



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

EASTER WEEK

5-10 APRIL 2021

INTRODUCTION

For Easter Week we have daily Bible passages describing events in the hours and days following Jesus' resurrection, concluding with Paul's summary of the belief handed down to him. None of the readings are from John's Gospel as we shall be looking at his last two chapters next week. Please note that this week's readings are different from those set for Morning Prayer.

MONDAY - The Women visit the tomb (Mark 16:1-8)

¹ When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ They had been saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?' ⁴ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶ But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.' ⁸ So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Thought for the day

Most Bibles have further verses at the end of this passage, but scholars agree that they are later additions based on the other Gospels. What scholars don't agree on is why Mark finished where he did on a note that, in the way it almost contradicts itself (if the women said nothing, how was their story ever heard?), is such an unsatisfactory ending (v8).

Apart from this mystery, the rest of Mark's account is less elaborate than the varying traditions that came down to the other Gospel writers: as with his description of the crucifixion he seems to make no attempt to smooth away the rough edges. After the events of Good Friday and Jesus' gruesome death, which they had witnessed (15:40), after a sabbath of enforced inaction, and with an unpleasant task before them, no wonder the women were alarmed by the open tomb (v4), the presence of a 'young man in white' (v5), and the disappearance of Jesus' body (v6). No wonder they fled in terror; no wonder they said nothing to anyone (v8).

Whatever we do or don't understand, let's marvel at their faithfulness and commitment to Jesus, faithfulness in life and death, faithfulness almost literally through the grave, faithfulness beyond the grave as the light of new life was dawning. Let us pray for such faithfulness ourselves.

TUESDAY - On the road (Luke 24:13-35)

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' ¹⁹ He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and

how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' ²⁵ Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared. ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon.' ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Thought for the day

This familiar passage would provide enough Thoughts for a whole week, if not longer. But today we will focus on the climax of the story, when Jesus made himself known to the two disciples in the breaking of the bread (v31,35). They had come to this point via their desolation at Jesus' death (v20), their perplexity at the empty tomb (v23-24), and Jesus' exposition of the Scriptures to them (v27). The immediate effect on them of their hearts being warmed by this teaching (v32) was their importuning Jesus to stay with them (v29). We might describe the entire passage as Despair - Confusion - Understanding - Response - Recognition. In varying measure all these are likely to be elements of most Christians' faith experience. They don't necessarily come in the same order. Perhaps if we were more open to Jesus, our hearts might burn in response to the Scriptures (or even perhaps to preaching) and we might come to know him better in the breaking of the bread.

WEDNESDAY - Jesus appears to his Disciples (Luke 24:36-48)

³⁶ While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' ³⁷ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, 'Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.' ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.' ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.

Thought for the day

In spite of the women's testimony, Peter's confirmation of the empty tomb, and the report of the two companions on the road to Emmaus, the eleven were still perplexed. They certainly didn't expect Jesus to be there with them. Understandably they were scared (v37) and Jesus had to convince them he was not a ghost (v39,43). Then, as on the road to Emmaus, he started explaining what had happened by reading and interpreting the Hebrew scriptures to them (v45-48).

Perhaps you are sometimes conscious of Jesus arriving in your life or standing at your side unbidden. Or perhaps reading the Bible brings him vividly to mind or heart. When this happens, don't let him go. Try and find out what his message is for you. At a time like this it may be as simple and reassuring as 'Peace be with you'.

THURSDAY - The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

Thought for the day

This is the only post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to the disciples in Matthew's Gospel, though he does appear to the women as they return from the tomb. It's significant that he commissions them for the future on a mountain (v16), the traditional location for God to speak to human beings. Significant too that baptism is to be done in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one of the few direct references to the Holy Trinity in the Bible (v19). But most significant of all is the closing sentence of Jesus' speech (also the last words in the Gospel) where he promises to be with them always (v20). He couldn't have been simpler or clearer could he? And that promise is for us also, assuring us that, whatever we go through, he will go through it with us.

FRIDAY - Jesus returns to his Father (Acts 1:3-11)

³ After his suffering Jesus presented himself alive to the apostles by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over the course of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴ While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. 'This', he said, 'is what you have heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' ⁷ He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'

⁹ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹ They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'

Thought for the day

Matthew's Gospel (and John's) end in Galilee, but Luke has Jesus appearing only in Jerusalem, as this summary account at the beginning of Acts makes clear (v3-4). He teaches them to expect to be baptised by the Holy Spirit (v5,8) before they start to spread the Good News more widely. Today's commissioning makes an interesting comparison with Matthew's version in yesterday's reading. From the very first this Good News was never intended to be appropriated by those who had the good fortune to have heard it themselves - it was to be spread as widely as possible. Many of us find it hard to speak even to our family and friends about our faith - it's quite a challenge to realise that if those who went before us had not shared their faith actively, we might possibly never have heard the Gospel ourselves. Let's be brave.

SATURDAY - Paul passes on the Good News of the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:3-5&20-22)

[Part of Paul's summary of what he had heard about the resurrection of Jesus and its implications, some years before the Gospels were written down.]

³ For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴ and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas [=Peter], then to the twelve.

²⁰ Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. ²¹ For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; ²² for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.

Thought for the day

As we come to the end of Easter Week, we have a chance to read and reflect on one of the earliest written accounts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection (v3-5). Isn't it brief? There's nothing there about Jesus' birth, or his teaching, healing or miracles, or about his passion. But even for a new church with mainly non-Jewish converts, Paul is anxious to emphasise the continuity of God's plan 'in accordance with the Scriptures'. For Paul himself this brief statement was all that was necessary, coupled as it was with his personal relationship with Jesus. And it's enough for him to use as a starting point for his explanation of all that the resurrection of Jesus means. Humanity mired in sin and death ('as all die in Adam') is transformed into humanity 'alive in Christ' (v22). As the Covid pandemic continues, would it not be a wonderful thing if every Christian reflected being alive in Christ? What would that look like for you, for me, for us, for the world?

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