



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

30 August - 4 September 2021

INTRODUCTION

This week we reach a pivotal period in Mark's Gospel - we hear about Peter's first recognition of Jesus for who he really was; this is followed by the Transfiguration; and Jesus explaining to the disciples what the future holds for him and them. Coinciding as they do with the beginning of a new school year and something like a return to life as normal, this seems an appropriate time to conclude these Thoughts for the Day. When we started preparing them just before Easter last year, at the start of the first lockdown, we had little idea that they would be needed for so long. For anyone who has found this opportunity to consider a daily Bible passage helpful, and might like to continue, we can obtain Bible Reading Fellowship notes which do much the same. If you are interested, please speak to Pamela in the Parish Office. As usual in these Thoughts the text in bold type provides a focus.

MONDAY - Mark 8:11-21

¹¹ The Pharisees came and began to argue with Jesus, asking him for a sign from heaven, to test him. ¹² And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, 'Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation.' ¹³ And he left them, and getting into the boat again, he went across to the other side.

¹⁴ Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. ¹⁵ And he cautioned them, saying, 'Watch out—beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.' ¹⁶ They said to one another, 'It is because we have no bread.' ¹⁷ And becoming aware of it, Jesus said to them, 'Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? ¹⁸ **Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember?** ¹⁹ **When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?** They said to him, 'Twelve.' ²⁰ **And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?** And they said to him, 'Seven.' ²¹ Then he said to them, 'Do you not yet understand?'

Thought for the day

We finished last week's readings wondering about the relationship between the two feeding stories. Today we discover we were right to do so, because the disciples clearly didn't understand, though the position is complicated by Jesus' reference to the Pharisees and Herod (v15), and by the disciples' lack of bread (v14,16). In his comments about the two feedings Jesus suggests that the implications ought to be clear (v18), and have something to do with the various numbers he reminds the disciples about (v19-20). But the coded message remains coded and we are left with two miraculous feedings in which Jesus demonstrated himself to be greater than Moses, indeed on a par with God. To what extent should we worry about loose ends such as these in the Bible?

TUESDAY - Mark 8:22-26

²² They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. ²³ **He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, 'Can you see anything?'** ²⁴ **And the man looked up and said, 'I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.'** ²⁵ **Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.** ²⁶ Then he sent him away to his home, saying, 'Do not even go into the village.'

Thought for the day

There are clear similarities between this healing account and that of the deaf and dumb man we read about last Friday (7:31-37) - the healing away from public view, Jesus' touch of the eyes, the instruction to silence. But today's incident is unique in one way: it's the only time a healing happens in two stages. It's not clear that this is significant in relation to the event itself, though it makes it memorable. But it seems likely that Mark has placed it at this point in his narrative to prepare his readers for the disciples' partial understanding in tomorrow's reading.

WEDNESDAY - Mark 8:27-9:1

²⁷ Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' ²⁸ And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' ²⁹ **He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.'** ³⁰ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹ Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² He said all this quite openly. **And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.** ³³ **But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan. For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'**

³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸ Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.' ^{9:1} And he said to them, 'Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.'

Thought for the day

This passage marks a turning point in the Gospel - in two ways, though they are inter-related. First the disciples, with Peter acting as spokesman, start to realise just who Jesus is - no longer simply their teacher, but God's anointed one, the one foretold by the prophets, the Messiah or Christ (v29). But it is only a start (like the first stage of the restoration of sight in yesterday's reading) because, immediately afterwards, Peter is shown (v32-33) to have only a partial understanding of Jesus' interpretation of what the role of God's Messiah involves - great suffering, rejection, death (v31). It is Jesus' articulation of what lies ahead for him, the first time he has spoken so directly to the disciples, which is the second turning-point. The implications for his followers are just as stark (v34-35). Throughout subsequent history these words of Jesus about the cost of discipleship have proved true, as indeed they still do for many of our sisters and brothers around the world today.

THURSDAY - Mark 9:2-13

² **Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them,** ³ **and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.** ⁴ **And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.** ⁵ **Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.'** ⁶ **He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.** ⁷ **Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him.'** ⁸ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰ So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean. ¹¹ Then they asked him, 'Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?' ¹² He said to them, 'Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things. How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt? ¹³ But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him.'

Thought for the day

In this remarkable epiphany, God confirmed Jesus' destiny, as Jesus himself described it in yesterday's reading. The presence of Moses and Elijah, the pre-eminent OT figures representing the Law and the Prophets, demonstrated again Jesus' superiority to all other human beings. The incident was also an epiphany (showing) of Jesus for who he really was to the three disciples - the dazzling white (v3) a sign of God, the voice of God (v7) speaking directly to them. No wonder they were terrified (v6). Above the altar in St James' church there is a stained glass representation of the Transfiguration. For much of the day the window shows the scene on the mountaintop accurately enough - but it dazzles only briefly in the early morning when the sun blazes through the glass. Are we early morning people who can grasp the full significance of this extraordinary event, even if we need to stretch our imaginations to do so? Or are we so stuck on how it happened, rather than why, that we miss all its brilliance?

FRIDAY - Mark 9:14-29

¹⁴ When they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. ¹⁵ When the whole crowd saw him, they were immediately overcome with awe, and they ran forward to greet him. ¹⁶ He asked them, 'What are you arguing about with them?' ¹⁷ Someone from the crowd answered him, 'Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; ¹⁸ and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so.' ¹⁹ He answered them, 'You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me.' ²⁰ And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it threw the boy into convulsions, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. ²¹ Jesus asked the father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' And he said, 'From childhood. ²² It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.' ²³ **Jesus said to him, 'If you are able.—All things can be done for the one who believes.'** ²⁴ **Immediately the father of the child cried out, 'I believe; help my unbelief.'** ²⁵ When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, 'You spirit that keep this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again.' ²⁶ After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, 'He is dead.' ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand. ²⁸ When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, 'Why could we not cast it out?' ²⁹ He said to them, 'This kind can come out only through prayer.'

Thought for the day

This is quite a complex incident, with Mark emphasising the inability of the disciples to effect a cure. But at the heart of it is yet another parent's desperation over the plight of their child. The disciples having failed (v18), the man approaches Jesus tentatively and politely to do something, anything, 'if you are able' (v22). Jesus' response seems brusque but, by introducing the idea of the power of belief (v23), he enables the man to declare his confidence while still recognising that perhaps that confidence was not perfect ('help my unbelief' - v24). These words, and Jesus' generous-hearted response to them in curing the young man (v26), ought to be a huge encouragement to us - whatever our shortcomings, however inadequate we feel our faith to be, Jesus doesn't expect perfection, only enough faith for us to realise our need for his help.

SATURDAY - Mark 9:30-37

³⁰ They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; ³¹ **for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.'** ³² **But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.**

³³ Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the way?' ³⁴ But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. ³⁵ He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.' ³⁶ Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'

Thought for the day

Our readings this week end on a sombre note with Jesus telling his disciples for the second time what lies in store for him (v31-32). At least this time Peter doesn't tell him off (8:32 in Wednesday's

reading). But rather than trying to work out what Jesus meant, the disciples fall back on promoting their own importance (v34). The child Jesus then presents to them represents the least powerful, the least regarded, the least influential of people - this is what the disciples should aspire to. Down the ages, the followers of Jesus have been called to be 'the servants of all' (v35). And so are we.

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