

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY WEEKLY DIGEST

7th September - 13th September 2020

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 The Church of Scotland

Monday Sep 7: Sarah Smith

Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"

Matthew 12 : 9 – 10

Have you ever had the experience of your hand or your foot being asleep? It is really difficult to use or try to get it to do what you want it to do. Now, eventually you get the feeling back, and are able to use it again. Imagine if it stopped working, and you were no longer able to use it. There are so many things we depend on our hands for when it comes to day to day life.

We are able to love, care for, and serve people with our hands, but if your hand was shrivelled, you wouldn't be able to do everything you want to do. Here is this man, and there are people watching, waiting to see if Jesus will heal him, since it was the Sabbath. Jesus' attention is not on following the law of the Sabbath, but on healing this man, because this is what is more important. This man having use of

his hand in order to live his life to the fullest is more important to Jesus. Love is bigger than ticking the boxes and following the rules.

Prayer: Gracious God, sometimes we get so bogged down with the following the rules that we miss the opportunity to reach out and love and care for your people. Help us to lift our eyes up, and see your beloved community, and open our eyes and hands to serving you through loving and caring for others. Amen.

Action: Love people, care for people.

Tuesday Sep 8: Stuart Mitchell

He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

Matthew 12 : 11 – 12

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The Pharisees were continually trying to trip Jesus up on points of Law. On this occasion they were trying to get Jesus to admit that performing an act of healing and compassion on the Sabbath was wrong under the established laws of the time. Jesus artfully turns this against them by saying that if rescuing a sheep is permissible under these laws then showing mercy, compassion and kindness to a fellow human being are even greater deeds and therefore lawful. In the eyes of God, performing acts of kindness and compassion come without any time constraints or conditions.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I ask that you give me the strength to do good in this world even in trying and difficult circumstances. Help me to realise and accept that there are no boundaries or time constraints to being kind and compassionate towards my fellow travellers on life's often tricky path. Amen

Action: Make every effort to show kindness and compassion to those in need even when the circumstances may present difficulties.

Wednesday Sep 9: Norman Smith

Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

Matthew 12 : 13 – 14

There is a very old story of a man who didn't like his brother, really didn't like his brother. One day he found a lamp, rubbed it and out popped a Genie. You know what happens next, 3 wishes! The caveat though was that however blessed he was his brother would be twice as blessed. After giving it much thought he asked the Genie to beat him half to death. It's a terrible story used to illustrate how some people even when being blessed find a way to turn that against others.

Surely on seeing a person healed, that is a cause for celebration? Yet here, the pharisees saw it as reason to turn against Jesus even more. They were so consumed with themselves they could not see blessing when it was right in front of them.

Prayer: Father, the world does not revolve around me. Ill say it again, the world does not revolve around me. Please do not let me be blind to good things because I think it's all about me.

Action: Celebrate with someone today, even if its of no benefit to you.

Sometimes people think that the best way to get a point across or get something accomplished in order for people to actually hear them is through loud voices. So many people think that the way to accomplish things is through violence and power. Yet, in this passage, we see that Jesus goes about bringing justice through meekness and humility.

People can view meekness, humility, and gentleness as signs of weakness, but this is not the case with Jesus.

In a time when there are so many voices shouting, we should listen out for those voices of gentleness and meekness. Jesus did not teach through shouting. Jesus didn't make a difference through violence, but gentleness and meekness. He never put himself first, but always put others first.

Prayer: Loving God, we give you thanks that you have taught us how to follow you through gentleness and meekness. May we go about spreading your message of love and grace through that same gentleness and humility. Help us to take time to listen to others, and put others first, knowing that this is what love looks like. Amen

Action: Practice humility and gentleness

Sunday Sep 13: Norman Smith

In his name the nations will put their hope.

Matthew 12 : 21

Where you place your hope is a really good question? For the Jews of Jesus day there was an exclusivity to their understanding of God's relationship with the world. They even had a semi-derogatory word for others, 'gentiles', that marked them out as distinctly not Jewish. All the benefits of faith, of God, were a Jewish right that did not and could not extend to the gentiles.

Jesus showed through his life and teaching that God was a generous God who was open to both Jew and Gentile without discrimination. Anyone could come to him and anyone could be accepted by him. God would not turn away anyone willing to follow him.

Today there are tens of millions of Christians all over the world with every single nation on earth having those who believe. How do you think the Jews of Jesus day would have reacted if they could see this? Truly, the nations have put their hope in him.

Prayer: Lord, please do not let my inner prejudice limit your grace today. Help me to be as open and generous to others as you have been to me.

Action: Before you judge someone, ask, what would Jesus do?

Friday Sep 11: Ian Moir

This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

“Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations.

Matthew 12 : 17 – 18

One of the important things we have learned during the ‘lockdown’ is the importance of some jobs that society previously undervalued – at least in terms of the wages paid to the people who do these jobs – cleaners, care workers, shop assistants, health workers, transport workers etc. While we were sheltering in our houses, these folk were going out to their places of work and putting themselves and their families at risk. They were called ‘front line’ workers and they certainly were – serving the public and caring for the vulnerable.

In our passage, Matthew is summing up the work of Jesus with a quotation from Isaiah.

“Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, the one I love and with whom I am pleased.”

Jesus showed the importance of the servant when he washed his disciples feet in the Upper Room. He told his disciples that they should follow his example.

The quotation from Isaiah goes on to say, “he will proclaim justice to the nations.” So Jesus came to bring justice. Bringing justice to the world is part of the task of Jesus’ followers.

One area where justice is lacking is in the way we regard and reward our front line workers!

Prayer: Living God we thank you for all those, who through their daily work, serve other people. Help us to honour the service they give.

Action: Continue to ‘applaud’ the contribution of our front line workers and support efforts to ensure that they and all workers are paid a fair wage.

Saturday Sep 12: Sarah Smith

He will not quarrel or cry out;
no one will hear his voice in the streets.

A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out,

till he has brought justice through to victory.

Matthew 12 : 19 – 20

Thursday Sep 10: David Moodie

Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill. He warned them not to tell others about him.

Matthew 12 : 15 – 16

We have seen this several times now: Jesus heals people but then asked them not to spread the word about him. It can be confusing to read as so much of Christianity is focused on sharing the Good News with others. Why wouldn’t Jesus want to promote his message further?

Well here it seems to be most practical. There was a plot to kill Jesus and so, for the time being, he needed to evade the authorities. He would face them down but not yet.

But there are other reasons too. Jesus seems to have been aware that his reputation as a healer was growing, but he seems to have wanted to limit that. Healing was an important part of Jesus’s ministry but he didn’t come to bring healthcare to 1st Century Palestine, he had a much more important mission. So it seems he wanted to make sure that if he was known it wasn’t just as that guy who heals, but as someone with a message that will save Israel.

As Christians and a Church it’s helpful to have a good reputation. It’s good if people think we are caring and know about the Church’s social programs. But ultimately

we want to be known for more than that. We want people to know our actions came from our faith and at the heart of what we do is following Jesus. That’s the reputation we want to have in the world.

Prayer: Lord, help me to learn from Jesus the power of words and wisdom of discretion. May my words and actions point beyond myself and towards you and the impact you’ve had on my life.

Action: When someone asks about the things you do don’t be afraid to tell them how your faith motivates your actions.