



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

8-13 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 7:32-52

³⁷ On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, ³⁸ and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" ³⁹ Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

⁴⁰ When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, 'This is really the prophet.' ⁴¹ Others said, 'This is the Messiah.' But some asked, 'Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he?'

⁴² Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?' ⁴³ So there was a division in the crowd because of him. ⁴⁴ Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

⁴⁵ Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, 'Why did you not arrest him?' ⁴⁶ The police answered, 'Never has anyone spoken like this!' ⁴⁷ Then the Pharisees replied, 'Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? ⁴⁸ Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹ **But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed.**' ⁵⁰ **Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked,** ⁵¹ **'Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?'** ⁵² **They replied, 'Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.'**

Thought for the day

Jesus' teaching was persuasive (v40) but his background was not (v41) and the crowd was undecided (v43). Some wanted him arrested (v43) but the temple police, charged with that very task (7:32), refused to obey (v45-47). In the ensuing debate among the Pharisees, they dismiss the views of the crowd (v49) and focus on the Galilee dimension, suggesting that Nicodemus (who had visited Jesus at night - 3:1-21) offers reasonable advice only because he comes from there as well (v52). How easy we find it to dismiss the views of other people because we think them ignorant (like the crowd) or because we believe they must have false motives (like Nicodemus). As with the Pharisees our attitudes may say more about our own shortcomings than those who we criticise.

TUESDAY - John 7:53-8:11

⁵³ Then each of them went home, ^{8:1} while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. ³ The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, ⁴ **they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. ⁵ Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?'** ⁶ **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. ⁷ 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.' ⁸ And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and said to her,

'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' ¹¹ 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

We had this as a special reading on Ash Wednesday but return to in our daily readings today. Then we focused on Jesus and the woman. Now we look at the motivation of the men who wanted to catch Jesus out. Their approach is more subtle than it may appear. It seems quite likely that the strict letter of the Law was rarely applied in cases of adultery. If this is so then Jesus is being put in the position of upholding the Law, but being seen as an extremist (in our terms a fundamentalist), or of setting it aside, making him as a teacher an easy target for criticism. As we all know, there are still arguments about the true interpretation of Scripture. Some stress what they regard as the plain truth evident in the text. Others prefer an approach that tries to understand the message behind the words. Throughout John's Gospel we see how those who took Jesus' words at their face value often, if not always, missed the point he was making.

WEDNESDAY - John 8:12-30

¹² Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.' ¹³ Then the Pharisees said to him, 'You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid.' ¹⁴ Jesus answered, 'Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. ¹⁵ You judge by human standards; I judge no one. ¹⁶ Yet even if I do judge, my judgement is valid; for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. ¹⁷ In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. ¹⁸ I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf.' ¹⁹ Then they said to him, 'Where is your Father?' Jesus answered, 'You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.' ²⁰ He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

²¹ Again he said to them, 'I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.' ²² Then the Jews said, 'Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, "Where I am going, you cannot come"?' ²³ He said to them, 'You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. ²⁴ I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he.' ²⁵ They said to him, 'Who are you?' Jesus said to them, 'Why do I speak to you at all? ²⁶ I have much to say about you and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.' ²⁷ They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father. ²⁸ So Jesus said, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. ²⁹ And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.' ³⁰ As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

Thought for the day

When Jesus said 'I am the bread of life' he taught extensively about what that meant, provoking strong reactions from his hearers (6:35-69). But now his claim 'I am the light of the world' (v12) passes almost unheeded with his hearers not questioning the statement itself but rather Jesus' right to make such a claim (v13). Once again they give Jesus the chance to stress his closeness to God his father (v18-19,26-29) who gives him the authority to condemn his opponents (v24,26,28). While this is important for us also, let's hold on to the glorious picture of Jesus as the light of the world: it was there at the start of the Gospel (1:4-5) and John hasn't finished with it yet.

THURSDAY - John 8:31-47

³¹ Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.' ³³ They answered him, 'We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, "You will be made free"?''

³⁴ Jesus answered them, 'Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there for ever. ³⁶ So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. ³⁷ I know that you are descendants of Abraham;

yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word. ³⁸ I declare what I have seen in the Father's presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.'

³⁹ They answered him, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said to them, 'If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, ⁴⁰ but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. ⁴¹ You are indeed doing what your father does.' They said to him, 'We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself.' ⁴² Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me. ⁴³ Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. ⁴⁴ You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶ Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? ⁴⁷ Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God.'

Thought for the day

Just like those earliest disciples who believed in Jesus (v31), belief in him doesn't remove our need to understand and question his teaching, especially when it's message is not what we want to hear. In today's reading the debate is around truth and freedom (v32-33) and soon moves away from the disciples to Jesus' opponents (v40), for whom he has harsh words (v44-47): their confidence in the truth they believe they have inherited from Abraham is misplaced (v39) and contradicts the real truth Jesus brings (v42). Their minds were closed - we need to make sure ours are open.

FRIDAY - John 8:48-59

⁴⁸ The Jews answered him, 'Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?' ⁴⁹ Jesus answered, 'I do not have a demon; but I honour my Father, and you dishonour me. ⁵⁰ Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it and he is the judge. ⁵¹ Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.' ⁵² The Jews said to him, 'Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, "Whoever keeps my word will never taste death." ⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?' ⁵⁴ Jesus answered, 'If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, "He is our God", ⁵⁵ though you do not know him. But I know him; if I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and I keep his word. ⁵⁶ Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad.' ⁵⁷ Then the Jews said to him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?' ⁵⁸ **Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.'** ⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Thought for the day

In the other Gospels, when his opponents accused him of working miracles by the power of the devil, Jesus responded by pointing out that once Satan fights with himself, his end is near (Mark 3:26). Here Jesus simply denies the accusation (v49) and shifts the ground of the argument back to his relationship with his Father and his offer of eternal life (v51). To his questioners his words imply superiority to Abraham, which in their eyes is incredible (v53,57). After this verbal sparring, they are confronted by Jesus' explicit claim to divinity (v58 - as we saw in 6:20, 'I am' is God's self-description). No wonder they want to kill him (v59).

SATURDAY - John 9:1-17

¹ **As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' ³ Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'** ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷ saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' ⁹ Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' ¹⁰ But they

kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' ¹¹ He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.' ¹² They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.'

¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' He said, 'He is a prophet.'

Thought for the day

Once again (as in 8:12 - Wednesday's reading) Jesus describes himself as the light of the world. Here he confronts darkness in the form of a man born blind (v1). And of course he has the power to give him his sight (v7) as a practical sign of all that he claimed to be in yesterday's reading. So why did he need to smear mud on the man's eyes when he could heal the official's son without even seeing him (4:50)? It seems likely that he is re-enacting another familiar event - God's creation of Adam 'from the dust' (Genesis 2:7) - to emphasise the divinity he claimed in words yesterday. In the midst of these profound truths it might help us to reflect on Jesus as the light of the world and what kind of light it is that the world needs most now.