



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

7 - 12 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 10:34-48

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷ That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹ We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, ⁴⁶ for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ 'Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' ⁴⁸ So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

Thought for the day

The apostles had been transformed by the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and we have already heard how successful they had been at converting many fellow Jews into Christians. But each one of them still had a long way to go to understand God's plan fully. There was nothing so persuasive as seeing the effect the same Holy Spirit had on the unlikeliest of people - those who were not even Jews. Even so they were 'astounded' (v45). Are we astonished by the way God still works through the unlikeliest of people, by the power of the Holy Spirit to change lives, by the fact that God cares so much for each one of us?

TUESDAY - Acts 11:1-18

¹ Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, ³ saying, 'Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?' ⁴ Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, ⁵ 'I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. ⁶ As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. ⁷ I also heard a voice saying to me, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." ⁸ But I replied, "By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth." ⁹ But a second time the voice answered from heaven, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." ¹⁰ This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. ¹¹ At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. ¹² The

Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. ¹³ He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, "Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; ¹⁴ he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved." ¹⁵ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. ¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁷ **If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?' ¹⁸ When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, 'Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.'**

Thought for the day

Peter's humility before the reality of God's will ('Who was I that I could hinder God?' v17), not only persuaded his hearers but caused them to praise God (v18). Humility is a virtue sadly absent in much public discourse today, and politicians usually seem unwilling to accept that they had been wrong, thinking it a sign of weakness. That's sad, because it's only through recognising mistakes that anyone can grow in character and capability. For Christians Peter is a far better model, showing that humility before God not only demonstrates true integrity but affects others for the good.

WEDNESDAY - Acts 11:19-30

¹⁹ Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, and they spoke the word to no one except Jews. ²⁰ But among them were some men of Cyprus and Cyrene who, on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists also, proclaiming the Lord Jesus. ²¹ The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord. ²² **News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast devotion; ²⁴ for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were brought to the Lord.** ²⁵ Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an entire year they associated with the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called 'Christians'.

²⁷ At that time prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ One of them named Agabus stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine over all the world; and this took place during the reign of Claudius. ²⁹ The disciples determined that according to their ability, each would send relief to the believers living in Judea; ³⁰ this they did, sending it to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Thought for the day

Quite often in the Bible we hear a brief description of someone's character which tells us as much as any number of anecdotes would have done. Barnabas was probably not perfect, but these few words - he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith (v24) - represent a high accolade. Perhaps it's the single, simple word 'good' that is unexpected. And yet, on reflection, does it not say all that is necessary? It embraces his trustworthiness (as an ambassador of the Jerusalem church v22), his enthusiasm, and his teaching (v23). How contented would we be if the first word that sprung to our friends' and family's minds about us was 'good'?

THURSDAY - Acts 12:1-17

¹ About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. ² He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. ³ After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread.) ⁴ When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. ⁵ While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him.

⁶ The very night before Herod was going to bring him out, Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison.

⁷ Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, 'Get up quickly.' And the chains fell off his wrists. ⁸ The angel said to him,

'Fasten your belt and put on your sandals.' He did so. Then he said to him, 'Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.'⁹ Peter went out and followed him; he did not realize that what was happening with the angel's help was real; he thought he was seeing a vision.¹⁰ After they had passed the first and the second guard, they came before the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went outside and walked along a lane, when suddenly the angel left him.

¹¹ Then Peter came to himself and said, 'Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hands of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.'

¹² As soon as he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many had gathered and were praying.¹³ When he knocked at the outer gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer.¹⁴ On recognizing Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the gate, she ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the gate.¹⁵ They said to her, 'You are out of your mind.' But she insisted that it was so. They said, 'It is his angel.'¹⁶ Meanwhile, Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the gate, they saw him and were amazed.¹⁷ He motioned to them with his hand to be silent, and described for them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he added, 'Tell this to James and to the believers.' Then he left and went to another place.

Thought for the day

Even at this stage, after so many remarkable experiences, Peter took nothing for granted - as we read here he had so little expectation of further divine intervention in his life that his first thought was that he must be having a dream (v9). Only once he and his companions were definitely outside the prison and free did he understand what had happened (v11) - no sense of entitlement to be saved from the danger of persecution, not even a grand celebration, but a brief message sent via a servant girl for the other disciples. And then he went into hiding, recognising perhaps that now was not the time to provoke the authorities further. Discretion may sometimes be the better part of valour, but it's not always easy to know which approach is best.

FRIDAY - Acts 12:18-25

¹⁸ When morning came, there was no small commotion among the soldiers over what had become of Peter.¹⁹ When Herod had searched for him and could not find him, he examined the guards and ordered them to be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there.

²⁰ Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. So they came to him in a body; and after winning over Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for a reconciliation, because their country depended on the king's country for food.²¹ On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat on the platform, and delivered a public address to them.²² The people kept shouting, 'The voice of a god, and not of a mortal.'²³ And immediately, because he had not given the glory to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

²⁴ But the word of God continued to advance and gain adherents.²⁵ Then after completing their mission Barnabas and Saul returned to Jerusalem and brought with them John, whose other name was Mark.

Thought for the day

'No small commotion' (v10) sounds like an understatement for the complete disappearance of a prisoner. On the other hand Herod's death is suitably dramatic (v23). In the midst of all this, the message about Jesus continued to take root, one individual convert after another. Barnabas and Saul (note that Barnabas is still named first) seem to have had a successful visit to Antioch (see Wednesday's reading for its start) and included John Mark as a companion when they returned to Jerusalem to give an account of it.

SATURDAY - Acts 13:1-12

¹ Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul.² **While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'**³ **Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.**

⁴ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵ When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John also to assist them. ⁶ When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they met a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet, named Bar-Jesus. ⁷ He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and wanted to hear the word of God. ⁸ But the magician Elymas (for that is the translation of his name) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul away from the faith. ⁹ But Saul, also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰ and said, 'You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? ¹¹ And now listen—the hand of the Lord is against you, and you will be blind for a while, unable to see the sun.' Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he went about groping for someone to lead him by the hand. ¹² When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was astonished at the teaching about the Lord.

Thought for the day

Today's reading marks a discontinuity with chapter 12 where we heard of Barnabas and Saul heading back to Jerusalem. Now Luke takes us back to Antioch in Syria for the start of a new phase in the development of the church. The prominence of Barnabas is emphasised, and he and Saul are commissioned after the prompting of the Holy Spirit to undertake a journey to Cyprus (v3). Commissioning by the church remains an important element of Christian witness today thereby maintaining a close link between those who send and those who are sent. This stress on the corporate nature of ministry too often gets lost in individual success or failure. None of this prevents individual behaviour, and we see here how Paul takes the initiative, invoking the penalty of blindness with which he was only too familiar himself (v11).

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