

Friday (Thomas Merton)

Life in Christ is life in the mystery of the cross. It is not only a hidden supernatural participation in the divine life in eternity, but a participation in a divine mystery, a *sacred action* in which God himself enters into time and, with the co-operation of people who have answered his call and have been united in a holy assembly, the Church, carries out the work of our redemption.

Scripture (Ephesians 3:17-21)

May Christ live in your hearts through faith, and them planted in love and built on love, with all God's holy people you will have the strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth; so that, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond knowledge, you may be filled with the utter fullness of God. Glory be to him whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory be to him from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.

Detailed discussion notes from a Scripture group's thoughts on the readings for this Sunday, trying to answer the questions below, are available at www.sthelenscrosby.org.uk. Go to 'prayer' then 'Thinking outside the pew'.

Q1 When will God's word be fulfilled?

Q2 Why doesn't Jesus explain himself clearly?

Q3 If you were a field, how much of you would be 'good soil'?

(this question is for individuals, families, churches, societies)

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15th Week of Ordinary Time

A church for patchy Christians

Our Christian belief that God is all powerful should allow us to profess confidently that his Kingdom will come and that people will come to live in his ways. Given the state of the world today, this would be greeted with scepticism by many people who don't believe in God, and people who do believe perhaps find it hard to convince people, resorting to phrases like, 'God works in mysterious ways', or 'He has a different timetable'. Both of these are true, but don't take account of the way he works through us.

Isaiah's imagery of the journey water takes is worth pondering. Who knows where your cup of tea has been, or how many forms of life it has been a part of since it fell as rain or snow, but at every stage it is intimately part of the plant or creature and is active, causing growth, giving life. On its journey, the water will encounter many obstacles which hold it up, divert it or pollute it, but it is never stopped and always returns to the heavens having given life. Like the water, God's Spirit becomes part of our being and is active within us. All we need is to be thirsty.

In the context of Isaiah and the invitation to the new Covenant being open to all, it is appropriate that Jesus teaches by the shores of the lake surrounded by crowds of ordinary people, (Matthew 13:1-23) rather than in the temple surrounded by learned scholars but it seems to be a contradiction that Jesus chooses to teach in parables which will keep the mysteries of the Kingdom hidden from some but reveal them to others, suggesting that God only selects certain people to be admitted to the Kingdom. The Parable of the Sower, however, shows that God is not selective: just as Jesus speaks openly for all to hear, the sower does not carefully plant the seeds only in good soil but scatters it everywhere. Jesus' quotation from Isaiah shows that he is aware that people's hearts have become coarse and dull, and so do not allow God's word to penetrate – their choice, not his, but like the water, God's word cannot be stopped.

If I read the parable as the different soils being different people, I will end up trying to be the good soil. This ends up with a religion where God demands perfection, but Jesus by the lake teaches otherwise. The main point of the parable is how God's Kingdom grows through us, individually and collectively. The problem is, not all of me is good soil.

There are areas or times in my life which are 'out of bounds' to religion or, more subtly, where my religion has become routine, simply fulfilling obligations instead of being open to God's word as it comes in everyday life, allowing it to get 'under my skin'; I am part 'path'. As it grows, this word will put me at odds with the norms of society (If not, I am more 'path' than I think) but I take the easy option and 'keep myself to myself', keeping quiet and talking God in church circles, even though I am called to bear fruit, which means bearing an active witness i.e I am part thin soil. As I am unlikely to face persecution – although some readers certainly run that risk – my biggest concern is how many weeds I allow to grow – or even cultivate – with my dependence on security and comfort which strangles my free response to God.

The point of this parable is that, as Isaiah promised, the word of God, (the risen Jesus) will accomplish what it set out to do, in me as an individual, in us as church. God will not be surprised to find me less than ideal soil, but as long as I thirst, he will find a way to use me to produce much fruit.

Martin Bennett

Monday (Malcom Muggeridge)

When Mother Teresa's permission to leave the convent came, she stepped out with a few rupees in her pocket, made her way to the poorest, wretchedest quarter of the city, gathered together a few abandoned children and began her ministry of love. This act of superb, some would say outrageous courage and faith made a particularly strong impression on me. She was a nun, rather slightly built, not particularly clever, or particularly gifted in the arts of persuasion. Just with this Christian love shining about her, in her heart and on her lips. Just prepared to follow her Lord.

Scripture (Matthew 13:19-23)

When anyone hears the word of the kingdom without understanding, the evil one comes and carries off what was sown: this is the seed sown on the edge of the path. The seed sown on the patches of rock is someone who welcomes the word with joy but has no deep root deep down and does not last should some trial or persecution come. The seed sown in thorns is one who hears the word, but the worry of the world and the lure of riches choke the word and it produces nothing. And the seed sown in the rich soil is someone who hears the word and understands it; this is the one who yields a harvest and produces now a hundredfold, now sixty, now thirty.

Tuesday (Meister Eckhart)

On frequently receiving Our Lord's body: You may feel you have committed many sins and cannot atone for them. Go then to him, for he has worthily atoned for all guilt. You may be aware of nothing great in you but your own great poverty. Truly, if you wish to transform all your poverty, then go to the abundant wealth beyond measure, and you shall be made rich. You should say, 'I wish to come to you so that our wealth shall fill my poverty, your infinity shall fill my emptiness and your immeasurable, incomprehensible Godhead shall fill my base humanity.'

Scripture (1 Cor. 2:1-4)

When I came to you I did not come with any brilliance of oratory or wise argument to announce to you the mystery of God. I was resolved that the only knowledge I would have while I was with you was knowledge of Jesus, and of him as the crucified Christ. I came among you in weakness, in fear and in great trembling, and what I spoke and proclaimed was not meant to convince by any philosophical argument but to demonstrate the convincing power of the Spirit, so that your faith should depend not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

Wednesday (Cardinal Basil Hume)

The resurrection has power to transform our lives. The more we accept its truth, its reality, the greater will be our change in attitude towards God and in our view of the world in which we live. It is important for ourselves and our society that we retain and develop a wholesome faith, a sense of the eternal and the spiritual. We need to be armed with faith and vision.

Scripture (Jeremiah 1:4-8)

The word of Yahweh came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before I came to birth I consecrated you; I appointed you as prophet to the nations." I then said, "Ah, Ah, Ah, Lord Yahweh; you see, I do not know how to speak, I am only a child!" But Yahweh replied, "Do not say 'I am only a child' for you must go to all to whom I send you and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid, for I am with you."

Thursday (Caryll Houselander)

Jesus knew fear, temptation and failure. He suffered loneliness, betrayal, unrequited love, utter desolation of spirit, the sense of despair and death. And he overcame them all and he came back to the world bringing it life and peace and joy. He took our humanity, just as it is, with all its wretchedness and ugliness, and gave it back to us just as his humanity is, transfigured by the beauty of his living, filled full of his joy. Every day thousands of people receive Holy Communion. Christ's response to that dogged, devoted will of a multitude of insignificant people is coming to life in them. When the world seems to be finished, given up to hatred and pride, secretly, in unimaginable humility, Love comes to life again. There is resurrection everywhere.

Scripture (Isaiah 55:10-11)

Thus says the Lord: "Yes, as the rain and the snow come down from the heavens and do not return without watering the earth, making it yield and giving growth to provide seed for the sower and bread for the eating, so the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do."