

St Marc Grenoble
 Sunday 6th June 2021
2 Cor 4: 13 - 5: 1 (NTFE)
Psalm 116: 1 - 8, 12 - 14 (The Message)
Mark 3: 20 - 35 (NTFE)
'Family or Friends'

Good Morning, welcome to everyone both here and at home

PRAY

As we read through Mark's Gospel we see, wherever Jesus went, huge crowds followed Him; it's a theme in several of Mark's stories about Jesus'.

Vast crowds were drawn to Jesus?? WHY? Care /Love / Fresh Hope/ Healing?! Remember, nationally things were at a very low ebb; the country was occupied by the Romans and the economy was being strangled – Do you notice any similarities with our present situation???

First, let's look at the background of this story:

To get away from the crowds, for some peace and quiet, Jesus went off up a mountain – for some quiet reflection – and we're told, He called 'those He wanted'. He selected twelve – designating them 'apostles' (*messenger or authorised representative*) - they're the people we usually call His 'Disciples' (apprentices).

Why did Jesus appoint them? We're told it was so they would be with Him, learning from what He did, *and that He might send them out*, to preach and have authority to drive out demons.

Who were they?? Simon whom Jesus re-named Peter (The Rock or Rockie!); James and John sons of Zebedee (Jesus called them sons of Thunder) Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot – and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

We don't know much about some of them; but we know they were a mixed bunch – at least one known revolutionary, a few fishermen, a tax collector – collaborator, and one we know, with hindsight, who actually betrayed Jesus.

From what we read, they became Jesus' closest friends despite being quite undependable at times, and having many human failings: short fuses, jealousies, fears and various other challenges. I find that very encouraging, because it proves to me that we don't have to be perfect, or superhuman, for God to be able to use us to do His work, for His glory!!

It must have been frustrating for the 'religious leaders' - the 'teachers of the

law'; because, unlike them, Jesus attracted huge crowds wherever he went and did remarkable healing miracles, which drew even bigger crowds.

As I've often said, Jesus' preaching was totally counter-cultural to the culture of his day; His teaching cut across so many of the religious structures and practices, which had grown up at that time.

So, to try and discredit Jesus, the 'scribes', teachers of the law, accused Him of being able to cast out demons, because He was the 'prince of demons'.

Complete nonsense of course because, as Jesus pointed out, a kingdom, or house, divided against itself simply destroys itself with infighting. But it was intended to start rumours, division and fear among His followers, because in those days anyone convicted of blasphemy could be executed.

Jesus pointed out the ridiculous nature of their accusations, which silenced their objections; but it left some of them 'plotting' for other ways of 'dealing with Him' on the sidelines!

Although there were no daily newspapers; news spread very rapidly and it seems Mary, His mother, heard about what was going on.

Probably concerned for His safety, and possibly worried about the sanity of His actions, she came with Jesus' brothers to the place where He was teaching; wanting to take Him home and keep Him quiet so that He didn't risk upsetting any more influential people.

Because of the crush, she couldn't get anywhere near Him. So she tried to send a message to Jesus, that she and his brothers were outside.

On the face of it, Jesus' response to His mother appears harsh: 'Who are my mother and brothers?'...then, looking around Him He said 'here are my mother and brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother *and sister* and mother.' Once again that was a counter cultural comment in a time, where the family was the most important unit – bar none!

It was amazing then; but I believe today, when the family unit has often become dysfunctional, it brings a whole new, deeper meaning to the need for Christian fellowship, offering bonds of real hope and love to a troubled world!

I hope the brief look into this passage has challenged you to continue chewing on it, this week; so that, as you consider the character of Jesus and his disciples, you'll start to have a fresh understanding of the transforming power of Christian love and fellowship!

Now, looking briefly at the first reading, from Paul's second letter to the Christians in Corinth, he touches on similar issues; - He'd been explaining that

he felt somewhat crushed, and ready to die.

And, as I look around - I can understand that we're not all feeling quite as youthful and 'gungho' as we once were!

We complain of increasing ailments and less energy; and by his own admission, Paul had also been going through a 'rough patch', at times feeling close to death. Maybe some of us can relate to his feeling of being crushed!

But, he's taken a step back, and probably a deep breath – in v. 13 he says 'I believed and so I spoke', then he goes on 'We too believe, and so we speak'.

That's a quote from Psalm 116, which although it may not have been immediately apparent to us, would have rung bells with the early Christian believers Paul was writing to. In v.16, he asserts: 'we know that the God who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us with Jesus and present us with you.'

He reminds us 'The aim is, as grace abounds through the thanksgiving of more and more people, it will overflow to God's glory'. I translate that: 'if we all; pray and praise together, we can – with God's grace, help each other through the rough patches!' Praise, prayer and supplication for each other, are so important.

Paul continues: 'For this reason we don't lose heart' ... (and this bit I love): 'Even if our outer humanity is decaying, our inner humanity is being renewed day by day!'

Later he says: 'For we don't look at the things that can be seen, but the things that can't be seen. After all, the things you can see are here today and gone tomorrow, but the things you can't see are everlasting.'

Paul encourages us not to fret over the struggle with earthly things now; but, rather, to look forward with delight to the joys of eternity.

He reminds us: Jesus, our Messiah, went down to death himself and was brought up to new life. In v.14 he says 'we know that the God who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us with Jesus, and present us with you.'

In this time, when life seems to have become very cheap: murders, stabbings and shootings abound. Suicides are at their highest levels ever – our secular materialistic society seems to take an increasing toll on those who either can't cope, or can't keep up with the Jones's.

But Paul reminds us that 'After all, the things you can see (the materialistic stuff) are here today and gone tomorrow; but the things you cannot see (that's God's grace and His love for us) are everlasting.'

He reassures us in 5 :1

'For we know that if our earthly house, our present 'tent', is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house no human hands have built: it's everlasting, in the heavenly places.

For me, that's tremendously re-assuring. We know our lives on this earth are fragile and transient, but we're promised a joyous eternity, won for us by the life giving love of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ.

Looking at it another way, we really aren't nearing the finish of our lives, we're shortly going to be arriving at the start!!

Paul also says: 'In the meantime we need to support and encourage each other, in fellowship together, by prayer, praise and supplication.'

Remember, when asked about the most important commandment; Jesus said 'The first commandment is this - love the Lord your God with everything you've got, and the second is similar – love your neighbour as yourself.'

I think that's what Paul is thinking of when he speaks of 'the grace that abounds through the thanksgiving of more and more people – overflowing to God's glory.'

Those words roll off the tongue very easily; but, in the cool light of reality, it takes a lot of hard work to put them into practice.

Let's Pray ...