy Spirit. This power of the Holy Spirit is what lies at the heart of charismatic forms of Christianity. Anglicans often tend to prefer the spiritual to the physical. Are we right to do so?

THURSDAY - Luke 4:1-12

¹ Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³ **The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.'** ⁴ **Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone."'**

⁵ Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.

⁶ And the devil said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.'⁸ Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

⁹ Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you", ¹¹ and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" ¹² Jesus answered him, 'It is said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Thought for the day

Of the three tests concocted by the devil, the exchange about bread is the one that is the most directly related to Jesus' wilderness experience; Luke tells us 'he was famished'. Even those of us who have never experienced serious hunger can probably imagine what it would be like: uncomfortable, debilitating, dominating our thoughts. Later on Jesus taught his disciples to pray 'Give us today our daily bread' - having food is a fundamental aspect of living life to the full. Jesus, fortified by his knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures, refused to work for his own short-term such a simple, such a harmless miracle. Do we resist the things that tempt us, or are we like Oscar Wilde who said, 'I can resist anything - except temptation'?

FRIDAY - Luke 4:14-30

¹⁴ Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. **The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.** ²¹ **Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'** ²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?' ²³ He said to them, 'Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Doctor, cure yourself!" And

you will say, "Do here also in your home town the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum." 24 And he said, 'Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's home town. 25 But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; 26 yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. 27 There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.' 28 When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. 29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. 30 But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Thought for the day

Throughout the Gospels we hear of Jesus 'teaching with authority'. And to begin with the men in the synagogue, because they think they know all there is to know about Jesus, the carpenter's son, wonder where his eloquence comes from. But when he starts pointing to scripture passages that privilege foreigners over them and their ancestors, they grow angry. What are the messages from scripture or from Jesus' own teaching that we find difficult to hear and accept?

SATURDAY - Luke 4:31-37

31 Jesus went down to Capernaum, a city in Galilee, and was teaching them on the sabbath. 32 They were astounded at his teaching, because he spoke with authority. 33 In the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, 34 **'Let us alone! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.'** 35 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!' When the demon had thrown him down before them, he came out of him without having done him any harm. 36 They were all amazed and kept saying to one another, 'What kind of utterance is this? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and out they come!' 37 And a report about him began to reach every place in the region.

Thought for the day

Scholars have spent much time and energy trying to explain how it was that Jesus was recognised for who he really was, not by those he came to teach, but by those aspects of evil, often described as 'demons', that he was so willing to confront and overcome. But maybe the reality is that we learn as much, if not more, from bad things as from good. We are certainly learning (or re-learning) a lot about looking after the vulnerable, about society's priorities, about working together and about self-sacrifice from this malignant virus. When things return to normal, whenever and whatever that turns out to be, we need to hold on to and act on what we have learnt.