

St Marc Grenoble
Sunday 25th April 2021(Easter 4)

Acts 4: 1 - 12

John 10: 11 - 18

'The Name of Jesus'

Good Morning ...

PRAY

We've had a couple of really great scripture readings; there's food for hours of sermons - So, make yourselves comfortable and here we go!

The Gospel reading, from John 10, which we had first, takes us back to a time in Jesus' ministry, when he was being followed by Jewish religious scholars, who simply could not line up His claims to be the Son of God and Messiah, with their understanding of Mosaic law and the sovereignty of God the Father. In short, they didn't believe - or didn't want to believe - Jesus' claims to be 'the Son of God'.

They thought His claims were blasphemous; but also a real threat to the comfortable and dominant position of the Jewish religious leaders - because, if what Jesus said about being the Son of God, and Messiah was true, their power - and their dominant position in Jerusalem was under very serious threat.

It could dangerously upset the status quo, where the Jewish authorities had an uneasy alliance with the occupying Romans, who allowed them to exercise their religious power, without too much interference.

There was a historical tradition in Jewish culture, linking the concept of shepherds with that of kings. This went back, at least as far as King David, who started life - and in Jewish history - as the shepherd boy overlooked by his family, when the prophet Samuel was sent by God to find and anoint the new king of Israel.

David became the shepherd king who rescued God's 'Children of Israel' from the marauding Philistines. This contrasted starkly with the failure of the Jewish leaders to rescue God's people from Roman occupation - and it didn't put them in a good light. - If a potential Messiah, or king, was likely to do that, instead of them, they were really under threat.

Jesus said: 'I am the Good Shepherd'. In the subsistence culture of the

day, under Roman occupation, everyone appreciated the need for a Good, Dependable, Shepherd - and King!

Jesus describes Himself as the Good Shepherd, willing to lay down His life for His sheep, which gives - with the benefit of hindsight - a graphic word picture of the remarkable promise of our redemption. But, which at the time, would have been very hard to understand.

Jesus was sharing with them the idea of a Shepherd, Messiah, and King - who would redeem, rather than conquer. He explained: 'That's why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, so that I can take it up again

That's a veiled reminder to us but, it was more like a prophecy to them - Jesus was willing to lay down his life, and surrender to the pain and humiliation of crucifixion, to break the power of death once and for all.

Which means we are all able to enjoy the prospect of eternity in His presence His sheep, cared for by Jesus, Shepherd, Messiah and King!!

We need to notice that Jesus described the Jewish people he was addressing here as His 'sheep', who hear His voice and follow Him.

But He also said - very clearly - there will be other sheep who will hear His voice - and we will all become one flock together. Now that was food for thought!! Jesus was saying He'd come so that everyone (even foreigners Gentiles) who believe in Him will not perish, but share in eternal life - wonderful news for us.

But, if they understood what He was saying, it was highly unpalatable for the religious Jews, who believed they alone were God's chosen people. That's the Gospel - the Good News - if we hear His voice and follow Him, He offers forgiveness and joy to all of us, whatever our background. Not just to a chosen few.

Now let's have a brief look at our second reading, from the book we call 'The Acts of the Apostles' a better title may be 'Acts of the Holy Spirit'! As we read it, we begin to see that Christian Faith is no 'cakewalk' - and never has been! Living the Christian life is not a 'soft option'; persecution has been normal since the beginning of the church.

We heard about Peter and John healing the crippled beggar 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth'. The astonishing results were there for all to see - a man more than forty, who'd never been able to walk, was running, jumping and shouting out, praising God.

Crowds gathered, everyone was delighted at this amazing miracle, done in the name of Jesus. But, the Chief Priests and the Rulers of the Temple, suddenly felt their power and authority being threatened and eroded.

What was more disturbing, was the men who'd done this remarkable healing, who were speaking so convincingly, about 'Jesus of Nazareth' as Messiah, were simple fishermen, totally uneducated. Yet claiming to be empowered by the Holy Spirit of God.

For the authorities, this was alarming, and blasphemous. These men had to be stopped. But how?? They were surrounded by crowds of people, delighted by this miracle, and wanting to learn more about the power they claimed to have received from Jesus of Nazareth.

They seized Peter and John, while they were speaking, and put them in jail until the next day. Nevertheless the power of the Gospel continued; many who'd heard Peter and John speaking, believed and the number of men in the group increased to 5,000 that day.

The young church was being persecuted AND it was growing rapidly – this became the norm – it seems where the church is persecuted it grows strongly too!!

Next morning, the Sanhedrin – the Temple Council, had Peter and John brought before them for questioning. 'By whose power, or authority did you do this?'

Peter, 'filled with the Holy Spirit' responded: 'If the question we're being asked today is about a good deed done for a sick man, and whose power it was that rescued him, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man stands before you fit and well because of the name of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, whom you crucified, but whom God raised from the dead. He is the stone you builders rejected, but which has become the head cornerstone. Rescue won't come from anybody else! There's no other name given under heaven and among humans by which we must be rescued.'

The council were astonished at the way these unschooled men spoke, and took note that they'd been with Jesus'. They were caught in a cleft stick: "What are we going to do? Everyone knows they've done an outstanding miracle, we can't deny it. We must warn them off to stop this thing spreading."

They instructed them not to speak, or teach, in the name of Jesus. But, they didn't expect the response from Peter and John.

'You judge', they said, 'whether it's right to listen to you rather than God! We cannot stop speaking about what we've seen and heard.'

They threatened and released them. There was no way to punish them because the people were all glorifying God for what happened. The man disabled from birth who'd received this healing was over forty years old.

Peter and John went back to their friends, praised God for what He'd done and asked Him to empower them with greater boldness to speak His word and to do miracles in Jesus' Name.

It's a story of amazing things, done in Jesus' Name. You see – whatever happens, remember Jesus changes lives!

And the Good News is: It is still true today! Are you ready to ask Him to change your life - if so invite Him into your life right now

Let's pray ...