

## Thought for the day – Thursday July 9<sup>th</sup> 2020

*We're coming out of lockdown ! Woo-Hoo. But we're being very cautious about it too in a typically British way. This is because we realise now, more than we ever did a few months ago, that the world is a very uncertain place. We are very fortunate as we have our faith as our bedrock and touchstone to help us get through all the trials and tribulations that we know will beset us, irrespective of how we behave towards others.*

*The two readings for today might seem to be wildly different, but they aren't really. The Old Testament reading is from the book of Job chapter 7. We may be slightly or broadly familiar with the story of Job – a devout man who was tested beyond belief so that ultimately his repentance was rewarded by God. But he had a long and difficult time of things – disasters such as we could hardly credit - and having questioned why he “deserved” to be treated so when he was obviously one of the most pious men around and went around muttering about it – and then four “friends”, come to talk him through his situation.*

*I thought, OK, so what is so special about this chap that he gets a whole book to himself in the Old Testament? It's an interesting way of going through a whole examination of our relationship with God without actually standing up and screaming at God when things don't go exactly (or at all) the way we would like of expect. I mean that would be on the one hand disrespectful to our Creator, and on the other hand virtually suicidal as if we really annoy God he has too many ways to make us consider the folly – not just thunderbolts!*

*So I read up a bit more on Job and discovered that he was actually the King of Edom ! He was also a Gentile as he was a grandson of Jacob's brother Esau, but was also a son-in-law of Jacob as his second wife was Dinah. Not your average kind of chap then! He was renowned for living piously according to the Laws of God gave to the sick, the poor, helped and protected children, but was also very strict in his dispensation of justice. You might think of his as an early Pharisee in this regard. “Holier-than-thou “, is a description that comes to mind for all he was a stand-up sort of chap. Thus while he was a member of the Patriarchs family, because throughout his trials he waivered in his resignation to the will of the Divine and “murmured against God” he lost the distinction that might*

otherwise have been conferred on him of having his name joined to the name of God in Jewish prayer. So instead of referring to “The God of Abraham and Job”, the phrase became and is still, “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” since he could not demonstrate the same constancy as the three Patriarchs when they were also tested. He tries to justify his viewpoint – without success – and he disputes that the attempts by his friends (also One was the King of Teman and the other three were his cousins...) are quite specious and it is only when he is confronted by God that he sees the magnitude of his folly. That he should think to discourse with God as an equal !! It took him a long while to understand and accept that even in the height of his piety and devotion, his self-deception of his life and actions meant he was still actually in error and sinning against God. Once he understood and repented God restored his favour to him and he finished his life better than he had been before the tribulations had started.

The passage for today from Matthew 7: 21-29, is actually on exactly the same topic. It is the parable of the man who builds his house on stone and another who builds his house on sand. Someone who hears the Word and really lives by it is the model of the man who build on stone. But someone who hears the word – and may even understand it – but does not live according to the simple teachings of Jesus, is deceiving themselves that their outward acceptance and embracing of the faith will still be sufficient to gain them salvation and access to heaven even if they wander off the beaten track from time to time. There are no half-measures. The road to follow Jesus is not an easy road and you can't take short-cuts and hope to still arrive at the same destination. This was quite a revelation for those listening to Jesus. He was making it clear in language they could understand that even the most pious people could still succumb to evil and if they do so then their piety is for nothing.

So both readings, are about self -deception. It's a tough topic for all of us as we aren't comfortable by really examining our innermost thoughts and our actions to see how they stand up against the simple teaching of Jesus. Do we love our neighbour as ourselves? If we don't love ourselves how could we even begin?

Back to the beginning.... As we're coming out of lockdown, we've seen many selfless acts by people. While one can say that the Doctors and Nurses and the others in the emergency services and healthcare “have to do it as it's their job

*anyway”, that is of course partly true, but they are also fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, uncles, aunts etc , friends and each of them is just as concerned about their own health and their immediate circle as the rest of us. They, however have to go more than just a step further and make those almost a secondary consideration so they visibly “love their neighbour”. Many more folk have found ways through other aid groups to also help the community around them.*

*This is truly awesome.*

*But the test of our “constancy” will come when the virus is a memory. Are we still as neighbour-minded? Or might we self-deceive that such mindset was “Only needed for the pandemic! That was then, this is now and it’s no longer relevant!” Really?? Jesus did not say that “love for our neighbour” was time limited or in any other way “conditional”. We need to remember this or we are no better than Job and have built on sand too.*

*To perhaps (I Hope) assist you with reflections on the lessons from Job and Matthew, I leave you with a lovely rendition of that hymn “I heard the voice of Jesus”. Maybe as we listen we too shall hear him speaking to us, helping us.*

<https://youtu.be/74kyfROS4q8>