



## Parish of Finchampstead and California

# THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

23 - 28 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 6:45-56

<sup>45</sup> Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. <sup>46</sup> After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray.

<sup>47</sup> When evening came, the boat was out on the lake, and he was alone on the land. <sup>48</sup> When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the lake. He intended to pass them by. <sup>49</sup> But when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; <sup>50</sup> for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, '**Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.**' <sup>51</sup> **Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded,** <sup>52</sup> **for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.**

<sup>53</sup> When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. <sup>54</sup> When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, <sup>55</sup> and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. <sup>56</sup> And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the market-places, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

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

*Mark is careful to tie this incident in with the feeding of the 5000 by linking the disciples' astonishment when Jesus got into the boat (v51) with their failure to understand the significance of the feeding (v52). Although we regard both accounts as miracles (and always want to know how they happened as if they were a magician's tricks), it is perhaps better to think of them as epiphanies, that is Jesus showing the disciples who he was, like the Transfiguration. God had fed the Israelites in the wilderness through the agency of Moses; God had shown his absolute command and control over the Red Sea through Moses. But here was one greater than Moses who himself fed a vast throng of people, who himself showed supremacy over the water and the wind, who in the Greek words translated 'It is I' (v50) appropriated to himself God's own Hebrew self-description 'I am'. He was, and is, so much more than a miracle-worker; he is our Lord and Saviour.*

### TUESDAY - Mark 7:1-13

<sup>1</sup> Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, <sup>2</sup> they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. <sup>3</sup> (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; <sup>4</sup> and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) <sup>5</sup> So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?' <sup>6</sup> He said to them, 'Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, "This people honours me with their

lips, but their hearts are far from me; <sup>7</sup> in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines." <sup>8</sup> **You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.'**

<sup>9</sup> Then he said to them, 'You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. <sup>10</sup> For Moses said, "Honour your father and your mother"; and, "Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die." <sup>11</sup> But you say that if anyone tells father or mother, "Whatever support you might have had from me is Corban" (that is, an offering to God)— <sup>12</sup> then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother, <sup>13</sup> thus making void the word of God through your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many things like this.'

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

*Jesus takes aim in this reading at attitudes which, however well-intentioned they might have been originally, are easily hijacked to frustrate God's intentions for humanity. He goes back to the Ten Commandments - specifically to the command to honour parents (v10). Set against this is the later concept of dedicating wealth to God (v11), which could be used to nullify the commandment. That is Jesus' complaint against the scribes and Pharisees (v8). Are there ways in which we as individuals or together as a church might fall into the same trap?*

### **WEDNESDAY - Mark 7:14-23**

<sup>14</sup> Then he called the crowd again and said to them, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand; <sup>15</sup> there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.'

<sup>17</sup> When he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. <sup>18</sup> He said to them, 'Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, <sup>19</sup> since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?' (Thus he declared all foods clean.) <sup>20</sup> And he said, '**It is what comes out of a person that defiles.** <sup>21</sup> **For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come:** fornication, theft, murder, <sup>22</sup> adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. <sup>23</sup> All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.'

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

*The discussion about the Jewish purity and food laws continues, first with the crowd, then with the disciples. Note that in rejecting them completely (see Mark's editorial comment in verse 19), Jesus does not seek to replace them with other laws. Instead he makes a statement about where real evil comes from - from each of our hearts (v20-21). His list of evil behaviour is similar to the one Paul gives in Galatians 5:19-21 as a contrast to the fruits of the Spirit. Paul emphasises the effect of such sins - separating us from God - whereas Jesus focuses on the fact that they derive from deep within us and are what really pollute us.*

### **THURSDAY - Mark 7:24-30**

<sup>24</sup> From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, <sup>25</sup> but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet.

<sup>26</sup> Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. <sup>27</sup> **He said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.'** <sup>28</sup> **But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.'** <sup>29</sup> **Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.'** <sup>30</sup> So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

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

*This incident, in which Jesus first refuses to heal a Gentile woman's daughter (v27) but then relents (v29), follows on from the last two days' consideration of the Jewish purity laws. It's always a difficult account to reconcile easily with what we might have expected of Jesus. On the surface it seems as though it's the woman's clever response (v28) that unlocks Jesus' compassion. But would Jesus really not have healed her daughter if she had been less quick-witted? It seems unlikely, but still this whole exchange, even though it does end well, may leave us feeling rather uncomfortable. How might we deal with such feelings of discomfort?*

## **FRIDAY - Mark 7:31-37**

<sup>31</sup> Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. <sup>32</sup> They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. <sup>33</sup> **He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. <sup>34</sup> Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened.'** <sup>35</sup> **And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.** <sup>36</sup> Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. <sup>37</sup> They were astounded beyond measure, saying, 'He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.'

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

*Yesterday we read about Jesus healing a young woman at a distance. Today the man's plight evokes a much more intimate hands-on response. First he takes the man out of sight of the crowd (v33) in just the way a doctor would treat a patient today. Then he touches ears and tongue and commands them to be healed (v34), suggesting that the physical contact is significant in enabling the healing power to be passed from him to the one afflicted. It's not clear why this approach is necessary in this case but not in others, but it works (v35). Perhaps it's because removing deafness and a speech impediment was such a big deal, and was clearly perceived as such by the crowd (v36-37). But once again we may be left with a degree of uncertainty as to why this very specific method of healing was needed in this case.*

## **SATURDAY - Mark 8:1-10**

<sup>1</sup> In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat, he called his disciples and said to them, <sup>2</sup> 'I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. <sup>3</sup> If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way—and some of them have come from a great distance.' <sup>4</sup> His disciples replied, 'How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?' <sup>5</sup> He asked them, 'How many loaves do you have?' They said, 'Seven.' <sup>6</sup> **Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them to the crowd. <sup>7</sup> They had also a few small fish; and after blessing them, he ordered that these too should be distributed. <sup>8</sup> They ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full.** <sup>9</sup> Now there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. <sup>10</sup> And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

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

*Some scholars think that this second miraculous feeding story is simply a variant of the feeding of the 5000 which acquired an independent life when the Gospels were still being transmitted orally. But there's no doubt that Mark himself was convinced that the feeding of the 4000 was a separate incident. While it's not clear that the distinction between 5000 and 4000 is important - they're both very large, impossibly large, for the amount of food on hand - the numbers of baskets of fragments almost certainly do, as we shall see in a further exchange that Jesus has with the disciples in next week's readings. Perhaps there is an important lesson for us here about how to read the Bible - skipping over the detail of a familiar passage because we think we know all it has to tell us may cause us to miss important parts of its message.*