



23 – 29 March 2025

### THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

It is a comforting thought – albeit a false comfort – to think that goodness, health, and happiness are signs of God's blessing, and suffering is a sign of God's punishment. This week, though, Jesus makes it clear that this is not how God operates. When he was informed about Pilate's murder of some Galilean worshippers, Jesus taught that it was not their sin that brought this disaster upon them. Then he spoke about people who had died when a tower had collapsed on top of them and made it clear that it was not their sin that caused this disaster either. Then, in the tough words, "unless you repent, you will perish, too" Jesus declares that good fortune is not a guarantee of good spirituality, or of God's reward. Suffering comes on the innocent, and even evil people can enjoy good circumstances.

The key here, though, is that, whether we are "good" or "bad" we all need to repent – we all need to turn from the ways of this world's system (the grasping for power, wealth, and pleasure) to the ways of God's Reign (justice, simplicity, generosity, grace, love, servanthood, and peace). Then, as we begin to live according to the values of God's Reign, we will be able to face whatever comes – good or bad – with the strength and grace of Jesus, and we will bear the fruit of bringing life to those around us.

This call to repentance and fruit bearing is the challenge of this week's readings.

### SUNDAY 23 MARCH 2025

**Read:** Luke 13:1-9

**Reflect:** Bearing fruit – which is a sign of our repentance (our changed life) – is God's desire for us & God is always seeking to give us time to repent. But, to repent is to recognise that God works

differently from our meritocratic, reward-and-punishment systems, and to embrace the grace and life that can be found in both joy and suffering. Unfortunately, we have often turned repentance into a shadow of the profound practice that Jesus taught. Repentance, for too many of us, is about saying sorry for a few, trivial "sins," and promising not to do them again. While this practice has some merit, it does nothing to impact the values by which we decide what to label as sin. It does not get to the core of our being where our attitudes to the world and to one another can be changed. And it does not impact the way we live each moment of each day in any significant way.

When Jesus speaks about bearing fruit, he means living lives that embody the love, grace, justice, and generosity of God's Reign. And, while God is constantly calling us to repent, we will always have to face the consequences of our choice to respond to God's call or not.

How do you need to repent and turn to God's Kingdom ways a little more today?

**Do:** Repentance is not easy. It is not comfortable. But it is life giving. It's not about wallowing in guilt, or about viewing ourselves negatively. On the contrary, it is about believing that we can be more than our worst and being willing to do the work to become our best. This is what Jesus calls us to today. Any time your worst self takes control, today, take a moment to repent and turn back to your best.

**Pray:** When I allow my worst self to rule my life, O God, give me the grace and courage to repent and change.

### MONDAY 24 MARCH 2025

**Read:** Romans 2:1-11

**Reflect:** Romans Chapter One has often been used to judge and condemn all sorts of behaviour. But two truths must be kept in mind when we reflect on Paul's teaching here. The first is that the focus of Chapter One is not behaviour, but idolatry – the choice to worship what is not God in place of God. Idolatry is a problem because it, inevitably, leads us into destructive behaviour, but, at its root, it is a problem of the heart. The second truth we must note is the focus of

today's reading. Paul is not writing about "evil people out there". The first verse of today's reading indicates that Paul is confronting the idolatry in the hearts of believers. Although this passage keeps making reference to what we do, it is important to remember that our behaviour is the fruit of our hearts (as yesterday's passage indicated). So, Paul challenges the Roman Christians – and us – to change how we live, by allowing the grace of God, and the values of God's Reign to capture our hearts.

It is tempting to see ourselves as pure and holy because we have accepted Christ, and to judge others who haven't, or who don't believe and behave as we do. But Paul makes it clear that we have no right to do so. The only judgement we can make is about our own hearts and lives. And, when we are honest about our own idolatry and its effects, we will soon realise that we have no place to point fingers at others.

Where, in your life, is idolatry seeking a root in your heart? How is this impacting your life?

**Do:** One of the best ways to undermine the idolatrous impulses in our hearts, is to focus on God's grace and goodness. As we celebrate God and allow God's glory to fill our hearts and minds, we are more easily able to resist the idols that seek to entice us. Today, allow the practice of praise to fill your heart with visions of God.

