



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

28 September - 3 October

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 19:8-20

⁸ Paul entered the synagogue and for three months spoke out boldly, and argued persuasively about the kingdom of God. ⁹ When some stubbornly refused to believe and spoke evil of the Way before the congregation, he left them, taking the disciples with him, and argued daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord.

¹¹ God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, ¹² so that when the handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, their diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them. ¹³ Then some itinerant Jewish exorcists tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, 'I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.' ¹⁴ Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. ¹⁵ But the evil spirit said to them in reply, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?' ¹⁶ Then the man with the evil spirit leapt on them, mastered them all, and so overpowered them that they fled out of the house naked and wounded. ¹⁷ When this became known to all residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks, everyone was awestruck; and the name of the Lord Jesus was praised. ¹⁸ **Also many of those who became believers confessed and disclosed their practices.** ¹⁹ **A number of those who practised magic collected their books and burned them publicly; when the value of these books was calculated, it was found to come to fifty thousand silver coins.** ²⁰ **So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.**

Thought for the day

Although Jesus said, "Those who are not against me are for me" (Luke 9:50), something else is going on here. Jesus himself and later on his followers especially Peter and Paul (see for example Acts 3:6) knew the power that came from his 'name'. But this power could only be invoked by those who believed in it: it wasn't simply an incantation or a magical spell. Such magic is as much of a false god as the idols Paul and his companions met on their travels. A miracle remains as far separated from magic as it ever did. What also endures is the name of Jesus at which 'every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth ...' (Philippians 2:10).

TUESDAY - Acts 19:21-41

²¹ Now after these things had been accomplished, Paul resolved in the Spirit to go through Macedonia and Achaia, and then to go on to Jerusalem. He said, 'After I have gone there, I must also see Rome.' ²² So he sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he himself stayed for some time longer in Asia.

²³ About that time no little disturbance broke out concerning the Way. ²⁴ A man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the artisans. ²⁵ These he gathered together, with the workers of the same trade, and said, 'Men, you know that we get our wealth from this business. ²⁶ You also see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost the whole of Asia this Paul has persuaded and drawn away a considerable number of people by saying that gods made with hands are not gods. ²⁷ **And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be scorned, and she will be deprived of her majesty that brought all Asia and the world to worship her.'**

²⁸ When they heard this, they were enraged and shouted, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.' ²⁹ The city was filled with the confusion; and people rushed together to the theatre, dragging with them Gaius and

Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's travelling-companions. ³⁰ Paul wished to go into the crowd, but the disciples would not let him; ³¹ even some officials of the province of Asia, who were friendly to him, sent him a message urging him not to venture into the theatre. ³² Meanwhile, some were shouting one thing, some another; for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. ³³ Some of the crowd gave instructions to Alexander, whom the Jews had pushed forward. And Alexander motioned for silence and tried to make a defence before the people. ³⁴ But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours all of them shouted in unison, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!' ³⁵ But when the town clerk had quietened the crowd, he said, 'Citizens of Ephesus, who is there that does not know that the city of the Ephesians is the temple-keeper of the great Artemis and of the statue that fell from heaven? ³⁶ Since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. ³⁷ You have brought these men here who are neither temple-robbers nor blasphemers of our goddess. ³⁸ If therefore Demetrius and the artisans with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls; let them bring charges there against one another. ³⁹ If there is anything further you want to know, it must be settled in the regular assembly. ⁴⁰ For we are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion.' ⁴¹ When he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

Thought for the day

As we see only too often, it is easy to appeal to people's self-interest by using apparently simple and uncontroversial phrases and tag-lines. So it was here in Ephesus where there was 'no little disturbance' (v23) fomented by a guild whose trade was threatened (v27), but presented as an assault on all the people held dear: 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians' (v28, 34). On this occasion Paul was prevailed upon to stay silent (v30) - hard for him to do - and help came from the wise words of the city authorities. Silence, as Jesus showed in his trial, and withdrawal (see tomorrow's reading - v1) are not signs of weak leadership, however hard it is for public figures to recognise this truth.

WEDNESDAY - Acts 20:1-16

¹ After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples; and after encouraging them and saying farewell, he left for Macedonia. ² When he had gone through those regions and had given the believers much encouragement, he came to Greece, ³ where he stayed for three months. He was about to set sail for Syria when a plot was made against him by the Jews, and so he decided to return through Macedonia. ⁴ He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Beroea, by Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, by Gaius from Derbe, and by Timothy, as well as by Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia. ⁵ They went ahead and were waiting for us in Troas; ⁶ but we sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we joined them in Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

⁷ On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them; since he intended to leave the next day, he continued speaking until midnight. ⁸ There were many lamps in the room upstairs where we were meeting. ⁹ **A young man named Eutychus, who was sitting in the window, began to sink off into a deep sleep while Paul talked still longer. Overcome by sleep, he fell to the ground three floors below and was picked up dead. ¹⁰ But Paul went down, and bending over him took him in his arms, and said, 'Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.'** ¹¹ Then Paul went upstairs, and after he had broken bread and eaten, he continued to converse with them until dawn; then he left. ¹² Meanwhile they had taken the boy away alive and were not a little comforted.

¹³ We went ahead to the ship and set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul on board there; for he had made this arrangement, intending to go by land himself. ¹⁴ When he met us in Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene. ¹⁵ We sailed from there, and on the following day we arrived opposite Chios. The next day we touched at Samos, and the day after that we came to Miletus. ¹⁶ For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia; he was eager to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

Thought for the day

Poor Eutychus - he clearly wanted to listen to Paul but was overcome by tiredness and the stuffiness of the room (v8) and fell out of the window, apparently to his death. Paul's response echoed Jesus' when he went to Jairus' house to raise his daughter back to life (Luke 8:52). Note also that Paul wasn't deterred by this incident from carrying on with his teaching until dawn (v11). Amidst all his travels and activity, he made time to encourage and build up the faith of his fellow-Christians.

