



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

10 - 15 MAY 2021

INTRODUCTION

Thursday is Ascension Day, the least noticed major feast day of the church's calendar because it always falls mid-week, forty days after Easter Day. The readings from 1 Peter finish on Wednesday and on Friday we start a new series on 1 John which will take us to Pentecost at the end of next week. As usual the Thoughts are based mainly on the text in bold type.

MONDAY - 1 Peter 4:1-11

¹ Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same intention (for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin), ² so as to live for the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God. ³ You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry. ⁴ They are surprised that you no longer join them in the same excesses of dissipation, and so they blaspheme. ⁵ But they will have to give an account to him who stands ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ For this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does.

⁷ The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. ⁸ Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Be hospitable to one another without complaining. ¹⁰ Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. ¹¹ **Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.**

Thought for the day

Another reason for criticism of church members was their refusal to take part in accepted social behaviour (v3-4). Peter commends them for this and encourages them to discipline themselves (v7), to love one another (v8), to be hospitable (v9), and to serve one another (v10). They are to weigh their words and carry out this service in God's name (v11) so that he is glorified. This means that speaking and serving represent the best of which Christians are capable, and that this will prevail with their critics in God's favour. It's as tall an order now as it was then, but if it causes us to question our own behaviour (is this really what God wants us to say or do?), it can only be for our benefit and God's glory.

TUESDAY - 1 Peter 4:12-19

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice in so far as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief-maker. ¹⁶ **Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name.** ¹⁷ For the time has come for judgement to begin with the household of God; if it begins with us, what will be the end for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And 'if it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinners?' ¹⁹ Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good.

Thought for the day

There is a distinction between being convicted in the eyes of the world, on the one hand, for following the way of Jesus Christ (v12-14) and, on the other, for engaging in criminal activity (v15). The difference may not be obvious to those looking for reasons to persecute Christians, but it is plain to God, especially where suffering for his sake is involved (v16). He will bring judgement soon enough and the faithful will be vindicated (v17,19). Then the ungodly will be condemned (v18). Early Christians were perhaps better at distinguishing between good and evil than we are; their world was governed by absolutes, of which absolute faithfulness to God through Jesus was surely the greatest. How do we respond to this?

WEDNESDAY - 1 Peter 5:1-12

¹ Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you ² to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it—not for sordid gain but eagerly. ³ Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away. ⁵ In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'

⁶ Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ **Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.** ⁹ **Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.** ¹⁰ And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

¹² Through Silvanus, whom I consider a faithful brother, I have written this short letter to encourage you, and to testify that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it. ¹³ Your sister church in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings; and so does my son Mark. ¹⁴ Greet one another with a kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

Thought for the day

For the first time the letter addresses issues of church leadership - the elders are to follow Jesus (the chief shepherd - v4) by tending their flock and leading by example (v2-3). The flock are called to obedience (v5) and humility (v6). Elders and congregation alike are to reflect God's care of them through discipline and alertness - the picture of the devil prowling around the Christian community, waiting to pick off stragglers and weaklings, is a powerful and dramatic one (v7-8). So the letter ends on a note of encouragement (v10,12). In what ways do we need encouragement to turn to God in times of trouble?

THURSDAY - Ascension Day - Acts 1:1-11

¹ In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ² until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ After his suffering he presented himself alive to them 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

Luke is the only Gospel-writer who gives us an account of Jesus' Ascension - and he gives us two: a shorter one at the end of his Gospel (24:50-53), and the longer one at the start of Acts that is our reading today. While he was still with the disciples, Jesus continued to teach them - about the Kingdom of God (v3) and about how they were not to trouble themselves about the future God had in store for his people (v6-7). He also gave them an instruction which they probably found difficult both to understand and to comply with - to wait: for an unspecified time and for an event, the coming of the Holy Spirit, about which they could have had little conception until it happened (v4-5,8). We too often wish we knew what the future holds for us: we too have to trust that the future is in God's hands and that we will discover his plans in his time, not ours.

FRIDAY - 1 John 1:1-2:6

^{1,1} We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— ² this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— ³ we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; ⁷ but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. **⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

^{2,1} My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ² and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

³ Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. ⁴ Whoever says, 'I have come to know him', but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; ⁵ but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: ⁶ whoever says, 'I abide in him', ought to walk just as he walked.

Thought for the day

Unlike most of the other letters in the NT, this one doesn't start with a greeting or recognition of the recipients, but instead with a remarkable declaration of faith in 'the word of life' and a beautiful description of the aims of the letter (v1-4). The contrast between light and dark that follows (v5-7) may well remind us of the opening of John's Gospel (1:4-5); there the darkness of the world failed to understand the coming of the light, here the light discloses the darkness of sins - not sins in general, not the sins of the world or of others, but our own sins. Sin is inevitable - we have to recognise it, acknowledge and address it, and have it forgiven (v8-9, familiar from use in our liturgy). Sin gets in the way of our relationship with God the Father and God the Son (v3) and we should not delude ourselves about its effect on us (v2.4). But sin honestly acknowledged and regretted is sin forgiven through Jesus (v2.2-3).

SATURDAY - 1 John 2:7-17

⁷ Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word that you have heard. ⁸ Yet I am writing you a new commandment that is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. ⁹ Whoever says, 'I am in the light', while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness. ¹⁰ Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling. ¹¹ But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.

¹² I am writing to you, little children,
because your sins are forgiven on account of his name.

¹³ I am writing to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I am writing to you, young people,
because you have conquered the evil one.

¹⁴ I write to you, children,
because you know the Father.

I write to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young people,
because you are strong
and the word of God abides in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.

¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; ¹⁶ for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live for ever.

Thought for the day

When we follow Jesus we have to adopt a way of thought and behaviour that reflects the light of Christ and is incompatible with the darkness of sin (v9-11). The poem in verses 12 to 14 stresses some of the beliefs and implications that go along with this. Then (v15-17) we move back into language familiar from Jesus' farewell discourses in John's Gospel (ch 14-17). There and here 'the world' stands for those who are against God (and therefore against Jesus and his followers) and for the temptations they offer (v16), all of them transitory and not worth exchanging for God's eternal promises (v17). A good reminder on which to end this week of varied readings.