



## Parish of Finchampstead and California

# THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

## 15-20 February 2021

### INTRODUCTION

Lent begins this week on Ash Wednesday, 17 February. Between now and Palm Sunday our readings are from John's Gospel. As usual the Thoughts are based principally on the text in bold type.

### MONDAY - John 3:1-21

<sup>1</sup> Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. <sup>2</sup> He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.' <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' <sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. <sup>6</sup> What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." <sup>8</sup> The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.' <sup>9</sup> Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?' <sup>10</sup> Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

<sup>11</sup> 'Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. <sup>12</sup> If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. <sup>14</sup> And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

**<sup>16</sup> 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.**

<sup>18</sup> Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. <sup>19</sup> And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.'

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

*Many of the incidents reported by John are unique to his Gospel, and, as here, provide the context for extended teaching by Jesus. In this passage Jesus describes the need for those striving to find God's kingdom to be born from above (v3,7) through the Holy Spirit (v8). Some translations use the phrase 'born again' and it is Nicodemus' literal response this idea which causes his question to Jesus - How? (v4). Jesus goes on to describe his role in God's plan (v13-14) including his death ('lifted up' - v15). The climax is the familiar verse 16, and its further explanation (v17-21). Jesus assumes that not perishing but having eternal life is humanity's greatest aspiration; do we agree?*

### TUESDAY - John 3:22-36

<sup>22</sup> After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized. <sup>23</sup> John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was abundant there; and people kept coming and were being baptized— <sup>24</sup> John, of course, had not yet been thrown into prison.

<sup>25</sup> Now a discussion about purification arose between John's disciples and a Jew. <sup>26</sup> They came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him.' <sup>27</sup> **John answered, 'No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven. <sup>28</sup> You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, "I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him." <sup>29</sup> He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. <sup>30</sup> He must increase, but I must decrease.**

<sup>31</sup> 'The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all. <sup>32</sup> He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony. <sup>33</sup> Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true. <sup>34</sup> He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. <sup>35</sup> The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands. <sup>36</sup> Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath.'

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

*In his Gospel, John seems keen to emphasise the superiority of Jesus over John the Baptist. Only here do we read that Jesus also baptised (v26). John the Baptist, in his time a famous prophetic figure, now describes how Jesus' growing ministry is divinely ordained (v27), that John was his herald (v28), that John is delighted with the success of his own role (v29) and that Jesus' ministry must eclipse his (v30). How many people would be as joyful as John is as he gives up the limelight of success for the sake of another?*

## **WEDNESDAY - John 8:2-11**

<sup>2</sup> Early in the morning Jesus came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. <sup>3</sup> The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, <sup>4</sup> they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. <sup>5</sup> Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' <sup>6</sup> They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. <sup>7</sup> When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' <sup>8</sup> And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. <sup>9</sup> When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. <sup>10</sup> Jesus straightened up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' <sup>11</sup> She said, 'No one, sir.' **And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.'**

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

*For Ash Wednesday we move ahead to an incident where Jesus uses a trick question to search deep into people's minds and actions. The woman in her humiliation and fear of her life is nothing more than a pawn to the religious leaders. To Jesus she is much more than that. The Pharisees on the other hand are much less than they appear to be on the outside - law-abiding, respectable, religious - but sinners like the woman all the same, and honest enough to recognise that they cannot throw the first stone (v7). They, not Jesus, judge themselves, and Jesus refuses to judge the woman either - he encourages her to avoid sin altogether, which of course is impossible, while perhaps suggesting that she avoid this particular sin (v11). There are many other ideas to unpick from within these few verses - gender oppression, double standards, our quickness to judge others etc - perhaps some of these ideas might stay with us throughout Lent 2021.*

## **THURSDAY - John 4:1-26**

<sup>1</sup> Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, 'Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John'— <sup>2</sup> although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized— <sup>3</sup> he left Judea and started back to Galilee. <sup>4</sup> But he had to go through Samaria. <sup>5</sup> So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup> Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

<sup>7</sup> A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. <sup>8</sup> (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) <sup>9</sup> The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) <sup>10</sup> Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' <sup>11</sup> The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? <sup>12</sup> Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' <sup>13</sup> **Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup> but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.'** <sup>15</sup> The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' <sup>17</sup> The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; <sup>18</sup> for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' <sup>19</sup> The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup> Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' <sup>25</sup> The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' <sup>26</sup> Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

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

*Like Nicodemus in Monday's reading, the Samaritan woman takes Jesus' words literally, responding with enthusiasm to the idea that she will never have again have to do the onerous work of fetching and carrying water (v15). It's hardly surprising that she fails to understand the meaning behind the word picture Jesus paints of 'eternal life water' (v13-14), or indeed what he goes on to say about how and where God is to be worshipped (v23-24). As in yesterday's passage, Jesus uses this apparently chance encounter to explain deep truths about himself, including his final assertion of his own identity as God's Messiah (v26). How open and responsive are we to such truths?*

## **FRIDAY - John 4:27-42**

<sup>27</sup> Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' <sup>28</sup> Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, <sup>29</sup> 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' <sup>30</sup> They left the city and were on their way to him.

<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' <sup>32</sup> But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' <sup>33</sup> So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' <sup>34</sup> Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. <sup>35</sup> Do you not say, "Four months more, then comes the harvest"? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. <sup>36</sup> The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. <sup>37</sup> For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." <sup>38</sup> I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.'

<sup>39</sup> Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' <sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. <sup>41</sup> And many more believed because of his word. <sup>42</sup> **They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.'**

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

*Interestingly, the woman's report to her friends majors on Jesus' insight into her personal life, though his disclosure of his true identity remains as a question in her mind (v29). She said enough to draw them to Jesus and his words did the rest, persuading them that he was 'the Saviour of the world' (v39-42). It should be encouraging to us to know that we are not on our own when we share*

our faith with others - we need only persuade them to come and see (1:39,42) and Jesus will do the rest. (Note in passing that Jesus' metaphorical language confuses even his own disciples (v31-34).)

## **SATURDAY - John 4:43-54**

<sup>43</sup> When the two days were over, he went from that place to Galilee <sup>44</sup> (for Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honour in the prophet's own country). <sup>45</sup> When he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the festival; for they too had gone to the festival.

<sup>46</sup> Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. <sup>47</sup> When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.

**<sup>48</sup> Then Jesus said to him, 'Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.'** <sup>49</sup> **The official said to him, 'Sir, come down before my little boy dies.'** <sup>50</sup> **Jesus said to him, 'Go; your son will live.'** The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way.

<sup>51</sup> As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. <sup>52</sup> So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, 'Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him.'<sup>53</sup> The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, 'Your son will live.' So he himself believed, along with his whole household. <sup>54</sup> Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.

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

*This incident has much in common with the healing of the centurion's servant in Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10, also set in Capernaum. But in John's account there is yet another example of Jesus and the person he is speaking to being at cross purposes: the official is so desperate for his child to live that he comes in person to Jesus and begs him to heal the boy (v47). Jesus' response seems rather beside the point (v48) and the official repeats his request (v49). Note how Jesus is powerful enough to heal the child at a distance (v50), and how the official in fact believes before he knows that his son is healed (also v50). What might we learn from this passage?*