

Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

EASTER WEEK

18-23 APRIL 2022

INTRODUCTION

For Easter Week we have daily Bible passages describing events in the hours and days following Jesus' resurrection, concluding with Paul's summary of the belief handed down to him. The Gospel readings are mainly from Luke.

MONDAY - The Women visit the tomb (Luke 24:1-12)

¹ On the first day of the week, at early dawn, the women came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵ The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. ⁶ Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' ⁸ Then they remembered his words, ⁹ and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰ Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹² But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Thought for the day

The key element of all the Gospel accounts of the first Easter morning is that the tomb where Jesus' body had been laid late on Friday afternoon was empty. It is also asserted by all of them that the first witnesses to this event were the women who had been unable to prepare the body properly for burial on Friday (insufficient time) or Saturday (the sabbath - no work allowed). These common reports are more significant than the divergent elements which follow. Luke's account involves two men in dazzling clothes (v4) - as does Jesus' Ascension 40 days later (Acts 1:10). The women act as messengers to the male disciples who disbelieve them (v10-11). But Peter wonders and, impetuous as ever, rushes to the tomb and sees that the body is not there (v12). Of course the whole idea of rising from the dead was as extraordinary then as it is now, but to the great mystery of how, and precisely when, it happened is added a further element of mystery: when women's testimony was so little regarded, as the disciples reaction showed, why did God entrust them with the messages of the men in dazzling white and not the male disciples?

TUESDAY - On the road (Luke 24:13-35)

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' ¹⁹ He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They

were at the tomb early this morning,²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive.²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.'²⁵ Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared.²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?'²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on.²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them.³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.³² They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?'³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together.³⁴ They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon.'³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Thought for the day

This incident is known only to Luke but he clearly considered it to be of great significance - the events of Easter morning which we looked at yesterday took 12 verses to describe, the road to Emmaus 23 verses. It's importance quite likely lies in the link it provides between the empty tomb and the first appearance of Jesus to his disciples (tomorrow's passage). But it's much more than simply a link. It has its own mysterious aspects - why did the two travellers not recognise Jesus until he broke bread with him (v30), especially as their hearts had been burning as he spoke about himself from the Scriptures (v32)? And how and why did he disappear during the meal (v31)? In these two ways - the talking on the road and the sharing of a meal - Jesus situated himself in exactly the way that Christians worship God in the service of Holy Communion: the ministry of the Word is followed by the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Against that background we might well ask ourselves when was the last time we felt our hearts burning within us - in church or elsewhere?

WEDNESDAY - Jesus appears to his Disciples (Luke 24:36-48)

³⁶ While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'³⁷ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost.³⁸ He said to them, 'Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?'³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.'⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.⁴¹ While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?'⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish,⁴³ and he took it and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.'⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,⁴⁶ and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day,⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.'⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.'

Thought for the day

When the women returned from the empty tomb, the disciples thought their report an idle tale (v11). Now, in spite of the cumulative testimony from the women, from Peter (v34), and from these two travellers, and even in Jesus' presence, some at least still disbelieved (v41). The marks of the nails in his hands and feet were insufficient to convince them, so he ate a piece of fish to show he wasn't a ghost (v43). Once again Jesus teaches how the OT scriptures pointed to him and foretold his suffering, death and resurrection (v46). He tells the disciples that, because they are witnesses to his truth, they are to proclaim repentance and forgiveness to all nations in his name (v47-48). Luke's Gospel ends with Jesus ascending into heaven after telling the disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they receive the Holy Spirit. We hear at the start of Acts that they did what he directed and all eleven (that is, without Judas) stuck together in Jerusalem (1:13). The earlier waverers had been convinced.

THURSDAY - The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

Thought for the day

Matthew has no account of Jesus appearing to the disciples in Jerusalem after the resurrection as Luke and John do (see yesterday's Thought for Luke's); nor does he report the Ascension (only Luke does). What Matthew gives us instead, as the conclusion to his Gospel, is this commissioning of the disciples to go out to make more disciples, to baptize and to teach (v19-20). Until this point Jesus' own peripatetic ministry had been almost exclusively to Jews but from now on the focus is outward - to all nations. (It's probably no coincidence that Gentiles - the magi - are given such prominence at the beginning of Jesus' life, serving as an early marker for this later change in direction.) Two other points are worth noting. Matthew had no particular need to tell us that, even at this point, 'some doubted' (v17) but his acknowledgement of that helps us to believe what he tells us, as it also allows to let our own doubts surface. And in the final sentence, though Jesus is leaving, he is not abandoning them. He was always with them as he is also with us, if only we will let him.

FRIDAY - Jesus returns to his Father (Acts 1:3-11)

³ After his suffering Jesus presented himself alive to the apostles 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

On the basis of this passage (v3) the Church has always celebrated Jesus' Ascension 40 days after Easter Day. So we are anticipating a little by considering it now. On the other hand it does provide something of a fulcrum between the Gospels where we hear about Jesus and his earthly ministry and the Acts of the Apostles where his followers take over the spreading of the word and development of the fellowship of the Way. Today's reading is the second of Luke's two versions of the Ascension and contains more details than the shorter one at the end of his Gospel. Here he covers some of the same ground as Matthew's great commission (yesterday) but adds an important rider - the disciples are not to leave Jerusalem yet (v4), not until they have received the gift of the Holy Spirit from God (v4-5,8). Only then is it time to go 'to the ends of the earth'. Having given his instructions, Jesus himself heads off in a very different direction and returns to his Father in heaven (v11).

SATURDAY - Paul passes on the Good News of the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:3-5,20-22)

[Part of Paul's summary of what he had heard about the resurrection of Jesus and its implications, some years before the Gospels were written down.]

³ For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴ and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas [=Peter], then to the twelve.

²⁰ Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. ²¹ For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; ²² for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.

Thought for the day

Christian creeds have grown substantially both in length and in complexity since Paul could write down in a few words what was passed on to him after his conversion (v3-5). But his conversion experience was such a powerful one - meeting the risen Lord Jesus in that way struck him as being just as real and valid as having known him in the flesh - that perhaps the knowledge of how things happened and when seemed less necessary to him than for those who have been nurtured in the faith without such a drastic intervention. It's not that Paul was uninterested in the past but, as we see in verses 20-22, he looks to the past to explain the present and guide the future. Because he met Christ on the road to Damascus he has no doubt that he was raised from the dead and provides the model (first fruits) for those who will come after (v20). And this makes sense to him: because death entered humanity through the sin of the historical Adam so the sin and its consequences has already been and will remain remedied for all future time (v21-22). One of the ironies of Easter is that it's over so quickly. Wouldn't it be wonderful to hold onto the feeling of release and happiness that many of us feel on Easter Day throughout the year? How might we do that?

JRE / 30.3.22