

Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

HOLY WEEK

11 to 16 April 2022

INTRODUCTION

For Holy Week we have daily Bible passages describing events in the few days leading up to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion on Good Friday. This year the readings are mainly from Luke's Gospel.

MONDAY - Weeping over Jerusalem and Cleansing the Temple (Luke 19:41-48)

⁴¹ As Jesus came near Jerusalem with his disciples and saw the city, he wept over it, ⁴² saying, 'If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace. But now they are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴ They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.'

⁴⁵ Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; ⁴⁶ and he said, 'It is written, "My house shall be a house of prayer"; but you have made it a den of robbers.'

⁴⁷ Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him; ⁴⁸ but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard.

Thought for the day

Luke is the only Gospel writer to follow the momentous events of the first Palm Sunday with this account of Jesus' second lament over Jerusalem, whose name meant city of peace. His concerns centre around the city's failure to see how peace might have come to it through him: he is God with us, Emmanuel, so at that very moment God was visiting the city (v44). Everything that Jesus said in the lament could be traced back to the Old Testament prophets. And when he went to the temple he justified his cleansing action with words from Isaiah and Jeremiah (v46). What the temple authorities saw was someone disrupting the religious status quo for which they were responsible. It's interesting that the crowd of Jews was much more impressed than their leaders (v48). As I write this, death and destruction have been unleashed upon Ukraine and its people and the church in Russia has remained silent. Surely Jesus must be lamenting both the actions themselves and the silence surrounding them. Surely he calls us not to be complicit, and not only to strive for peace but to do all we can to help those caught up in the conflict or fleeing from it.

TUESDAY - The parable of the tenants (Luke 20:9-19)

⁹ He began to tell the people this parable: 'A man planted a vineyard, and leased it to tenants, and went to another country for a long time. ¹⁰ When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants in order that they might give him his share of the produce of the vineyard; but the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ¹¹ Next he sent another slave; that one also they beat and insulted and sent away empty-handed. ¹² And he sent yet a third; this one also they wounded and threw out. ¹³ Then the owner of the vineyard said, "What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him." ¹⁴ But when the tenants saw him, they discussed it among themselves and said, "This is the heir; let us kill him so that the inheritance may be ours." ¹⁵ So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? ¹⁶ He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.' When they heard this,

they said, 'Heaven forbid.'¹⁷ But he looked at them and said, 'What then does this text mean: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone"?¹⁸ Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.'¹⁹ When the scribes and chief priests realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to lay hands on him at that very hour, but they feared the people.

Thought for the day

Jesus does nothing to alter the mindset of the religious leaders who, as we heard yesterday, were determined to arrest him. In fact by telling this parable Jesus could only inflame their anger further (v19). The idea of a vineyard representing God's people Israel was a well-known one, especially in Isaiah 5:1-7. There it was the people who disappointed God. But in Jesus' parable it's not the vineyard itself that disappoints but its tenants. They refused to pay their rent and mistreated those sent to collect it (v10-12). (The slaves represent the OT prophets.) So the owner sent his own son whom the tenants killed (v15). As a result the owner destroyed the tenants (v16) and handed the vineyard over to new ones, by implication Jesus' followers or by Luke's time the church. It's chastening to reflect that, although what Jesus said was true initially, once the Christian church had taken on responsibility for the vineyard, it had and has a tendency to display institutional behaviour just as inimical to Christ's teaching as the Sadducees and other leaders of Jesus' time. Why is that, and what can we do about it?

WEDNESDAY - Destruction of the Temple (Luke 21:5-24)

⁵ When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, ⁶ 'As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.'

⁷ They asked him, 'Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?' ⁸ And he said, 'Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, "I am he." and, "The time is near." Do not go after them.

⁹ 'When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.'¹⁰ Then he said to them, 'Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; ¹¹ there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

¹² 'But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. ¹³ This will give you an opportunity to testify. ¹⁴ So make up your minds not to prepare your defence in advance; ¹⁵ for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷ You will be hated by all because of my name. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your souls.

²⁰ 'When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near.

