



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

17 - 22 AUGUST 2020

INTRODUCTION

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

MONDAY - Acts 3:11-26

¹¹ While the man who had been healed clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's Portico, utterly astonished. ¹² When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, 'You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, ¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶ **And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.**

¹⁷ 'And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, ²⁰ so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus, ²¹ who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets. ²² Moses said, "The Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me. You must listen to whatever he tells you. ²³ And it will be that everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted out from the people." ²⁴ And all the prophets, as many as have spoken, from Samuel and those after him, also predicted these days. ²⁵ You are the descendants of the prophets and of the covenant that God gave to your ancestors, saying to Abraham, "And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed." ²⁶ When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you, to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.'

Thought for the day

We probably don't think much about our own names even though they represent part of our unique identity. But if someone steals our name or our identity we realise how vulnerable we are. Throughout the Bible names are important and in today's passage there are two people whose names were changed - Peter (Simon) and Abraham (Abram). Peter himself draws attention to the importance of a name and, in the case of Jesus, its power (v16) - 'At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow' (Philippians 2:10). And, when we pray in the name of Jesus, we also are calling on that same power.

TUESDAY - Acts 4:1-12

¹ While Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came to them, ² much annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead. ³ So they arrested them and put them in custody

until the next day, for it was already evening. ⁴ But many of those who heard the word believed; and they numbered about five thousand.

⁵ The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, ⁶ with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷ When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, 'By what power or by what name did you do this?' ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. ¹¹ **This Jesus is "the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone."** ¹² **There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.'**

Thought for the day

Once again, as yesterday, Peter emphasises that the name of Jesus (which means 'God saves') is the only key by which human beings are restored to their destiny with God (v12). But he also uses the picture of the rejected building block becoming the whole building's critical component part (v11). The quote is from Psalm 118:22 which continues 'the Lord has done this and it is marvellous in our eyes'. It's a simple image, but one which conveys a profound truth about faith in God relying on the strength and durability of Jesus.

WEDNESDAY - Acts 4:13-31

¹³ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized them as companions of Jesus. ¹⁴ When they saw the man who had been cured standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. ¹⁵ So they ordered them to leave the council while they discussed the matter with one another. ¹⁶ They said, 'What will we do with them? For it is obvious to all who live in Jerusalem that a notable sign has been done through them; we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But to keep it from spreading further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.' ¹⁸ So they called them and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered them, 'Whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; ²⁰ for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard.' ²¹ After threatening them again, they let them go, finding no way to punish them because of the people, for all of them praised God for what had happened. ²² For the man on whom this sign of healing had been performed was more than forty years old.

²³ After they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ When they heard it, they raised their voices together to God and said, 'Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and everything in them, ²⁵ it is you who said by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant: "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? ²⁶ The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers have gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah."

²⁷ For in this city, in fact, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. ²⁹ And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰ while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.' ³¹ **When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.**

Thought for the day

The religious authorities are unsettled but speechless (v14) and impotent (v16&21). So Peter and John were released to praise God with their friends (v24). After they had prayed together they were anointed again with the Holy Spirit in the same way as at Pentecost (v31). So Pentecost was not a once-and-for-all event, as we'll be reminded several more times in Acts. Nor was it restricted to the first disciples. All Christians have access to the power of the Holy Spirit. Often what's missing

is our own expectation, and our recognition of the working of the Spirit in our lives. Watch then, and pray.

THURSDAY - Acts 4:32-5:11

4.³² Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. ³³ With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. ³⁵ They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. ³⁶ There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement'). ³⁷ He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

5.¹ But a man named Ananias, with the consent of his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property; ² with his wife's knowledge, he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet. ³ **'Ananias, Peter asked, 'why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You did not lie to us but to God.'** ⁵ Now when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard of it. ⁶ The young men came and wrapped up his body, then carried him out and buried him.

⁷ After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ Peter said to her, 'Tell me whether you and your husband sold the land for such and such a price.' And she said, 'Yes, that was the price.' ⁹ Then Peter said to her, 'How is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.' ¹⁰ Immediately she fell down at his feet and died. When the young men came in they found her dead, so they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ And great fear seized the whole church and all who heard of these things.

Thought for the day

Most people probably don't think of lying as a great sin, though they might well say they think it wrong. But in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus stresses that Christians have no need to swear oaths because they must be known to be honest (Matthew 5:37). And in this cautionary tale Peter explains to husband and wife that their lie not only was unnecessary, since they were completely free to do whatever they wished with their property (v4), but was a lie before God (v5). No wonder everyone was afraid when they were struck down (v11).

FRIDAY - Acts 5:12-26

¹² Now many signs and wonders were done among the people through the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. ¹³ None of the rest dared to join them, but the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴ **Yet more than ever believers were added to the Lord, great numbers of both men and women, ¹⁵ so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on cots and mats, in order that Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he came by.** ¹⁶ A great number of people would also gather from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all cured.

¹⁷ Then the high priest took action; he and all who were with him (that is, the sect of the Sadducees), being filled with jealousy, ¹⁸ arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. ¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, brought them out, and said, ²⁰ 'Go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life.' ²¹ When they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and went on with their teaching.

When the high priest and those with him arrived, they called together the council and the whole body of the elders of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. ²² But when the temple police went there, they did not find them in the prison; so they returned and reported, ²³ 'We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them, we

found no one inside.’²⁴ Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were perplexed about them, wondering what might be going on.²⁵ Then someone arrived and announced, ‘Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.’²⁶ Then the captain went with the temple police and brought them, but without violence, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

Thought for the day

In Wednesday's reading the authorities were perplexed. They must have decided to act and arrested 'the apostles' (some of them? all of them?) apparently 'out of jealousy' (v17-18). But the apostles were miraculously released, recalling the angel at Jesus' tomb, before being taken into custody again (v26). The high priest's action and jealousy seems to have arisen from the fact that the apostles were not only healing people, but were getting a reputation for doing so, and people were joining them (v14-15). The crime of the followers of Jesus seems to be their unconcern for the status quo, just as his had been. Are we like that, or are we careful to avoid making a fuss about things we know to be wrong?

SATURDAY - Acts 5:27-42

²⁷ When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them,²⁸ saying, ‘We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man’s blood on us.’²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than any human authority.’³⁰ The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree.³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour, so that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.³² And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.’

³³ When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.³⁴ But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, respected by all the people, stood up and ordered the men to be put outside for a short time.³⁵ Then he said to them, ‘Fellow-Israelites, consider carefully what you propose to do to these men.’³⁶ For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and disappeared.³⁷ After him Judas the Galilean rose up at the time of the census and got people to follow him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered.³⁸ **So in the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; ³⁹ but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them—in that case you may even be found fighting against God.**’

They were convinced by him,⁴⁰ and when they had called in the apostles, they had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.⁴¹ As they left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonour for the sake of the name.⁴² And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah.

Thought for the day

Gamaliel was a man of wisdom with a sense of recent history and a belief that God will not desert those who do his work. If only people had listened to his words in v38-39 rather than trying to impose their interpretation of God's will on others, how much strife might have been avoided in later centuries up to and including the present day. His idea is liberating for Christians too. When we try and discern God's will for ourselves and our churches, it will become apparent soon enough whether we have got it right. If we have, all well and good; if not we may have to start again from scratch - hard to do, but less hard than 'fighting against God'. Gamaliel didn't save the apostles from flogging, but they saw that as a privilege (v40-41).