



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

29 JUNE - 5 JULY 2020

INTRODUCTION

The NT readings for Morning Prayer continue their progress through Luke's Gospel; each day's thought is based mainly on the parts of the readings in bold type.

MONDAY - Luke 15:1-9

¹ All the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.' ³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ 'Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵ When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost." ⁷ **Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.**

⁸ 'Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost." ¹⁰ **Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'**

Thought for the day

These parables of the lost sheep and lost coin are much more straightforward than many others that Jesus told. He uses them as illustrations of why he associates with those who appear to be the riff-raff of society - their turning to God in repentance is such a huge change that it's worth sacrificing a few social conventions for. If the angels are happy with just one repentant sinner, everyone should be. (It's surprising that Jesus implies that the Pharisees and scribes, of whom he is generally so critical, are the righteous who need no repentance (v7): for this once he seems to take them at their own estimation.)

TUESDAY - Luke 15:10-32

¹¹ Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. ¹³ A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴ When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶ He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to

spare, but here I am dying of hunger. ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" ²⁰ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." ²² But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷ He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." ²⁸ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him." ³¹ **Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."**

Thought for the day

Unlike yesterday's shorter parables, the Prodigal Son is much more complex. But at its heart is the same theme - the recovery of the lost. The father is so keen to see his son that he runs out to meet him in a most undignified way. Everything is forgiven, everything is set for the great banquet of rejoicing. Only the older brother casts a shadow over things, and his father speaks tenderly to him too, assuring him that the delight in his brother's return displaces none of his love for him, the one who is always with his father (v31). This is a hard lesson, especially for the good and reliable, but God's grace is for all.

WEDNESDAY - Luke 16:1-18

¹ Then Jesus said to the disciples, 'There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. ² So he summoned him and said to him, "What is this that I hear about you? Give me an account of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer." ³ Then the manager said to himself, "What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴ I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes." ⁵ So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, "How much do you owe my master?" ⁶ He answered, "A hundred jugs of olive oil." He said to him, "Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty." ⁷ Then he asked another, "And how much do you owe?" He replied, "A hundred containers of wheat." He said to him, "Take your bill and make it eighty." ⁸ And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. ⁹ And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.

¹⁰ 'Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. ¹¹ If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? ¹³ No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.'

¹⁴ The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they ridiculed him. ¹⁵ So he said to them, 'You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of others; but God knows your hearts; for what is prized by human beings is an abomination in the sight of God.

¹⁶ 'The law and the prophets were in effect until John came; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and everyone tries to enter it by force. ¹⁷ But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one stroke of a letter in the law to be dropped.

¹⁸ 'Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and whoever marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.

Thought for the day

Unlike this week's other parables, the Shrewd Manager is a difficult one fully to make sense of. But Jesus' comment in v10 is unequivocal and many of us would instinctively agree with it. Honesty is not only about money, though money (often along with power) is perhaps the best example of a temptation by which basically honest people are most easily corrupted. No wonder Jesus' final saying about God and wealth (v13) is true and yet shocking. It's a hard lesson for many of us.

THURSDAY - Luke 16:19-31

Jesus continued ¹⁹ 'There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.' ²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶ Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' ²⁷ He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹ **Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them."** ³⁰ **He said, "No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent."** ³¹ **He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."**

Thought for the day

This is another parable only reported by Luke. Its pictorial representation of the contrast between heaven and hell is intentionally stark, as is the comparison between the fortunes of the two characters in life and in death. This is a deeply Jewish story with the emphasis on the heavenly role of Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, and the rich man's concern for his family. In the final verses, Jesus points out that, even if someone returned from the dead (as he was to do), people would still find reasons not to be convinced and not to turn to God. By the time Luke wrote his Gospel that was the case for the majority of the Jewish people. Sadly it remains so today.

FRIDAY - Luke 17:1-10

¹ Jesus said to his disciples, 'Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come. ² It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around

your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble. ³ Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. ⁴ And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, "I repent", you must forgive.'

⁵ The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!' ⁶ The Lord replied, 'If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea", and it would obey you.'

⁷ **'Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from ploughing or tending sheep in the field, "Come here at once and take your place at the table"'?** ⁸ **Would you not rather say to him, "Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink"'?** ⁹ **Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded?** ¹⁰ **So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, "We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done."'**

Thought for the day

Jesus is not commending slavery but he is speaking out of a culture in which slavery was a norm and unquestioned. Everyone knew what a slave was, what was owed by slave to master (everything) and what was owed by master to slave (nothing). We may not like the language or imagery of what Jesus says, nor may we like the thrust of his response to the disciples' request to increase their faith (v5): they should do what they are called to do, not for hope of reward, but because the calling to follow Jesus puts them, and us, in a position of utter subordination to God. What might we learn from thinking in this way, which may be counter-intuitive, indeed offensive, to us?

SATURDAY - Luke 17:11-19

¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³ they called out, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.' ¹⁴ When he saw them, he said to them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶ He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ **Then Jesus asked, 'Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?'** ¹⁸ **Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?'** ¹⁹ **Then he said to him, 'Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.'**

Thought for the day

Notice that while the returning former leper did two things (praising God, thanking Jesus), Jesus does not commend him for his politeness to himself, but because he gives glory to God. Similarly he criticises the other nine (who as Jews might have been expected to know better) for their failure to do that. Before we join in the condemnation of the nine, perhaps we should ask ourselves how apt we are to thank God and praise him when things go well for us.