THURSDAY - Acts 20:17-38

¹⁷ From Miletus Paul sent a message to Ephesus, asking the elders of the church to meet him. ¹⁸ When they came to him, he said to them: 'You yourselves know how I lived among you the entire time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears, enduring the trials that came to me through the plots of the Jews. ²⁰ I did not shrink from doing anything helpful, proclaiming the

message to you and teaching you publicly and from house to house, ²¹ as I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus. ²² And now, as a captive to the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me. ²⁴ But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace.

²⁵ And now I know that none of you, among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom, will ever see my face again. ²⁶ Therefore I declare to you this day that I am not responsible for the blood of any of you, ²⁷ for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. ²⁸ Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. ²⁹ I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears. ³² And now I commend you to God and to the message of his grace, a message that is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified. ³³ I coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ **You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions.** ³⁵ **In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."**

³⁶ When he had finished speaking, he knelt down with them all and prayed. ³⁷ There was much weeping among them all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, ³⁸ grieving especially because of what he had said, that they would not see him again. Then they brought him to the ship.

Thought for the day

So now, in another reminder of Jesus (Luke 9:51), Paul is convinced that he must make his way to Jerusalem, whatever might be in store for him there (v22). As he warns the Ephesian church leaders of what may follow his departure (savage wolves, distorting the truth - v29, 30) he also reminds them how he worked for a living when he was with them, so that he was not a charge on them (v34-35). This was an important principle for him, even though on occasion it provoked the criticism that it devalued his ministry (see 1 Corinthians 9). Clearly it had no adverse impact on his ability as preacher and teacher and the parting was full of sadness and affection (v36-38).

FRIDAY - Acts 21:1-16

¹ When we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. ² When we found a ship bound for Phoenicia, we went on board and set sail. ³ We came in sight of Cyprus; and leaving it on our left, we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, because the ship was to unload its cargo there. ⁴ We looked up the disciples and stayed there for seven days. Through the Spirit they told Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. ⁵ When our days there were ended, we left and proceeded on our journey; and all of them, with wives and children, escorted us outside the city. There we knelt down on the beach and prayed ⁶ and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home.

⁷ When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; and we greeted the believers and stayed with them for one day. ⁸ The next day we left and came to Caesarea; and we went into the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the seven, and stayed with him. ⁹ He had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy. ¹⁰ While we were staying there for several days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ He came to us and took Paul's belt, bound his own feet and hands with it, and said, 'Thus says the Holy Spirit, "This is the way the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles."' ¹² **When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem.** ¹³ **Then Paul answered, 'What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.'** ¹⁴ **Since he would not be persuaded, we remained silent except to say, 'The Lord's will be done.'**

¹⁵ After these days we got ready and started to go up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶ Some of the disciples from Caesarea also came along and brought us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to stay.

Thought for the day

As well as Paul's own feelings, derived from the Holy Spirit (yesterday - 20:23), he receives two further warnings not to go to Jerusalem also derived from the Holy Spirit (v4, 11) which he ignores. Faced with his determination, his friends had nothing more to say other than 'The Lord's will be done' (v14). Does our faith have this as its default position when confronted with the uncomfortable realities of life?

SATURDAY - Acts 21:17-36

¹⁷ When we arrived in Jerusalem, the brothers welcomed us warmly. ¹⁸ The next day Paul went with us to visit James; and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰ When they heard it, they praised God. Then they said to him, 'You see, brother, how many thousands of believers there are among the Jews, and they are all zealous for the law. ²¹ They have been told about you that you teach all the Jews living among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, and that you tell them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs. ²² What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. ²³ So do what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow. ²⁴ Join these men, go through the rite of purification with them, and pay for the shaving of their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself observe and guard the law. ²⁵ But as for the Gentiles who have become believers, we have sent a letter with our judgement that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication.' ²⁶ Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having purified himself, he entered the temple with them, making public the completion of the days of purification when the sacrifice would be made for each of them.

²⁷ When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, who had seen him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd. They seized him, ²⁸ shouting, 'Fellow-Israelites, help. This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against our people, our law, and this place; more than that, he has actually brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.' ²⁹ For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. ³⁰ Then all the city was aroused, and the people rushed together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut. ³¹ While they were trying to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. ³² Immediately he took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. When they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. ³³ Then the tribune came, arrested him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains; he inquired who he was and what he had done. ³⁴ Some in the crowd shouted one thing, some another; and as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. ³⁵ **When Paul came to the steps, the violence of the mob was so great that he had to be carried by the soldiers.** ³⁶ **The crowd that followed kept shouting, 'Away with him!'**

Thought for the day

As we reach the end of a week in which Luke has drawn our attention to the ways in which Paul's experiences at this stage of his life mirrored those of Jesus, we have a further striking example. As for Jesus the riot against Paul started with an incident in the Temple (see Luke 19:45-48). And, as with Jesus, once he was in Roman custody, the crowd was stirred up to seek his death (v36, see Luke 23:18). By means of all these parallels, Luke intends us to understand the integrity of Paul's apostleship, in spite of the fact that Paul, unlike the other Apostles, had not taken part in Jesus' earthly ministry. This might be a good time for us to reflect on how our own lives might follow Jesus' example more closely.