**Pray:** I praise you, O God, for only you can satisfy the longing in my soul.

## TUESDAY 25 MARCH 2025

**Read:** Psalm 39

**Reflect:** Sometimes we bring suffering on ourselves and sometimes suffering comes to us through no fault of our own. And sometimes, our pain flows from a combination of the two. This appears to be the case in the Psalm that we read today. There are a number of things that the Psalmist seems to have done that should not have been done. There is the "fire of words" which he would rather not have spoken. There is the heaping up of wealth, and the futility of "busy rushing". Finally, there is the unspecific, but strong word: "rebellion."

In all of these ways, the Psalmist acknowledges violating God's standards.

But then there is a sense that God's "punishment" is too harsh. The way God's discipline is described is difficult to read. In today's terms, it may even sound a little like parental abuse. We cannot know for sure what circumstances caused the Psalmist to use these words, but we can surmise that he felt that his punishment was beyond the severity of his crime. We could debate whether it was God actively punishing the Psalmist, or just the circumstances he faced – perhaps as a consequence of his actions, but this would not be helpful. What is important is to recognise that, whatever the cause of his suffering, the Psalmist felt free to express his complaint honestly to God. And, in this practice of lament, he found some measure of hope, comfort and reassurance, if the last verses are anything to go by.

Are there any complaints against God that you need to express today? Can you find comfort in bringing your lament to God?

**Do:** The practice of lament may seem scary at first. It can feel like we're saying things about God that we shouldn't be saying – that our belief systems tell us are untrue. But, unless we express our feelings honestly to God, we do not have real relationship. No matter how shocking or "unspiritual" your feelings may be, why not bring them to God in a prayer of lament, today?

**Pray:** Listen to my cry, O God, and do not ignore the tears of my broken heart.

## WEDNESDAY 26 MARCH 2025

**Read:** Luke 13:18-21

**Reflect:** When Jesus speaks about "fruit" he means the way our lives begin to reflect the values and purposes of God's Reign. When we think of God's Reign, it can be tempting to adopt ideas of human empires – conquest, grandeur, "bigness," dominance. But this is not how Jesus describes God's Reign. Instead, the Reign of God is explained through images of small, ordinary things that make a significant difference. The small mustard seed becomes a tree in which birds can make their homes. The tiny bit of yeast placed in

some flour, leavens the entire batch of dough. This is how God's Reign works – not through grand displays and prominent acts of conquest or persuasion, but through small moments of influence, small decisions of integrity, grace, love and justice.

Sometimes the way of Jesus can feel overwhelming because God's Reign is so different from the ways of the world around us. When we see the suffering and injustice of our world, it can feel like we are too small and insignificant to make a contribution. But it is not grand actions that are needed. It is the small, daily commitments to live with compassion, grace and justice that slowly influence and change our world. When we allow the principle of simplicity to guide our buying and spending; when we allow the practice of generosity to guide how we use our resources; when we make kindness the primary value in our relationships; and when we embrace carefulness and mindfulness as the values by which we live on the earth – then God's Reign is being expressed through us. As more and more of us embrace these small acts of faithfulness, so the impact on the world becomes more and more significant.

What small acts of Christlikeness can you perform today?

**Do:** When we take the small, but significant, values of God's Reign seriously, it changes how we pray. Instead of seeing prayer as an attempt to coerce God to do what we want or need, prayer becomes a way to see the world from God's perspective, and a call to perform small acts of grace as answers to our own prayers. Try to pray in this way today and allow your prayers to influence your actions.

**Pray:** I offer my small prayers and actions as mustard seeds for your Reign, O God.

#### THURSDAY 27 MARCH 2025

**Read:** 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5

**Reflect:** The way we view the world, and the values upon which we base our lives, make a massive difference to the way we live each day. This Sunday we will read about the Prodigal Son who valued immediate gratification and pleasure above all and paid the price. In contrast, we may sometimes be tempted to view this world as unimportant, and our bodies as temporary, while we wait for

heavenly bliss in the next life. Today, Paul offers us a different way to see things. While he affirms the hope we have in a life that extends beyond the grave, Paul does not devalue this life, or the bodies in which we live it. We are not going to become disembodied spirits, but those who live in transformed, eternal bodies. We can't know now what that is going to be like, but we can allow this hope to change how we live in the world now.

