



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

9 - 14 AUGUST 2021

INTRODUCTION

We continue our readings from Mark's Gospel. As usual the text in bold type gives a focus for the day's Thought.

MONDAY - Mark 2:23-3:6

²³ One sabbath Jesus was going through the cornfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?' ²⁵ And he said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? ²⁶ He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.' ²⁷ **Then he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; ²⁸ so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.'**

^{3.1} Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. ² They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. ³ And he said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Come forward.' ⁴ Then he said to them, 'Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent. ⁵ He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. ⁶ The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Thought for the day

'Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you' - so starts the fourth of the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:12). By Jesus' time a whole tapestry of prohibitions had been woven around the basic requirement not to work. In his well known comment about God's intentions behind the Commandment (v27-28), Jesus goes to the heart of the matter. He will not be intimidated into ignoring the suffering of the man with the withered hand (v1-5). Undermining muddle-headed human rules and regulations puts him on a collision course with those, until then, in authority (v6). When, if ever, is it right for Christians to disobey the law?

TUESDAY - Mark 3:7-19a

⁷ Jesus departed with his disciples to the lake, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; ⁸ hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon. ⁹ He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him; ¹⁰ for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him. ¹¹ Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, 'You are the Son of God.' ¹² But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.

¹³ **He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴ And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, ¹⁵ and to have authority to cast out demons. ¹⁶ So he appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); ¹⁷ James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); ¹⁸ and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.**

Thought for the day

The twelve were the followers of Jesus who were closest to him and who, after his ascension, were the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. The number twelve has always been taken to be symbolic of the tribes of Israel. Note what Mark tells us about them (v13-15): Jesus called them; they responded; he set them apart, gave them a descriptive title (Apostle) and commissioned them - to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and to exorcise. This pattern of call, response and commissioning is characteristic of Christian life. Today might be a good day to reflect on how Jesus has touched us in this way.

WEDNESDAY - Mark 3:19b-35

¹⁹ Then Jesus went home; ²⁰ and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.' ²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.' ²³ And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, 'How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. ²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

²⁸ 'Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin'— ³⁰ for they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit.'

³¹ Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him.

³² **A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.'** ³³ **And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?'** ³⁴ **And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers.'** ³⁵ **Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.'**

Thought for the day

After rejecting, in the strongest possible terms, the charge against him of having an unclean spirit with power derived from the devil (v22-29), Jesus has to deal with his own family and their concern for his safety (v21,31). In a radical reinterpretation of what 'family' means he refuses to engage with them (v32-35). While this was a shocking rejection of traditional Jewish understanding of the obligation due to one's own family, it is another example (see Monday's reading) of Jesus' teaching that all behaviour is subject to God's will, not to human conventions.

THURSDAY - Mark 4:1-20

¹ Again Jesus began to teach beside the lake. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the lake and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the lake on the land.

² He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: ³ 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶ And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷ **Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain.** ⁸ Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.' ⁹ And he said, 'Let anyone with ears to hear listen.'

¹⁰ When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. ¹¹ And he said to them, 'To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; ¹² in order that "they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.'"

¹³ And he said to them, 'Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? ¹⁴ The sower sows the word. ¹⁵ These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. ¹⁶ And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷ But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution

arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. ¹⁸ **And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, ¹⁹ but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing.** ²⁰ And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.'

Thought for the day

The Sower is not only one of the best known parables but also one of the few to which Jesus gives a detailed explanation. For today's Thought I've selected the words from the parable and the related explanation about the seed (that is the word - v14) that fell among thorns (v7,18-19) because it seems close to the position that many of us are in. Who is not subject to 'the cares or the world', 'the lure of wealth', 'the desire for other things'? We would so like to rise above such temptation, and sometimes we can, but we are always at risk of our good intentions - our response to God's word - being choked by them. The greatest risk of all is not to recognise the dangers and therefore not to seek God's help in confronting them.

FRIDAY - Mark 4:21-34

²¹ He said to them, 'Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lampstand? ²² For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light. ²³ Let anyone with ears to hear listen.' ²⁴ **And he said to them, 'Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you. ²⁵ For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.'**

²⁶ He also said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷ and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. ²⁸ The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.'

³⁰ He also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.'

³³ With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; ³⁴ he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

Thought for the day

In Matthew (25:14-30) and Luke (19:26), Jesus' words in verse 25 are illustrated by the parable of the talents. The message of the parable is often diluted by our sympathy for the the risk-averse behaviour of the third servant, and the harshness of the treatment he receives. Here the emphasis (v24) is rather different and involves an attitude (giving) rather than an action (making money). As in the Lord's prayer on forgiveness (Matthew 6:12,14-15), elsewhere in the Sermon on the Mount on not judging (Matthew 7:1-2), and in the parable of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-46), Jesus' teaching couldn't be clearer - God's attitude to us will be determined by our attitude towards others.

SATURDAY - Mark 4:35-41

³⁵ On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.' ³⁶ And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. ³⁷ A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' ³⁹ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. ⁴⁰ He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?' ⁴¹ **And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'**

Thought for the day

From the parables in readings earlier this week, we move to the drama of Jesus stilling the storm. Once again this is such a familiar incident that we may be tempted to say to ourselves, 'Oh yes - I know all that - wasn't Jesus clever?' and ignore the wide-reaching implications of the almost supernatural power he showed. These were not lost on the disciples once the crisis was over: there

is only one possible answer to the question they asked one another, 'Who is this ...?' (v41). The answer of course is 'God' (see Psalm 107:21-30, Jonah 1:4-5,11-12,15-16): Jesus' power was not so much supernatural as divine. The disciples 'were filled with great awe' or in another translation 'terrified'. They had experienced something awesome in the truest sense of that word. As this week ends should we not pray for God to reveal himself so powerfully and directly to each of us in our own hearts - and as we gather together in worship?

JRE / 1.7.21