

## WYLDE GREEN URC

**Thoughts for the Week commencing 20<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

**This week's thoughts are written by Sian Hancock**

**Based on: Exodus 16:2-15; Psalm 105:1-6; Philippians 1:21-30; Matthew 20:1-16**

### Monday

#### **Exodus 16:2-15**

<sup>2</sup> In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. <sup>3</sup> The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.” <sup>4</sup> Then the Lord said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. <sup>5</sup> On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.” <sup>6</sup> So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, <sup>7</sup> and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?” <sup>8</sup> Moses also said, “You will know that it was the Lord when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord.” <sup>9</sup> Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.’” <sup>10</sup> While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud. <sup>11</sup> The Lord said to Moses, <sup>12</sup> “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning, you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.’” <sup>13</sup> That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning, there was a layer of dew around the camp. <sup>14</sup> When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. <sup>15</sup> When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat.”

As a Welsh rugby fan, the song that immediately springs to mind when reminded of this passage is of course, ‘Guide me O thou great Jehovah.’ The similarities between this passage and a rugby match do not end there: there are two sides, a lot of complaining about the team leaders, a great deal of anticipation and tested patience! An ordinary friendly match!

The first side would of course be the Israelites – constantly complaining. In the first instance, it is easy to understand why they feel annoyed. Although they are no longer slaves and are free, life is not easy. They continue to have no permanent home, no constant food supply (as they did in Egypt) and, of course, the sweltering desert. Certainly, after lockdown initially began, many of us had a few worries e.g. would Asda continue to be open and, would it have anything left on the shelves. Lockdown tested our resilience, just as the desert tested the Israelites. In many ways, they needed ‘half time’ – a break- a time to rejuvenate which is why they were complaining.

At the same time, the referees (Moses and Aaron) were trying to continue according to God's guidelines without the aid of a red card while God (the other side) reveals his never-ending patience, love and generosity. While the Israelites were tested, God ensured they had what they needed - not necessarily what they wanted, as there is a difference. He even prepared them for the Sabbath. They were rejuvenated, fulfilled and ready to continue just like rugby teams.

Something I always cherish from this reading is that knowing God always provides for us: he gives us the courage, stamina, love and ability to continue each day which for many of us may see us as part of the rugby team or sometimes as the referee! His patience is never ending. Therefore, maybe today is an opportunity to consider the manna God has given to us today and if, we have been a team player or a frustrated referee.

*Guide me, O Thou great \*Jehovah,  
Pilgrim through this barren land;  
I am weak, but Thou art mighty,  
Hold me with Thy pow'rful hand.  
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,  
Feed me till I want no more;  
Feed me till I want no more.*

*Open now the crystal fountain,  
Whence the healing stream doth flow;  
Let the fire and cloudy pillar  
Lead me all my journey through.  
Strong Deliv'rer, strong Deliv'rer,  
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield;  
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield.*

(William Williams 1745)

## Tuesday

### Psalm 105:1-6

*Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done.  
Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always. Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced, you his servants, the descendants of Abraham, his chosen ones, the children of Jacob.*

Have you ever watched 'Who do you think you are?' or another of the television programmes where they research family history? Psalm 105 is a hymn of praise but, it does remind us of the ancestors of the people of Israel. In 'Who do you think you are?' frequently, famous people discover that people in their family had very humble beginnings but, it is their faith, love and determination that drives them onward; it is their will to improve life for their descendants that motivates their actions. Sometimes, they also discover a relative with whom they are a little shocked or surprised.

As Christians, Psalm 105 reminds us of our family tree and how Abraham, Jacob and their descendants prepared the way for Jesus and so the birth of Christianity. They persevered and thanked God for everything he has done. As we now have the mantle, continuing Christ's work, it is important to look back as well as forwards: we must remember to thank God for everything he has done as well as listen to what we need to do to shape our Church so that it looks more like Jesus.

*Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices,  
 Who wondrous things has done, in Whom this world rejoices;  
 Who from our mothers' arms has blessed us on our way  
 With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today. (Martin Rinkart)*

## Wednesday

### **Philippians 1:21-30**

*<sup>21</sup> For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup> If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! <sup>23</sup> I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; <sup>24</sup> but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. <sup>25</sup> Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, <sup>26</sup> so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.*

### ***Life Worthy of the Gospel***

*<sup>27</sup> Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel <sup>28</sup> without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. <sup>29</sup> For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, <sup>30</sup> since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.*

At this time, Paul wrote with confidence, joy and pride emulating his faith and his relationship with the Philippians. At this time, he was in prison and, hoping to see his congregation again and his positivity despite the situation is contagious. He asks for unity as a community so that they may continue to spread the Gospel despite the persecution they all know they will receive. In 2020, this reading is incredibly relevant. Many Christians continue to be persecuted because of their faith around the world today – some continue to need to worship in secret while others face persecution. What should we do? Paul is very clear, “Stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.” This can be very difficult. Some people find it very difficult even to tell others that they are Christians. If we work together however through Traidcraft, prayer, charities and especially within our community, we can make differences to our brothers and sisters around the world. When working together, patiently, with love and faith we make a difference. Christian Aid reminds us of the Christians in Iraq who suffer as they attempt to help others. Today, Christian Aid asks us to remember Christians in Iraq in the following ways:

