



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

15-20 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 9:18-41

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' ²⁰ His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.' ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.'

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.' ²⁵ He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' ²⁶ They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' ²⁷ He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' ³⁰ The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing. You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. **³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.**' ³⁴ They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' ³⁶ He answered, 'And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.' ³⁷ Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.' ³⁸ He said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains.

Thought for the day

The fallout from the healing of the man born blind continues. John stresses the contrast between the scepticism of the Jewish authorities (strong enough to intimidate the man's parents (v22)) and the man's own experience of having been healed (v30). This man, until now on the margins of society, is inspired to confront their attitude, drawing their, and our, attention to Jesus' unique healing power (v32) and the conclusion that this must come from God (v33). In his further encounter with Jesus we see him 'believing and worshipping' (v38). Others still refuse to see who Jesus is (v40). They didn't recognise their blind spots (v40) - do we do the same?

TUESDAY - John 10:1-10

¹ 'Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the

sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.' ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷ So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ **I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.** ¹⁰ **The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.**

Thought for the day

Today we hear probably the least well-known of Jesus' 'I am' sayings - 'I am the gate for the sheep' (v3,8). In describing the people as sheep, Jesus is not being derogatory - as we'll see tomorrow the shepherd/sheep imagery was a well-established metaphor for God's relationship with the people of Israel. But as the gate, Jesus is the means by which God's people are not only protected from evil but also assured of abundant life (v10). This promise gives the lie to those who see the Christian faith as rule-bound and restrictive. Today is a good day to reflect on whether others see that promise of abundant life in us.

WEDNESDAY - John 10:11-21

¹¹ **'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.** ¹² The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴ **I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,** ¹⁵ **just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.** And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.'

¹⁹ Again the Jews were divided because of these words. ²⁰ Many of them were saying, 'He has a demon and is out of his mind. Why listen to him?' ²¹ Others were saying, 'These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?'

Thought for the day

'The Lord is my shepherd - I'll not want ...': the opening of Psalm 23 is just one of many OT passages in which God is referred to as a shepherd. So in speaking of his own role as the good shepherd (v11,14), Jesus makes yet another claim to be God-like. The allusion could not have been lost on his hearers. And he claims not only the deepest intimacy of knowing his flock (v14), but also that this intimacy reflects his own relationship with his Father (v15). More than that he is the shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (v11). No wonder this beautiful metaphor has been such a powerful one throughout Christian history, but in Jesus' words there is nothing of the sentimentality with which it has often been portrayed.

THURSDAY - John 10:22-42

²² At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. ²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.' ²⁵ Jesus answered, 'I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; ²⁶ but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ The Father and I are one.'

³¹ The Jews took up stones again to stone him. ³² Jesus replied, 'I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?' ³³ The Jews answered, 'It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human

being, are making yourself God.’³⁴ Jesus answered, ‘Is it not written in your law, “I said, you are gods”?’³⁵ If those to whom the word of God came were called “gods”—and the scripture cannot be annulled—³⁶ can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, “I am God’s Son”?’³⁷ **If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. ³⁸ But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.**³⁹ Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands.

⁴⁰ He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. ⁴¹ Many came to him, and they were saying, ‘John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.’⁴² And many believed in him there.

Thought for the day

Jesus always pointed his original hearers towards God, without detracting from his own special role. Here he asks them to look at what he has been doing throughout his ministry. He attributes the signs (miracles) he has shown them to God his Father (v37). He suggests they speak for themselves and can only have been done in God's power (v38-39). The works/signs are witnesses to the truth of his words (v41). So even if they find some of his teaching difficult, they will find truth about him in what he has done. It's good to be reminded that we don't have to understand all the many words we hear about Jesus - we can simply rest in the truth and certainty of all he did, and does still.

FRIDAY - John 11:1-16

¹ Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, ‘Lord, he whom you love is ill.’ ⁴ But when Jesus heard it, he said, ‘This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.’ ⁵ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶ after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, ‘Let us go to Judea again.’ ⁸ The disciples said to him, ‘Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?’ ⁹ Jesus answered, ‘Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰ But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.’ ¹¹ **After saying this, he told them, ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.’** ¹² **The disciples said to him, ‘Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.’** ¹³ **Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep.** ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.’ ¹⁶ Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him.’

Thought for the day

Today we start to approach the greatest sign of all that Jesus did - raising Lazarus from the dead. John sets the scene in great detail. This is in contrast to the very limited information Luke gives us about a different visit of Jesus to the two sisters (Luke 10:38-42). Jesus seems to know all that will happen, and that it will be to God's glory (v4); he intentionally delays his departure (v5). Then he and the disciples have another conversation at cross-purposes (v11-13), until Jesus explains that by 'falling asleep' he meant 'died' (v14). Thomas' foreboding for the journey (v16) refers back to the disciples' earlier concerns over Jesus returning to Judea (v8). In the end they trust his judgement; will we do the same if he calls us to do something risky?

SATURDAY - John 11:17-27

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.’ ²³ **Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’** ²⁴ **Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’** ²⁵ **Jesus said to her, ‘I am the**

resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' ²⁷ She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

Thought for the day

In her grief, Martha, the woman of action (Luke 10:40), is both upset with Jesus (v21) and confident that he can still do something (v22). In response Jesus declares 'I am the resurrection and the life ...' (v25-26) - words proclaimed at almost every Christian funeral. Even more striking than his claim is Martha's unconditional acceptance of it, going further by declaring Jesus to be Messiah (Christ) and Son of God (v27). Her words reflect but go beyond Matthew's report of Peter's dramatic confession of Jesus at Caesarea Philippi (16:16), which is absent from John's Gospel. While we might want to reflect on the significance, if any, of this, the more important question is whether we would respond in the same way as Martha if we were challenged today about our own faith in Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life.

JRE / 14.2.21