



## Parish of Finchampstead and California

# THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

## 1-6 February 2021

### INTRODUCTION

This week we continue with readings from Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. We diverge from the lectionary readings for Morning Prayer towards the end of the week to include chapter 15 which the lectionary omits. As usual the Thoughts are based principally on the text in bold type.

### MONDAY - 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

<sup>12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup> But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup> If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many members, yet one body. <sup>21</sup> The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' <sup>22</sup> On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup> and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; <sup>24</sup> whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, <sup>25</sup> that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup> If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

**<sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. <sup>28</sup> And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. <sup>29</sup> Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? <sup>30</sup> Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? <sup>31</sup> But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.**

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

*We ended last week with Paul describing various gifts as coming from 'the one Spirit'. Now he introduces what has become the familiar metaphor of the body and its constituent parts to explain why this is so (v12-26). He emphasises that all parts of the body are important, even those we think of as inferior or less important/respectable (v22-24) - if one suffers all suffer (v26) and so it should be in the church. And the initial rhetorical climax of this section is the listing of various roles within the church and their implied dependence on one another (v27-30). The current pandemic has brought this home to us in the recognition of our reliance on essential services provided by many types of workers, often poorly paid. Should we also reassess the contribution to our churches of those who work tirelessly, often unseen, to keep things going?*

### TUESDAY - 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

<sup>1</sup> If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give

away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. <sup>7</sup> It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

<sup>8</sup> Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. <sup>9</sup> For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; <sup>10</sup> but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. **<sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.** <sup>13</sup> And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

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

*When Paul wrote his letter there were no chapter divisions and what we call chapter 13 is the ultimate climax of chapter 12. It's one of the best known and much appreciated expositions of divine love, often used as a commentary on human love when read at weddings. I've highlighted verse 12 as a sentence that has something different to say, but which is easily overlooked. There is much about the Christian faith, and about the world, that we don't understand - we can't because we don't have the mind of God. But we have the assurance that, just as adults understand things that children don't (v11), when we pass through death we will see God face to face and understand everything, just as he does. That ought to put a spring in our step today.*

## **WEDNESDAY - 1 Corinthians 14:1-19**

**<sup>1</sup> Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy. <sup>2</sup> For those who speak in a tongue do not speak to other people but to God; for nobody understands them, since they are speaking mysteries in the Spirit. <sup>3</sup> On the other hand, those who prophesy speak to other people for their building up and encouragement and consolation. <sup>4</sup> Those who speak in a tongue build up themselves, but those who prophesy build up the church.** <sup>5</sup> Now I would like all of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. One who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

<sup>6</sup> Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I speak to you in some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? <sup>7</sup> It is the same way with lifeless instruments that produce sound, such as the flute or the harp. If they do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is being played? <sup>8</sup> And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? <sup>9</sup> So with yourselves; if in a tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is being said? For you will be speaking into the air. <sup>10</sup> There are doubtless many different kinds of sounds in the world, and nothing is without sound. <sup>11</sup> If then I do not know the meaning of a sound, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. <sup>12</sup> So with yourselves; since you are eager for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in them for building up the church.

<sup>13</sup> Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret. <sup>14</sup> For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unproductive. <sup>15</sup> What should I do then? I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with the mind also; I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will sing praise with the mind also. <sup>16</sup> Otherwise, if you say a blessing with the spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say the 'Amen' to your thanksgiving, since the outsider does not know what you are saying? <sup>17</sup> For you may give thanks well enough, but the other person is not built up. <sup>18</sup> I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you; <sup>19</sup> nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

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

*There had clearly been some debate in Corinth about the superiority of praying or speaking in tongues, even now seen by some churches (generally not Anglican) as one of the highest spiritual gifts to aspire to. Paul confirms it as a gift, a way for the individual to get close to God. But he sees it for what it is, not as something to boast about in the church community or to impose on other people (v6-12). He draws a distinction between prophecy (again not a characteristic of many Anglican churches) which builds up the church, and tongues which doesn't (v1-4).*

## **THURSDAY - 1 Corinthians 14:20-40**

<sup>20</sup> Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults. <sup>21</sup> In the law it is written, 'By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people; yet even then they will not listen to me,' says the Lord. <sup>22</sup> Tongues, then, are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers.

<sup>23</sup> If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind? <sup>24</sup> But if all prophesy, an unbeliever or outsider who enters is reproved by all and called to account by all. <sup>25</sup> After the secrets of the unbeliever's heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, 'God is really among you.'

<sup>26</sup> What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. <sup>27</sup> If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret.

<sup>28</sup> But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God. <sup>29</sup> Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. <sup>30</sup> If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. <sup>31</sup> For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. <sup>32</sup> And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, <sup>33</sup> for God is a God not of disorder but of peace.

(As in all the churches of the saints, <sup>34</sup> women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. <sup>35</sup> If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. <sup>36</sup> Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?)

<sup>37</sup> Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. <sup>38</sup> Anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized. <sup>39</sup> **So, my friends, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues;** <sup>40</sup> **but all things should be done decently and in order.**

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

*Church meetings in these early days were clearly very different from the kinds of services that most of us are used to now. But Paul stresses again the need to build up the church, not to undermine it (v26), and for everything to 'be done decently and in good order' (v40, also v33). So far, so helpful. But it appears that at Corinth women had been allowed to participate fully in meetings and Paul finds this unacceptable (v33-36). He implies (v36), but does not state, that this is a direction 'from the Lord', rather than his own opinion (see his earlier use of this distinction in 7:10&12), and some churches still rely 2000 years later on these unfortunate words to keep women in subordinate roles. This of course raises the question of what precisely we mean when we describe the Bible as the 'Word of the Lord', as we do in most of our services.*

## **FRIDAY - 1 Corinthians 15:1-11**

<sup>1</sup> Now I should remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, <sup>2</sup> through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

<sup>3</sup> **For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time,** most of whom are still alive, though some have died. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me. <sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. <sup>11</sup> Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

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

*Verses 3 to 7 are the earliest description in the New Testament of Jesus' death and resurrection (much earlier than the Gospel accounts, though the accounts on which they were based are likely to have been circulating orally at this time). It's interesting what Paul stresses: death, burial, rising, all*

*in accordance with the Scriptures; death for our sins; appearances to Peter, the Twelve, 500 other disciples. With the significant omission of the women at the tomb, this is broadly consistent with the Gospel accounts, though you might like to reflect on the differences in detail with, for example, Luke 23:44-24:49.*

## **SATURDAY - 1 Corinthians 15:12-19**

<sup>12</sup> Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup> If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; <sup>14</sup> **and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.** <sup>15</sup> We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. <sup>17</sup> If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup> If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

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

*Yesterday's statement of belief moves on to another worrying debate within the Corinthian church - some saying that resurrection is impossible (v12). Paul follows the logic of this - if there is no resurrection, Jesus could not have been raised (v13); in which case Paul's Gospel message is false and the Corinthians' own faith is based on a lie, and valueless (v14). Earlier in the letter Paul seemed to be focusing his writing on the cross (eg 1:18-2:5) but here it's clear that the resurrection is an equally important element of Christian belief. We know this, and that Good Friday and Easter Day are inseparable, but maybe we don't give it the time or reflection it deserves.*

JRE / 9.1.21