



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

31 AUGUST - 5 SEPTEMBER

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 8:26-40

²⁶ Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Get up and go towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' (This is a wilderness road.) ²⁷ So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over to this chariot and join it.' ³⁰ **So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?'** ³¹ **He replied, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?'** **And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him.** ³² Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: 'Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.'

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, 'About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?' ³⁵ Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?' ³⁸ He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Thought for the day

In the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, there is a strong tradition that the Gospel reached the country very soon after the day of Pentecost. According to an earlier tradition, links between Ethiopia and Israel had existed since the time of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon's court. So there is nothing strange in an Ethiopian official visiting Jerusalem and reading the Hebrew scriptures. Through the power of the Holy Spirit Philip was in the right place at the right time to respond to the official's interest. All of us should be ready to talk to others about our Christian faith when similar opportunities arise (see Romans 10:13-15 for more on this Gospel imperative).

TUESDAY - Acts 9:1-19a

¹ Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' ⁵ He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.' ⁷ The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, and though

his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

¹⁰ Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' He answered, 'Here I am, Lord.' ¹¹ The Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, ¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.' ¹³ But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; ¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.' ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; ¹⁶ I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.' ¹⁷ **So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'** ¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Thought for the day

The scene shifts suddenly back to Saul and the familiar account of his dramatic conversion. It was not only Saul who was profoundly changed by his experience, but Ananias too. The whole of Paul's subsequently powerful ministry depended on Ananias being willing to do what he initially considered impossible. He responded voluntarily to his vision, while Saul's vision initially gave him no choice, and the whole idea of God's love lies in the first two words he spoke: 'Brother Saul' (v17). Are we open to the call to do something unthinkable for Jesus?

WEDNESDAY - Acts 9:19b-31

¹⁹ For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, ²⁰ and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.' ²¹ All who heard him were amazed and said, 'Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?' ²² Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

²³ After some time had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, ²⁴ but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night so that they might kill him; ²⁵ but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

²⁶ When he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷ **But Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.** ²⁸ So he went in and out among them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹ He spoke and argued with the Hellenists; but they were attempting to kill him. ³⁰ When the believers learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

³¹ Meanwhile the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

Thought for the day

Just like Ananias in Damascus in yesterday's reading, so Barnabas in today's facilitates Saul's acceptance into the Christian fellowship in Jerusalem. Barnabas means 'Son of encouragement' and he figures largely in the early stages of Paul's ministry as we'll read later in Acts. In the end, he and Paul parted company after a disagreement (Acts 15:36-39; Galatians 2:13) and he disappeared from the Biblical accounts. Before that, it's clear that he, more than anyone else, helped shape Paul's Christian life and destiny. Who might need our encouragement today?

THURSDAY - Acts 9:32-43

³² Now as Peter went here and there among all the believers, he came down also to the saints living in Lydda. ³³ There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years, for he was paralysed. ³⁴ Peter said to him, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed.'

And immediately he got up. ³⁵ And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

³⁶ Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. ³⁷ At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. ³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, 'Please come to us without delay.' ³⁹ So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. ⁴⁰ **Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, 'Tabitha, get up.' Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up.** ⁴¹ He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. ⁴² This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. ⁴³ Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

Thought for the day

We return to Peter today and read the account of two healing miracles, which both sound very similar to those of Jesus (Luke 5:24; 8:51-56). This emphasis on the continuity between the Gospel accounts of Jesus and the events in the early days of the church must be intentional, reminding us how dramatically the lives of the apostles were transformed by the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and afterwards. We need to hold on to the fact that these were ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Today might be a good day to pray for ourselves, that in our ordinariness we too might be transformed by the Holy Spirit into the people God knows we are capable of being.

FRIDAY - Acts 10:1-16

¹ In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. ² He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. ³ One afternoon at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, 'Cornelius.' ⁴ He stared at him in terror and said, 'What is it, Lord?' He answered, 'Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. ⁵ Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; ⁶ he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.' ⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, ⁸ and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.

⁹ About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. ¹² In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³ Then he heard a voice saying, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' ¹⁴ But Peter said, 'By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.' ¹⁵ **The voice said to him again, a second time, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.'** ¹⁶ This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

Thought for the day

Peter and the other apostles were all good Jews, fully embracing the laws and regulations about food that had been handed down to them. In addition they considered that Gentiles (non-Jews) did not have the same access to God's special concern as the Jewish nation did. The process of disabusing the new church of both of these false ideas starts today with the simple and fundamental message that God decides what food can be eaten (v15) and by implication which people should receive the good news. Without these steps the danger was that the church would remain a minor Jewish sect. This complete reorientation of preconceptions was fundamental to the future of the church and paved the way for Paul's missionary journeys. God's Spirit down the ages seems to have been much more open to change than Christians themselves. What transformations are necessary in the church today?

SATURDAY - Acts 10:17-33

¹⁷ Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon's house and were standing by the

gate. ¹⁸ They called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was staying there. ¹⁹ While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Look, three men are searching for you. ²⁰ Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them.' ²¹ So Peter went down to the men and said, 'I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?' ²² They answered, 'Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.' ²³ So Peter invited them in and gave them lodging.

The next day he got up and went with them, and some of the believers from Joppa accompanied him. ²⁴ The following day they came to Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵ On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshipped him. ²⁶ But Peter made him get up, saying, 'Stand up; I am only a mortal.' ²⁷ And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled; **²⁸ and he said to them, 'You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean.** ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?'

³⁰ Cornelius replied, 'Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. ³¹ He said, "Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. ³² Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea." ³³ Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say.'

Thought for the day

Today's reading puts Peter's vision, which we read about yesterday, into practice. Peter is keen to claim nothing for himself (v25-26), and to explain why he is behaving in a way which is quite out of the normal (v28-29). His vision is matched by that of Cornelius (v30-32), which in itself is further testimony to the truth of the unorthodox message. Nothing, it seems, has been left to chance. As we continue our reading of Acts we will hear again and again of apparent coincidences that further the spread of the Gospel. Such coincidences did not come to an end two thousand years ago - many of us have discovered them in our own lives.