



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

22-27 March 2021

INTRODUCTION

This week we conclude this series of readings from John's Gospel. Next week we shall have special readings for Holy Week. As usual the Thoughts are based principally on the text in bold type.

MONDAY - John 11:28-44

²⁸ When Martha had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' ²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' ³³ **When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.** ³⁴ **He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.'** ³⁵ **Jesus began to weep.** ³⁶ So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him.' ³⁷ But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' ⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out.' ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

Thought for the day

In the earlier part of this account, Jesus seemed to be fully in control, knowing what he would do, and when, and coolly discussing with Martha life, death and resurrection. Now, when Mary throws herself at his feet and rebukes him (v32), his human emotion - grief at the death of his friend - can no longer be suppressed (v33,35,38). His trust in God remains absolute (v41-42): his power and authority are not reduced and the dead body of Lazarus responds to his command and comes back to life (v43-44). John is keen to emphasise how humanity and divinity are inextricably linked in Jesus. How do we respond to this?

TUESDAY - John 11:45-57

⁴⁵ Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. ⁴⁶ But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. ⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, 'What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.' ⁴⁹ **But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰ You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.'** ⁵¹ He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, ⁵² and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. ⁵³ So from that day on they planned to put him to death.

⁵⁴ Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews, but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples.

⁵⁵ Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. ⁵⁶ They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, 'What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?' ⁵⁷ Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

Thought for the day

There is a great irony here. Jesus restored a man to life, an act that most people in any age would regard as remarkable, one that at the least would add lustre to his reputation. But by doing this Jesus signed his own death warrant (v53). There was no merit in the reason the authorities put forward (v48) which in reality had more to do with maintaining the status quo, and their role in it, than with fearing for their holy place and nation. How often we see truth, honesty and decency sacrificed to expediency, especially political expediency. And in a further irony, by the time John came to write his Gospel, the Romans had indeed destroyed the Jerusalem temple, killed many prominent Jews, and forced others to flee.

WEDNESDAY - John 12: 1-11

¹ Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ² There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. ³ Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?' ⁶ (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷ **Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'**

⁹ When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹ since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

Thought for the day

It's only in John's Gospel that the anointing of Jesus' feet is attributed to Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (v1-3). In the other Gospels the woman is un-named (see Mark 14:1-9). Also unique to John is the identification specifically of Judas as the disciple who criticised Mary's action, and his dishonest reason for doing so (v4-6). But Jesus commended Mary for her insight and generosity (v7-8). Some people are troubled by Jesus' comment about the poor, reported also by Mark and Matthew. But the words cannot be detached from their context - Jesus is about to look death in the face, alone and deserted by his disciples - and, apart it seems from Mary, he is the only one who knows this. Nor can these words detract from the evidence throughout his ministry of his inclination towards the poor, the sick and the marginalised. Even less are they a justification for us to ignore the poverty in our world.

THURSDAY - John 12:12-19

¹² The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³ So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel!'

¹⁴ Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: ¹⁵ 'Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt.'

¹⁶ His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. ¹⁷ So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. ¹⁸ It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the

crowd went to meet him. ¹⁹ **The Pharisees then said to one another, 'You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.'**

Thought for the day

John's account of Palm Sunday is very compressed (v12-14) compared with the other Gospel accounts (see Mark 11:1-10 for example). And only John explores the reaction to this unexpected event by the disciples (v16), the crowd (v17-18) and the Pharisees (v19). On this occasion it's the Pharisees who grasp the implications of Jesus' action better than his own followers. But they don't follow their own logic - they still see him as a threat. He was indeed a threat to them and he remains a threat still to those who improperly use the power they have, whether in a religious, political, or personal context.

FRIDAY - John 12:20-36

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' ²² Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ **Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.'** ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

²⁷ **'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—"Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name.'** ²⁹ Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' ³⁰ The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' ³¹ Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³² Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³³ And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' ³⁴ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. ³⁵ The crowd answered him, 'We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains for ever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?' ³⁶ Jesus said to them, 'The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. ³⁷ While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.'

Thought for the day

A frequent refrain in the Gospel so far is 'the hour has not yet come' (2:4,4:23,5:25,7:30,8:20); but now it has (v23, 27). Verses 27 to 30 allude to the Transfiguration (the voice from heaven) and to Jesus' agony in Gethsemane ('My soul is troubled'), times at which Jesus very drew close to God, but neither of which appear elsewhere in the Gospel. So now is the time for Jesus' glorification. Only John reports Jesus using 'glory' and 'glorification' extensively. Glory in the Old Testament was a defining characteristic of God and, whereas he himself could never be seen, his glory could be (for example in the wilderness - Exodus 16:7,10). And Isaiah's prophecy 'the glory of the Lord shall be revealed' (40:5) follows on from his reference to a voice of one calling in the wilderness, always applied by Christians to John the Baptist (Mark 1:3). Jesus uses these words as another way of stressing his closeness to God (see also 1:14). As we approach Holy Week it would be a good time to reflect on the glory of God shown in the passion and death of Jesus - in what ways does it open up the harsh and cruel facts of the crucifixion to different interpretations?

SATURDAY - John 12:36-50

³⁶ After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them. ³⁷ Although he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him. ³⁸ This was to fulfil the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah: 'Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?' ³⁹ And so they could not believe, because Isaiah also said, ⁴⁰ 'He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they might not look with their eyes, and understand with their heart and turn—and I would heal them.'

⁴¹ Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke about him. ⁴² Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they

would be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God.

⁴⁴ Then Jesus cried aloud: 'Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me. ⁴⁵ And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. ⁴⁶ I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. ⁴⁷ I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. ⁴⁸ The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge, ⁴⁹ for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me.'

Thought for the day

In this final passage in the current series from John, and even as he has to take care and hide from his opponents again (v36), Jesus reverts to the image of himself as the light of the world (v46) and as giving a true picture of his Father who sent him (v44-45). Jesus as light is a principal theme in the introduction to the Gospel (1:4-5,9) and is stressed in Jesus' own I AM declaration (8:12). As with the idea of Jesus' glorification yesterday, we might like to think about what this adds to our understanding of Good Friday and Easter - did the darkness overcome the light, at least for a time, or was it more like the night-time of Good Friday coming to an end when Easter morning dawned? And how might we use this metaphor to throw light on our own lives?

JRE / 20.2.21