



## Parish of Finchampstead and California

# THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

## 11-16 January 2021

### INTRODUCTION

Over the Christmas period we've been reading passages appropriate to the season. Now we revert to using the New Testament readings set for Morning Prayer each day. This week's readings come from Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. This letter contains some of Paul's most profound reflections on Jesus and the Holy Spirit as well as responding to specific issues in the church. As usual the Thoughts will be based principally on the text in bold type.

### MONDAY - 1 Corinthians 1:1-17

<sup>1</sup> Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, <sup>2</sup> to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: <sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>4</sup> I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup> for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— <sup>6</sup> just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— <sup>7</sup> so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup> He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

<sup>10</sup> **Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you should be in agreement and that there should be no divisions among you, but that you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose.** <sup>11</sup> **For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters.**

<sup>12</sup> **What I mean is that each of you says, 'I belong to Paul', or 'I belong to Apollos', or 'I belong to Cephas', or 'I belong to Christ.'** <sup>13</sup> Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup> I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup> so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup> (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) <sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.

### ***Thought for the day***

*After his initial greeting (v1-3) and his commendation of the church community (v4-9), Paul draws attention to one of the dangers facing any group of new believers - the mistaken idea that the leaders from whom they have received their faith are somehow as important as the message itself (v10-12). At Corinth this is leading to argument about status when the focus should be entirely on the good news about Jesus. What are the ways in which today's churches define themselves by the distinctiveness of their identity markers and traditions rather than by their calling 'into the fellowship of Jesus Christ' (v9)?*

### TUESDAY - 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

<sup>18</sup> For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.'

<sup>20</sup> Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who

believe. <sup>22</sup> **For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.**

<sup>26</sup> Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no one might boast in the presence of God. <sup>30</sup> He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, <sup>31</sup> in order that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'

## ***Thought for the day***

*Yesterday's reading provides a prelude to Paul's teaching, starting today, on the contrast between the wisdom of God and the apparent wisdom of the world. Paul confronts head on the scandal at the heart of Christianity - the death of Jesus on the cross (v18,23). The shame and powerlessness of such a humiliating death is, in fact, a display of God's power and his wisdom (v24). This message is no less shocking today than it was two thousand years ago. But for many of us it's as though, through familiarity, we've become desensitized to its full impact. So perhaps we don't struggle enough with the shocking truth at the centre of our faith. Maybe today we should.*

## **WEDNESDAY - 1 Corinthians 2:1-16**

<sup>1</sup> When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. <sup>2</sup> **For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.** <sup>3</sup> **And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.** <sup>4</sup> **My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup> so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.**

<sup>6</sup> Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. <sup>7</sup> But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. <sup>8</sup> None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. <sup>9</sup> But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him'—<sup>10</sup> these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. <sup>11</sup> For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup> Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. <sup>13</sup> And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

<sup>14</sup> Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are discerned spiritually. <sup>15</sup> Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. <sup>16</sup> 'For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ.

## ***Thought for the day***

*Paul continues with the theme of God's wisdom and worldly folly but moves his argument forward to explain that Christians can have access to God's wisdom through the working of the Holy Spirit (v10-12). But before this Paul writes of how he gave his own testimony to the Corinthian believers. He came with a simple message about Jesus (v2); he came as himself, in fear and trembling (v3); but he came with the power of the Spirit in his heart (v4); he came with the power of God (v5). In all these ways he came as himself. And so we, when we talk of our own faith, are not required to be wise or clever - but simply to be ourselves, and God's Spirit will give us the words we need.*

## **THURSDAY - 1 Corinthians 3:1-23**

<sup>1</sup> And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup> I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid

food. Even now you are still not ready, <sup>3</sup> for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? <sup>4</sup> For when one says, 'I belong to Paul', and another, 'I belong to Apollos', are you not merely human?

<sup>5</sup> What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. <sup>6</sup> I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. <sup>7</sup> So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. <sup>8</sup> The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labour of each. <sup>9</sup> For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

<sup>10</sup> According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. <sup>11</sup> For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— <sup>13</sup> the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. <sup>14</sup> If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If the work is burned, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

**<sup>16</sup> Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? <sup>17</sup> If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.**

<sup>18</sup> Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. <sup>19</sup> For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their craftiness', <sup>20</sup> and again, 'The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.'

