



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

1-6 March 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 6:41-51

⁴¹ Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.' ⁴² They were saying, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven"?' ⁴³ Jesus answered them, 'Do not complain among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God." Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶ Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ **I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'**

Thought for the day

At this stage the debate centres on Jesus' claim that he 'came down from heaven', that is, from God (v41). Since the crowd knows his family background (v42) such a claim seems implausible. As so often, Jesus' responses do little to help them out of their state of ignorance; indeed his words really only make sense in the light of later events. But in verses 51 and 52 he goes a stage further, describing himself as the living bread; this bread is his flesh, given for others, but to be consumed by them to obtain eternal life. Spiritually we might understand this, thinking about Holy Communion, but literally it makes no sense at all ...

TUESDAY - John 6:52-59

⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ **Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day;** ⁵⁵ **for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.** ⁵⁶ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever.' ⁵⁹ He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

Thought for the day

... And literally is how the crowd takes the last two verses of yesterday's reading. And Jesus adds to their confusion by extending the picture to include the drinking of his blood, describing both flesh and blood as 'true'. Moreover those who partake of his flesh and blood will have eternal life and will be raised up on the last day (v54-55). Once again such statements can only make sense in the light of Jesus' own resurrection, given that we know many Jews of the time did not believe in the resurrection of the dead (Mark 12:18-27), and of the sacrament of Holy Communion instituted at the Last Supper.

WEDNESDAY - John 6:60-71

⁶⁰ When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?' ⁶¹ But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, 'Does this offend you?' ⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³ **It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.** ⁶⁴ But among you there are some who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. ⁶⁵ And he said, 'For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.'

⁶⁶ Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. ⁶⁷ So Jesus asked the twelve, 'Do you also wish to go away?' ⁶⁸ **Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.'** ⁶⁹ We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.' ⁷⁰ Jesus answered them, 'Did I not choose you, the twelve? Yet one of you is a devil.' ⁷¹ He was speaking of Judas son of Simon Iscariot, for he, though one of the twelve, was going to betray him.

Thought for the day

To conclude this long chapter which started with the feeding of the 5000 John reports Jesus and the disciples discussing his teaching (v60), that is his words, which he describes as 'spirit and life' (v63). Peter has grasped this important point declaring that these are words of 'eternal life' (v68). And so the implications of the very first statement in the Gospel (In the beginning was the Word - 1:1) are applied to Jesus' followers, then and now. Peter's recognition of Jesus as the Holy One of God (v69) draws on the OT understanding of God himself as the Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 42:14,16,20). This unique relationship between God and his chosen people is itself a precursor to the eternal relationship, now revealed, between God the Father and God the Son (1:2).

THURSDAY - John 7:1-13

¹ **After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him.** ² Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near. ³ So his brothers said to him, 'Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing; ⁴ for no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.' ⁵ (For not even his brothers believed in him.) ⁶ Jesus said to them, 'My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. ⁷ The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil. ⁸ Go to the festival yourselves. I am not going to this festival, for my time has not yet fully come.' ⁹ After saying this, he remained in Galilee.

¹⁰ But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in secret. ¹¹ The Jews were looking for him at the festival and saying, 'Where is he?' ¹² And there was considerable complaining about him among the crowds. While some were saying, 'He is a good man', others were saying, 'No, he is deceiving the crowd.' ¹³ Yet no one would speak openly about him for fear of the Jews.

Thought for the day

In the light of the terrible injustice and persecution suffered by the Jewish people for the last 2000 years, shamefully often at the hands of Christians, it's important to bear in mind that when John writes about 'the Jews' (v1,11,13), he is invariably describing the Jerusalem hierarchy, not the Jewish populace. Jesus continues to provoke dissention within the crowds (v12) and in his own family (v5): it never has been an easy option to follow him; if we think it is, we may be ignoring some of his hardest teaching. All the NT writings confront us with this paradox.

FRIDAY - John 7:14-24

¹⁴ About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach. ¹⁵ The Jews were astonished at it, saying, 'How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?' ¹⁶ **Then Jesus answered them, 'My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. ¹⁷ Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own.'** ¹⁸ Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing false in him.

¹⁹ 'Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?' ²⁰ The crowd answered, 'You have a demon. Who is trying to kill you?' ²¹ Jesus answered them, 'I performed one work, and all of you are astonished. ²² Moses gave you circumcision (it is, of course, not from Moses, but from the patriarchs), and you circumcise a man on the sabbath. ²³ If a man receives circumcision on the sabbath in order that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I healed a man's whole body on the sabbath? ²⁴ Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgement.'

Thought for the day

Jesus is quite clear that those pursuing a deep relationship with God will be able to judge whether his teaching is from God, or simply his own invention (v17), thereby answering the question as to where his learning comes from (v15). He ignores the suggestion that he is demon-inspired (v20) - unlike in Mark 3:22-30 where he robustly rejects the idea. In the end we are all called respond to Jesus, not by appearances, but with right judgement (v24); that is, judgement based on God's wisdom, not the apparent wisdom of the world (1 Corinthians 2:6-10).

SATURDAY - John 7:25-36

²⁵ Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, 'Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? ²⁶ And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him. Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? ²⁷ Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.' ²⁸ Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, 'You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. ²⁹ I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.' ³⁰ Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come. ³¹ Yet many in the crowd believed in him and were saying, 'When the Messiah comes, will he do more signs than this man has done?'

³² The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering such things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent temple police to arrest him. ³³ **Jesus then said, 'I will be with you a little while longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. ³⁴ You will search for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come.'** ³⁵ The Jews said to one another, 'Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? ³⁶ What does he mean by saying, "You will search for me and you will not find me" and, "Where I am, you cannot come"?''

Thought for the day

It's only with the benefit of hindsight that much of Jesus' teaching in John's Gospel makes sense, and it's therefore not surprising that his original hearers were perplexed. As so often exchanges between Jesus and others consist of two layers - the earth-bound (we know where this man is from - v27 - meaning Nazareth) and the divine (you know where I am from - v28 - meaning from God). And so it is with Jesus' reference to his death and ascension (v33-34), which the crowd takes as suggesting he will simply be travelling abroad (v35). Are we also earth-bound, or are we among those who seek the real truths that God revealed through Jesus?