

St Marc Grenoble
 Sunday 9th May 2021 (Easter 6)
Acts 10; 44 - 48
Psalm 98
John 15: 9 - 17
'Love and Joy'

Good morning to everyone, here in Church, and those joining us on Zoom
PRAY

We're going to explore today's Gospel reading. But, it's difficult to fully understand this passage without having read the first part of the chapter - so we need to try and remember last week's reading.

This part of John's Gospel (from chapters 13:1 - 20:31) is sometimes known as 'the Book of Glory.' It is called that because hearing the story of Jesus' crucifixion, and the events leading up to and surrounding it, we learn how Jesus was - and is - glorified, in fulfilling God the Father's purpose.

In this chapter, Jesus uses the beautiful picture of a vine and its branches to describe His relationship with His disciples and, therefore, also with us.

Dozens of sermons could be based on ideas that ooze out of this passage, in the same way as wine oozes out of grapes in a winepress!

But, one of the most important messages is that it is the true vine (that's Jesus), which bears fruit through the branches (that's us); not the branches which bear fruit through the vine. In other words, we - who are the branches, are completely useless without the vine, who is Jesus.

It's easy to forget that. So often, in our lives, we think we have to do the work of producing the fruit alone - that we have to do it all by ourselves. But, if we believe that, we've completely missed the point. We need to remember that it's **always** Jesus who brings the fruit into our lives.

Sometimes He's able to use us to help Him - like branches feeding from the vine. But, if we remember that, it's easier to understand today's reading.

When I first preached on this passage - 21 years ago, I'd been to a talk by my teacher, and friend, Eugene Peterson. His talk was titled: 'Follow the Leader' and he explained that as long as we try to be the leaders of our faith, we will fall short. He reminded us, when Jesus called His disciples, He didn't ask them to lead. His call was "Follow Me!"

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to be His followers, not leaders. We're called to be branches, not the vine.

In vv 9 and 10, Jesus says "Remain in my love" - on its own that would be an impossible instruction - but He prefaces that remark by giving us a glimpse of how to do it. He tells us "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you, **NOW** remain in my love." He's given us a clear pattern to follow.

Jesus says in v. 10 "If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in His love." - We have a clear pattern to follow.

In v. 11, Jesus shows why He wants us to follow the pattern - to follow His leadership - He says "So that my joy may be in you and (as a result) your joy may be full."

Looking at it another way, we, the branches, are to feed on the parent vine. Our joy is only made full through feeding from His joy.

Jesus tells us that if we keep His commands, we'll cease to be His servants and we'll become His friends. As friends, we're privileged to know the joy of a full relationship with our Lord. What, then, is His command to us?

That's Easy! - He says: "My command is this: Love one another in the same way that I loved you. No one has a love greater than this, to lay down your life for your friends."

Ouch! Perhaps it is not quite so easy! Loving each other as Jesus has loved us - to lay down our lives? No, that is definitely not easy!

To avoid using local examples, I remember when I was working in Kiev, in Ukraine, with some of the homeless people there, they were so unused to people caring about them, and loving them, that they often wanted to hug us, and to kiss us. Because they wanted to return some of Jesus' love to us.

Well, that was a bit of a shock - it wasn't just the problem of the smell - or stench - they carried around with them. There were also the problems of the sores all over their faces, and the lice in their hair.

Again, it was a question of following the pattern Jesus gave us. - Or, as my teacher, Eugene, would say, "Following the Leader." What did Jesus do in that kind of circumstance??

Jesus broke all the rules. He reached out and touched people who were 'unclean' - lepers for example, I'm sure He hugged them too! But, do you know, in Kiev - once I'd taken the plunge, those were some of the most loving and joyful hugs I've ever received!!!

Jesus told us: "I've said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and

so that your joy may be full."

Now please don't misunderstand me, I do not believe that loving each other is only about hugs - although it may be a good place for some of us to start - I'm sure we'll all hug each other anyway, when the Covid rules are relaxed!

Really caring for each other, is a pretty good way of showing our love!

But, remember, we cannot even begin to bear fruit on our own - it's Jesus 'The True Vine' who produces the fruit - we're just the branches; only He can bear lasting fruit - the fruit of love and forgiveness.

Have you noticed - arms stretched out to hug look a lot like branches?

Remember, Jesus said: "I've said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and so that your joy may be full."

So, we've read that Jesus *commands* us, as Christians, to love one another. There's no English word, which adequately translates the original word, *philos*. It means much more than, just, 'friends'. It means, literally, 'Those who are loved'.

Commanding us to love one another, Jesus showed the extent to which love should go. He showed us perfect love: 'Love without limits'.

In case we're in any doubt, Jesus reminded us, He doesn't treat us as servants – instead, He's chosen us to receive the full benefits of being the ones He loves.

But, we also have to accept full responsibilities. He tells us we should be prepared to lay down our life for our faith, our friends and fellow Christians. That is a tall order!

But, Jesus Christ, whom we're called to follow, gave us a clear example.

Jesus also tells us that He chose us for a purpose. He has work for us to do: He's appointed, or commissioned, us to go - and to bear fruit that will last.

Wouldn't you think that was enough, the job was done, the task complete?

But no, we need to look at the last two verses of the reading - vv. 18 & 19. Jesus wasn't only talking about love and friendship, He has other challenging things to say: Being a Christian is *not* a soft option.

As Christians, Jesus calls us to follow His example, to be 'different'- to stand apart from the world.

He tells us how we can expect the world to react to His followers; and Jesus talks about the gift of the Holy Spirit – the Counsellor, whom He sends to help us.

Jesus urges us to join forces with the Holy Spirit, to proclaim the Gospel; Good News a world, bound up with sin and hatred, urgently needs to hear!

One thing the world cannot stand, or understand, is people who are different.

If they didn't understand who Jesus was, despite everything He did to make it clear – healings and miracles – why should they appreciate who we are, and what we stand for, as Christians?

We are called to tell them, but we shouldn't be surprised if they don't understand. We should be more concerned if we're considered successful by the World's standards.

It isn't easy; we may be called to do things, and go to places we don't want to go. But we are promised supernatural support.

Jesus calls us to show and to share His love – that is incredibly difficult. But, we're promised God's Holy Spirit to go with us and empower us - and His joy to reward us!

We've been chosen; we've been equipped, we are called.

All we have to do is accept the call!

Are YOU ready??

Let's Pray ...