²¹ Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those inside the city must leave it, and those out in the country must not enter it; ²² for these are days of vengeance, as a fulfilment of all that is written. ²³ Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days. For there will be great distress on the earth and wrath against this people; ²⁴ they will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.'

Thought for the day

In Mark's Gospel (13:1-37), which is generally thought to have been written before Luke's, Jesus' prophecy about the destruction of the temple heralds the return of Jesus himself as the Son of Man (Mark 13:26-27). For Luke the focus for the turmoil is the destruction of the temple and of the city of Jerusalem itself (v5-6,20-24), echoing and expanding the earlier lament we read on Monday. But in addition to this catastrophe for the Jewish people in general, Jesus has difficult words for his followers - they will be arrested and persecuted (v12). This will not be a time for fear or running away (though ironically this is exactly what the disciples will do in a few days' time) but an opportunity to witness to Jesus - and it is Jesus who will give them the words to say (v13-15). In a way we might see this as an introduction to Luke's sequel to his Gospel - the Acts of the Apostles - where we find many of the early Christians doing precisely this. It will be difficult, but the message will endure, even if some are lost on the way (v16-19). Few of us will have experienced at first hand

this kind of persecution and are probably grateful for that. But we know that in many countries of the world our Christian brothers and sisters do suffer discrimination, threats and violence. Holy Week is a good time to remember them and pray for them, and perhaps to reflect on how we might respond if we found ourselves in their situation.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

The Last Supper (Luke 22:7-23)

⁷ Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸ So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it.' ⁹ They asked him, 'Where do you want us to make preparations for it?' ¹⁰ 'Listen,' he said to them, 'when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters ¹¹ and say to the owner of the house, "The teacher asks you, 'Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" ¹² He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there.' ¹³ So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

¹⁴ When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶ for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' ¹⁷ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves; ¹⁸ for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' ¹⁹ Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' ²⁰ And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. ²¹ But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. ²² For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed.' ²³ Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this.

Thought for the day (1)

For Jesus this meal was clearly important and he tells his disciples so (v15). It sounds as though some preparation has already been made for the room, which makes sense as everyone in the city full of pilgrims for the Passover would have the same intention. Luke's account of the meal itself is different from Mark's and Matthew's in so far as Jesus takes a cup of wine first before breaking the bread - and then another cup after supper. The words for the bread and the second cup are similar to those in the other accounts, focusing on what they mean for the disciples ('my body' and 'the covenant in my blood') and how they are to respond ('do this in remembrance of me') (v19-20). With the meal in its original context, and on this day when we mark the institution of Holy Communion, it may be a good time to reflect on what exactly those words mean for us, familiar as they are. But what are we to make of the first cup (v17-18)? It's not clear, but perhaps it is a prelude to the meal and to what follows. Perhaps too it marks the separation of Jesus from the disciples as his future takes on a different dimension 'in the kingdom of God' (v16) from theirs in the world. But note that they are to share their burden, as indeed we find them doing at the start of the Acts of the Apostles, even when betrayal is in the air (v21-22). Of course Judas is not the only betrayer - all the disciples will betray Jesus by abandoning him to his fate. And don't we all in our own ways betray Jesus too?

Footwashing (John 13:1-15)

¹ Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴ got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' ⁷ Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' ⁸ Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head.' ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, 'One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.' ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.' ¹² After he had washed

their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you?' ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

Thought for the day (2)

In John's Gospel, the Last Supper is implied but not stated. (Nor incidentally does John give an account of Jesus and the three disciples in Gethsemane.) Instead John reports a different kind of ritual, where Jesus 'coming from God and going to God', and having been entrusted with God's authority (v3), uses all that power not to command but to be utterly submissive - washing his disciples' feet, the job normally of a slave. Peter, though he goes over the top in his response (v8-9), at least recognises the significance of Jesus' action. And in his response Jesus honours Peter and the others, except Judas, in an extraordinary way by telling them they have already become entirely clean - they have bathed, almost they have been baptised, in Jesus through their closeness to him (v10). When he has finished washing their feet, Jesus makes sure that the disciples understand not only what he has done for them but also that they must act similarly to one another (v14). And so the bread and wine and the towel and water complement one another as symbols of our relationship on the one hand with God and on the other with those around us.

Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-53)

³⁹ He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ When he reached the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.' ⁴¹ Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, ⁴² 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.' ⁴³ Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. ⁴⁴ In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. ⁴⁵ When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, 'Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.'

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; ⁴⁸ but Jesus said to him, 'Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?' ⁴⁹ When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, 'Lord, should we strike with the sword?' ⁵⁰ Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹ But Jesus said, 'No more of this.' And he touched his ear and healed him. ⁵² Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? ⁵³ When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.'

Thought for the day (3)

Luke's account of Jesus' agony in the garden is different from Mark's and Matthew's in a number of ways. There is no mention of Peter, James and John having a special, intimate involvement, nor is there the repeated disappointment with their failure to stay awake - just the single question. Instead he tells the disciples at start and end of this passage to pray not to come to the time of trial (v40, 46). While he himself was praying we read of an angel giving him strength (v43) and yet how his sweat became as blood (v44). These descriptions are also unique to Luke. And then Judas and the soldiers come, there is a small fracas, ended by Jesus (v50-51), and the time has come for Jesus to be led away and for the power of darkness to prevail (v53). If you've made it this far, with three Thoughts for today, how do you feel at this point of the story? Which of the events of the first Maundy Thursday stands out most for you?

GOOD FRIDAY- At the Cross (Luke 23:26-49)

²⁶ As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷ A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. ²⁸ But Jesus turned to them and said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For the days are surely coming when they will say, "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed." ³⁰ Then they

will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us"; and to the hills, "Cover us." ³¹ For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?'

³² Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³ When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴ Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots to divide his clothing. ³⁵ And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one.' ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, ³⁷ and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself.' ³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us.' ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' ⁴² Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' ⁴³ He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, ⁴⁵ while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.' Having said this, he breathed his last. ⁴⁷ When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, 'Certainly this man was innocent.' ⁴⁸ And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. ⁴⁹ But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Thought for the day

Luke's account of the crucifixion is different from Mark's and Matthew's, whose accounts reach their climax in Jesus' desolation ('My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'). Luke's portrayal is of a man in control - in control on his way to execution as he warns the daughters of Jerusalem what will befall them (v28-31); in control as the torture of crucifixion begins ('Father forgive ...' - v34); in control of the destiny of the deserving criminal ('... with me in Paradise' - v43); in control of himself as his life comes to an end ('Father, into your hands ...' - v46). This control and the compassion that accompanied it had a striking effect on the hard-bitten centurion (v47) and on the crowds who had come to see 'the spectacle' (v48). But imagine how hard it still was for Jesus' followers to see their teacher and friend die (v49).

At the three hour service at St James' today we'll be looking deeply into the passion and death of Jesus through the lens of his three sayings from the cross in Luke's account. Most people reading this Thought won't come to that service but we could all reflect on what they say to us about Jesus as he modelled Godly behaviour to us for the last time in his earthly life and used his final words for the benefit of others and to hand himself back to God his father.

SATURDAY (Luke 23:50-56)

⁵⁰ Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, ⁵¹ had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. ⁵² This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁵³ Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. ⁵⁴ It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. ⁵⁵ The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. ⁵⁶ Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments.

On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

Thought for the day

The sabbath started at 6 o'clock in the evening of the previous day so the activity of the previous 24 hours didn't come to an end with Jesus' death. Joseph would have had to have worked fast to ensure the corpse was placed in the tomb by then. The women had no time to anoint the body for burial. They would have spent the next day waiting - but only for the clock to move round and the new dawn arrive so that they could do what they had to do. Our waiting is of a different kind - we have always known that Good Friday will be followed by Easter Day; so Holy Saturday is a good day, in its between times

role, to reflect on what those two momentous days mean for us and what they might mean for the world, if only they were better understood. In reality today may be no different from most other Saturdays except insofar as it's part of a four day holiday weekend. But perhaps, however busy we are, it would be a good thing to spend a few moments at least with the women, watching and waiting.

JRE / 22.3.22