- *Pray for the protection of all people, including persecuted religious minorities such as the Yazidis and Christians – hundreds of thousands of whom have fled in fear of their lives.*
- *Pray for Christian Aid's long-term partners in Iraq, who are providing vital support to refugees from Syria, as well as displaced communities within Iraq.*
- *Pray for a generous response to this crisis appeal so that the needs of our partners can be met as they continue to support displaced communities affected by the violence.*

*Crying God, we join our voices with those from around the globe, crying out for the plight of the persecuted minorities in Iraq. We join our hearts with those displaced from their homes, yet again, crying out for the fear, the terror and the madness to end. We join our hope with those who wait for rescue on the Shangal Mountains, crying out for food, for water and for the kingdom of heaven to break into this hell. We join our faith with the faith of all who pray, crying out for the slaughter of innocence to end. We join our tears with yours, crying out for us all to know and live by the things that make for peace. So help us, God. Amen*

**(Christian Aid)**

### **Thursday**

Each day, on our own, we can continue to make a difference. The very first minister that I can recall from my childhood was Rev. Mary Evans. She always said that everyone had a gift. That gift may be the ability to put people at ease, a good listening ear or, a practical skill. Each summer, we had a holiday play scheme in our Church where there were almost as many volunteers as children (approximately 120 altogether). Everyone used their gifts. For some, it was making extreme amounts of tea for the workers while others completed competitions and with the children. Some were literally on mopping up duty while Aunty Phil (everyone called her this) had more patience than I have ever known - counting out hundreds of jelly teddies (2 for a penny) to many children each day at the tuck shop. On its own, each gift may appear small but, put together, Miss Evans was correct- everyone had a gift and when amalgamated, they brought happiness and kindness to many, many children. Each of these gifts made a difference to others as little acts of kindness always do.

Today, as Paul asked us to, ‘Conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ,’ think about how you can use your gifts to make a difference as a Christian. To you, it may appear to be a phone call to an old neighbour; to the recipient, it could be a sign that they are still loved.

*Brother, sister, let me serve you;  
let me be as Christ to you;  
pray that I may have the grace to  
let you be my servant too.*

*I will hold the Christ-light for you  
in the night-time of your fear;  
I will hold my hand out to you,  
speak the peace you long to hear.*

**Richard Gillard (1953-).**

*We are pilgrims on a journey,  
and companions on the road;  
we are here to help each other  
walk the mile and bear the load.*

### **Friday**

#### **Matthew 20:1-16**

##### ***The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard***

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.<sup>2</sup> He agreed to pay them a denarius<sup>[1]</sup> for the day and sent them into his vineyard.<sup>3</sup> “About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing.<sup>4</sup> He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’<sup>5</sup> So they went. “He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing.<sup>6</sup> About five in the afternoon he went out and found still

*others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’<sup>7</sup> “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’<sup>8</sup> “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’<sup>9</sup> “The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius.<sup>10</sup> So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius.<sup>11</sup> When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner.<sup>12</sup> ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’<sup>13</sup> “But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius?<sup>14</sup> Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you.<sup>15</sup> Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’<sup>16</sup> “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”*

Forgiveness is a wonderful word and Jesus explained very clearly through this parable that in God's eyes, through forgiveness, we are all equal. Sometimes however, as humans, we do not always see it. Two years ago, I taught a very difficult class. Many of the children clashed verbally, physically and simply with their personalities many times each day. I remember sitting two children down once to converse with them as they felt I should have disciplined another child in front of them. They felt they should be allowed to watch him being disciplined and laugh at him. Was that not fair considering he'd upset them – even though he'd asked for forgiveness. Obviously, I disagreed!

Forgiveness is something we are always grateful to receive but sometimes find it difficult to accept when someone else has received it. Sometimes, as in the case of those children, they continued to feel superior despite the apology offered and accepted.

About this time of year, people who are Jewish will celebrate the feast of 'Rosh Hashanah'. It is the first day of a ten-day period of reflection, asking God's forgiveness for faults of the past, promising to approach things in a better way in the year ahead. As Christians, in light of the parable, we could learn from Rosh Hashanah. Reflecting on which character we would be in the parable and, as a result, if we need to change and embrace the forgiveness of others in a new light.

*And can it be that I should gain  
An int’rest in the Saviour’s blood?  
Died He for me, who caused His pain?  
For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! how can it be  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?  
Amazing love! how can it be  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?  
(Charles Wesley 1707-1788)*