



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

22-27 February 2021

INTRODUCTION

We continue our readings from John's Gospel. As usual the Thoughts are based principally on the text in bold type.

MONDAY - John 5:1-18

¹ After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ² Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. ³ In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralysed. ⁵ One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, 'Do you want to be made well?' ⁷ The sick man answered him, 'Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.' ⁸ Jesus said to him, 'Stand up, take your mat and walk.' ⁹ At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

Now that day was a sabbath. ¹⁰ So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, 'It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.' ¹¹ But he answered them, 'The man who made me well said to me, "Take up your mat and walk."' ¹² They asked him, 'Who is the man who said to you, "Take it up and walk"?' ¹³ Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. ¹⁴ Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, 'See, you have been made well. Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.' ¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. ¹⁶ Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath. ¹⁷ **But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is still working, and I also am working.'** ¹⁸ **For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.**

Thought for the day

Here Jesus heals in person but, as with the royal official's son (last Friday's reading), he does it simply by a word of command. It's not clear whether the Jewish authorities criticise him for the healing itself (v16) or for telling the sick man he had cured to carry his bed (v8,11). In their eyes, the explanation he gives (v17) only makes things worse - by claiming God as his Father he not only implies an unacceptable intimacy with him (v18) but also suggests that God himself is breaking his own sabbath commandment ('My Father is still working' - v17), undermining the whole structure of the regulations added to the commandment itself. No wonder they were provoked.

TUESDAY - John 5:19-29

¹⁹ Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. ²⁰ The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. ²¹ Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomsoever he wishes. ²² The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son, ²³ so that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. Anyone who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him. ²⁴ **Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life.**

²⁵ 'Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has

granted the Son also to have life in himself;²⁷ and he has given him authority to execute judgement, because he is the Son of Man.²⁸ Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice²⁹ and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

Thought for the day

Jesus starts to develop the theme introduced yesterday of the relationship between God his Father and himself. It implies complete knowledge of God's will (v20); absolute power to 'give life' (v21) (metaphorically as in 4:14, literally as in 11:43), and eternal life at that (v24); authority to judge (v27). These were staggering claims then, and only seem less so now as Christians have come to accept them as true definitions of who Jesus was and is.

WEDNESDAY - John 5:30-46

³⁰ 'I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgement is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

³¹ 'If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. ³² There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true. ³³ You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth. ³⁴ Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved. ³⁵ He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. **³⁶ But I have a testimony greater than John's. The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, ³⁸ and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent.**

³⁹ 'You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. ⁴⁰ Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. ⁴¹ I do not accept glory from human beings. ⁴² But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. ⁴³ I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. ⁴⁴ How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? ⁴⁵ Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. ⁴⁶ If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. ⁴⁷ But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?'

Thought for the day

Once again John emphasises (v32-33) the significance of John the Baptist's role as witness to Jesus (1:7,15 and 3:28) while stressing (v36) his inferiority (see 1:8,15 and 3:30). But he goes on to report Jesus' reliance on testimony far more powerful even than John the Baptist's - that of God himself (v36-38): God cannot be seen but Jesus' actions disclose him. His opponents search the Scriptures for enlightenment, but without love for God in their hearts, so they miss what is waiting to be discovered there (v39-46). For us, as for them, faith is not true faith unless it is rooted in love for God.

THURSDAY - John 6:1-15

¹ After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ² A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³ Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵ When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.' ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹ 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?' ¹⁰ Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. ¹¹ Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.' ¹³ So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. **¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he**

had done, they began to say, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.'¹⁵ When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Thought for the day

The feeding of the five thousand is the only one of Jesus' miracles in all four Gospels. John's account is similar to the others though he alone mentions that the Passover festival was near (v4). The crowd had followed Jesus because of his skill as a healer (v2), but their recognition of how he had fed them changes their perception of who he is (v14). Jesus does not want this kind of attention at this time, and separates himself from everyone (v15); going up the mountain undoubtedly means spending time with God. His instinctive behaviour in this way teaches us how we also should seek God, in good times just as much as in bad.

FRIDAY - John 6:16-27

¹⁶ When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, ¹⁷ got into a boat, and started across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸ The lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. ²⁰ **But he said to them, 'It is I; do not be afraid.'** ²¹ Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land towards which they were going.

²² The next day the crowd that had stayed on the other side of the lake saw that there had been only one boat there. They also saw that Jesus had not got into the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. ²³ Then some boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴ So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they said to him, 'Rabbi, when did you come here?' ²⁶ Jesus answered them, 'Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.'

Thought for the day

What follows from the feeding contains elements of mystery in addition to Jesus walking on the water in the middle of a storm (v18-19): the boat suddenly reaching land (v21), some of the crowd staying overnight away from home (v22), boats available for transport (v23-24), Jesus answering a question he hadn't been asked (v26). In the middle of all this, in fact in the middle of the incident on the water, Jesus says two things (v20): 'do not be afraid' compassionately addressing his terrified disciples, which they and we might have expected; but prefaces this with 'it is I'. In English it sounds so insignificant, until we realise that the Hebrew equivalent is 'I am', the name by which God identified himself to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). In these seven short words we find the compassion and closeness of God the Father, revealed in God the Son.

SATURDAY - John 6:28-40

²⁸ Then his disciples said to Jesus, 'What must we do to perform the works of God?' ²⁹ Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'³⁰ So they said to him, 'What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?' ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat."³² Then Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.'³⁴ They said to him, 'Sir, give us this bread always.'

³⁵ **Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'** ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷ Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; ³⁸ for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ This is indeed the will of my Father,

that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.'

Thought for the day

The disciples pick up on Jesus' use of the word 'work' (v27) and ask what work they should do (v29). As disciples they expect to model their work on their master's but they fall into the trap of wanting to see 'signs' (v30), as if they had seen nothing already, as Jesus himself points out (v36). Just as God, not Moses, sent bread to the Israelites in the wilderness (v32) so he sends true bread, in the form of Jesus, to his people now. For the avoidance of doubt Jesus makes the first of his seven 'I am' declarations (see yesterday's Thought) - I am the bread of life (v35), the image and substance that has informed the Church's eucharistic practice ever since.

JRE / 25.1.21