When we know that our bodies are, in some way, eternal, we can value them and care for them better. When we recognise that the earth we know is the seed for a new earth in eternity, we can work to care for it and love it as God does. And when we can hope for the life of joy and justice that awaits us, we can endure the struggles of this life because we know that this is not all there is to life. And, so, as we learn to believe in and embrace the hope of eternal life, we are able to live with a greater sense of engagement, commitment and mindfulness, which enables us to enjoy life, and share life, every day. And, with the gift of God's Spirit to empower us, we can know that what we experience now is just a taste of what awaits us tomorrow, the next day, and on into eternity!

How can you embrace the hope of abundant, eternal life in your life today?

**Do:** One of the best ways to begin to experience something of God's gift of eternal life is to open ourselves to the Spirit who gives us this life. Today, use the practice of invocation to invite God's Spirit into every moment of your life, and open yourself to the abundant life of the Holy Spirit.

**Pray:** Come, Holy Spirit, fill me with life and teach me to live with mindfulness and hope.

#### FRIDAY 28 MARCH 2025

**Read:** Joshua 4:14-24

**Reflect:** One of the first things that happened after Joshua took over the leadership of Israel from Moses was the crossing of the Jordan River. This was the moment the people had all been waiting for – the entry into the Promised Land. But the large river was a major obstacle, and so Joshua, in a moment that echoed the crossing of

the Red Sea, sent the priests into the river first, carrying the Ark of the Covenant. When their feet touched the water, the river stopped flowing, and the people were able to cross the river on dry ground. As today's reading shows, this event had a huge impact on the people, and on their view of Joshua. In this moment, he was confirmed as God's appointed leader, and he found a place in the hearts of the people.

But Joshua knew how easy it is to forget the good things we enjoy. Like the Prodigal Son who, in the midst of a rich and privileged life, forgot his blessings, Joshua knew the people could easily forget what God had done for them, and what it had cost their ancestors to bring them into a place of security and prosperity. And so, he took twelve stones from the Jordan River and used them to create an altar on the banks to be a memorial. The idea was that the sight of the stones would always remind the people of what had happened that day.

It is an important part of our spiritual health to nurture our memory of God's presence and activity in our lives. How can you do this today?

**Do:** We all need memorials to remind us of God's faithfulness and love. That's why we share in Communion regularly – to remember Jesus and his saving work. Today, although you may not be able to share in the sacrament, use your mealtimes to remember Jesus and what his presence and activity has brought to your life.

**Pray:** May I never forget your goodness and faithfulness toward me, O God.

## **SATURDAY 29 MARCH 2025**

**Read:** Luke 15:1-10

**Reflect:** Jesus loved to be with those who were outcast and rejected by "decent" society. Needless to say, this offended the religious leaders, for whom purity and adherence to the letter of the law were paramount. The fact that Jesus was sharing meals with "sinners" was particularly offensive because it indicated that Jesus was identifying with these people and developing relationships with them. But, for Jesus, such inclusivity was a natural outworking of his mission. In Luke's Gospel, the idea of salvation is a key theme. But,

for Luke salvation is not just about going to heaven after we die. The salvation Jesus brought to people impacted every facet of their lives and their world. Salvation was spiritual, physical, and social, and it was experienced through forgiveness, healing, restoration, justice, and inclusion in community. The "sinners" who spent time with Jesus experienced their lives being changed and renewed in all of these ways, in spite of the fact that they were condemned under the law and would never have been permitted into the Temple.

The two stories Jesus tells in today's reading express the joy of being "found" – of being healed, restored, forgiven, and brought into a loving, just community. It's not just that the lost sheep and the lost coin are found. It's that their owners cannot help but celebrate and call their communities together to share in the joy. The saving work of Jesus always restores our relationship with God and with others – and gives us back our place in God's community. And, for those of us who have experienced being found by God through Jesus, there is no choice but to extend this same welcome and belonging to others in Jesus' name.

How do you experience being found by God today? How can you help others to experience this, too?

**Do:** The act of greeting and welcoming others may seem small and insignificant, but it is a powerfully healing thing. In fact, one of the meanings of the word "holiness" is "hospitality". When we acknowledge, greet and welcome others, we offer them a place of belonging, security, and restoration. Try to extend this welcome to everyone you meet today.

**Pray:** As you have found and welcomed me, Jesus, so I seek to welcome others into my heart and into your community.