



## Parish of Finchampstead and California

# THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

2 - 7 AUGUST 2021

## INTRODUCTION

This week we start a new series of readings from Mark's Gospel. This is generally considered to be the earliest of the Gospel accounts to have been written down in the form we now have it. It is also the shortest of the four Gospels with incidents following one another in rapid succession. As usual the text in bold type gives a focus for the day's Thought.

## MONDAY - Mark 1:1-13

**<sup>1</sup> The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.** <sup>2</sup> As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; <sup>3</sup> the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight"', <sup>4</sup> John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup> Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. <sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

<sup>9</sup> In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

<sup>12</sup> And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup> He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

## ***Thought for the day***

*In these few verses we hear about the OT prediction and coming of John the Baptist (v2-6); how part of his preaching was about one more powerful than him (v7-8); how Jesus came to him, was baptised by him and affirmed by God (v9-11); and how Jesus was tempted in the wilderness (v12-14). But Mark prefaces all this activity, so concisely reported, not with accounts of the birth of Jesus or his genealogy, like Matthew and Luke, nor with his place in God's eternal history, like John, but with a succinct manifesto (v1): the good news (Gospel) starts here; it's all about Jesus who is both God's anointed one (Messiah or Christ) as foretold in the OT, and God's Son. Everything Mark writes points to these truths, and close to the end of the Gospel he records the centurion's words at Jesus' crucifixion, 'Truly this man was God's Son' (15:39).*

## TUESDAY - Mark 1:14-20

<sup>14</sup> Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, <sup>15</sup> and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

**<sup>16</sup> As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup> And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.'** <sup>18</sup> **And immediately they left their nets and followed him.**

<sup>19</sup> As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. <sup>20</sup> Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

## **Thought for the day**

*Some of us have lived with these familiar stories throughout our lives. One of the downsides of this is that we may miss just how remarkable they are. Jesus' first recruits as disciples are two pairs of brothers. Jesus even wanting to extract such a significant proportion of each family's fishing enterprise is both strange and bold (v17,20). And fishermen, why fishermen? Hardly where most teachers would start their search for disciples. And then the four immediate responses to Jesus' call (v18,20), itself vague and mysterious - Fishing for people (v19): what does that mean? What did Jesus see in Peter and Andrew, James and John? What did they see in him? What might he see in us and we in him as he calls us to follow him, again and again?*

## **WEDNESDAY - Mark 1:21-28**

<sup>21</sup> They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught.  
<sup>22</sup> They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup> Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, <sup>24</sup> and he cried out, 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.' <sup>25</sup> But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!' <sup>26</sup> And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.  
**<sup>27</sup> They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, 'What is this? A new teaching—with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.'** <sup>28</sup> At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

## **Thought for the day**

*As he starts his public ministry, Jesus astounds onlookers with his teaching (v22) and amazes them by his power as a healer (v27). In both aspects they refer to his authority, but they don't take the next step of recognising him as 'the Holy One of God,' which the unclean spirit does (v24). We have the advantage of knowing how Jesus' story will unfold and may understand better than people did 2000 years ago the nature of what they called unclean spirits; but to what extent do our reactions to Jesus and his message fully comprehend the power of God working through him then and available to us through the Holy Spirit now?*

## **THURSDAY - Mark 1:29-45**

<sup>29</sup> As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. <sup>30</sup> Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once.  
<sup>31</sup> He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.  
<sup>32</sup> That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. <sup>33</sup> And the whole city was gathered around the door. <sup>34</sup> And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.  
**<sup>35</sup> In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. <sup>36</sup> And Simon and his companions hunted for him. <sup>37</sup> When they found him, they said to him, 'Everyone is searching for you.'** <sup>38</sup> He answered, 'Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.' <sup>39</sup> And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.  
<sup>40</sup> A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, 'If you choose, you can make me clean.' <sup>41</sup> Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I do choose. Be made clean.' <sup>42</sup> Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. <sup>43</sup> After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, <sup>44</sup> saying to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.' <sup>45</sup> But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

## **Thought for the day**

*As Jesus' fame spread (yesterday v28), he healed in private (v29-31,40-45) and in public (v32-33). We know from at least one other account of healing later in the Gospel that Jesus was himself affected by this aspect of his ministry (5:30 - 'power had gone out from him'). No wonder then that*

he needed time to himself and with God (v35). And in this case the result was a widening of the area where he 'proclaimed the message' (v38-39). The disciples meanwhile, excited by the interest and acclaim of the crowds, seemed to think that Jesus should be more available to those who were searching for him (v36-37). Is there a danger that we expect God to dance to our tune rather than we to his?

## **FRIDAY - Mark 2:1-12**

<sup>1</sup> When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. <sup>2</sup> So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. <sup>3</sup> Then some people came, bringing to him a paralysed man, carried by four of them. <sup>4</sup> And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. <sup>5</sup> When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.' <sup>6</sup> Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, <sup>7</sup> 'Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?' <sup>8</sup> At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, 'Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? <sup>9</sup> Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven", or to say, "Stand up and take your mat and walk"? <sup>10</sup> **But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins—he said to the paralytic—** <sup>11</sup> **'I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.'** <sup>12</sup> **And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this.'**

### ***Thought for the day***

*Sometimes we remember better the incidental details of an account such as this than the essential message. It's not entirely our fault - the image of the roof of a house being torn up and the man on his stretcher being lowered through the hole is an arresting one (v4). But the significance lies in what followed - Jesus first forgave the man his sins (v5), to the horror of the watching scribes (v6-7), and then validated his authority to do that by performing a remarkable healing (v10-11). Too glibly we take all this for granted; how would it affect us if we ourselves responded as the crowd did: 'we have never seen anything like this'?*

## **SATURDAY - Mark 2:13-22**

<sup>13</sup> Jesus went out again beside the lake; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. <sup>14</sup> As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him.

<sup>15</sup> And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax-collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him. <sup>16</sup> **When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax-collectors, they said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax-collectors and sinners?'** <sup>17</sup> **When Jesus heard this, he said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.'**

<sup>18</sup> Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, 'Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?' <sup>19</sup> Jesus said to them, 'The wedding-guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. <sup>20</sup> The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day.

<sup>21</sup> 'No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. <sup>22</sup> And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.'

### ***Thought for the day***

*At this early stage the disciples may well have been flummoxed by the scribes' question to them (v16). We know Jesus' answer only too well (v17) and no doubt commend it. The question though is not whether we approve it, or indeed his response to John's disciples about fasting (v19-20) and the 'old and new' sayings (v21-22), but whether we act them out in our own lives.*