<sup>21</sup> So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, <sup>22</sup> whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, <sup>23</sup> and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

## ***Thought for the day***

*Paul returns to the concern he first raised in Monday's passage (1:10-12) - the divisions in the church arising from attachment to different leaders. He sees this as a sign of spiritual immaturity (v1-3). The important thing is how the church 'works together' (v9), using the skills of all the leaders and members. Paul's description of this small, new group of believers as God's temple (v16-17) is an extraordinary idea for any Jew to suggest: how could a group of mainly gentile people have the same significance as the Jerusalem Temple, the central and sacred focus of Jewish religious identity? Paul is quite clear - as clear as he is that human leaders are not to be glorified (v21-23). How might this understanding of the church community as God's holy temple affect our own perceptions of ourselves and those we worship with?*

## **FRIDAY - 1 Corinthians 4:1-21**

<sup>1</sup> Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. <sup>2</sup> Moreover, it is required of stewards that they should be found trustworthy. <sup>3</sup> But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. <sup>4</sup> I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. <sup>5</sup> Therefore do not pronounce judgement before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God.

<sup>6</sup> I have applied all this to Apollos and myself for your benefit, brothers and sisters, so that you may learn through us the meaning of the saying, 'Nothing beyond what is written', so that none of you will be puffed up in favour of one against another. <sup>7</sup> For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?

<sup>8</sup> Already you have all you want. Already you have become rich. Quite apart from us you have become kings. Indeed, I wish that you had become kings, so that we might be kings with you. <sup>9</sup> For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals. **<sup>10</sup> We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honour, but we in disrepute.** <sup>11</sup> **To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are**

**poorly clothed and beaten and homeless,<sup>12</sup> and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure;<sup>13</sup> when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day.**

<sup>14</sup> I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. <sup>15</sup> For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. <sup>16</sup> I appeal to you, then, be imitators of me. <sup>17</sup> For this reason I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every church. <sup>18</sup> But some of you, thinking that I am not coming to you, have become arrogant. <sup>19</sup> But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. <sup>20</sup> For the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power. <sup>21</sup> What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

## ***Thought for the day***

*Paul is not renowned for his humility but his emotional description of his life as an apostle in verses 10-13 seems heartfelt rather than ironic. Whether intentionally or not he aligns himself with Jesus: it was only the dregs (v13) of society who were crucified (and tradition has it that the crucifixion took place on the city rubbish dump). But Paul goes on to accuse some of the church not only of favouring one special leader but of arrogance in relation to himself, their spiritual father (v15,18-19). Just as his suffering (foolishness) is for the sake of Christ (v16), so is his message (v17). How do we discern God's message for us, sometimes through our leaders, sometimes in spite of them?*

## **SATURDAY - 1 Corinthians 5:1-13**

<sup>1</sup> It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. <sup>2</sup> And you are arrogant. Should you not rather have mourned, so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you?

<sup>3</sup> For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present I have already pronounced judgement <sup>4</sup> in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, <sup>5</sup> you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.

<sup>6</sup> Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? <sup>7</sup> Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. **For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. <sup>8</sup> Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.**

<sup>9</sup> I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons— <sup>10</sup> not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world. <sup>11</sup> But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one. <sup>12</sup> For what have I to do with judging those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge? <sup>13</sup> God will judge those outside. 'Drive out the wicked person from among you.'

## ***Thought for the day***

*Paul has received further disturbing news about the church at Corinth (v1-2). He criticises their lack of action (v2,5,11,13) and their underlying attitudes (arrogance and boasting). And in the middle of his comments on what seems to have been rather a sordid affair, which he suggests has polluted the whole church (v6-7), he gives the glorious summary of Jesus' achievement at the passover feast (v7-8). The lamb has been sacrificed: the old yeast of malice and evil has been discarded, humankind is purified - sincere and truthful. So the sordid affair serves as an opportunity to restate the basic truth about Jesus in a new metaphorical way. By example we learn from Paul that there is no aspect of our own or our church's life that is immune from the piercing light of Christ's truths. If only we could articulate that idea as well as Paul did.*