

St Marc Grenoble
Sunday 5th September 2021
Mark 7: 24 - 37
James 2: 1- 7
'Crumbs of Faith'

Good Morning Everyone, those of you here, and those joining on Zoom
PRAY

This morning is one of those delightful occasions in the lectionary, where the readings all seem totally interconnected - clearly demonstrating that the faithfulness of God's message and teaching continues from age to age.

Hearing today's readings we can appreciate these words, written a couple of thousand years ago, are still just as relevant for us today. And that we have similar challenges to those our early Christian forebears had to deal with.

I love the passage about the Greek, Syrophenician woman, who would simply not accept 'no' for an answer from Jesus; because the version of that story in Matthew's Gospel was the first passage I preached on, in my first curacy, after I was ordained deacon, in 2002.

We're told that Jesus (and his disciples) went on a trip to Tyre - many miles (30-40) away from Capernaum where He'd been teaching and healing the people, you can see on the map just how far it was, when the only way of getting about was on foot. They went, not because they just wanted to visit the seaside, but because He (and they) desperately needed a time of relaxation and refreshment; a proper chance to unwind after all the hard work of evangelism..

They rented their local equivalent of an Air B&B, and Jesus obviously intended to keep a very low profile. Mark comments 'But it wasn't possible for Him to remain hidden. On the contrary, news of Him at once reached a Greek woman who had a daughter with an unclean spirit.'

We're told she came and threw herself at Jesus' feet and begged Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. We're not told exactly what the problem was, but she was doing exactly what any mother with a sick child would do, and taking the best opportunity she knew to get her daughter healed.

Jewish people would normally have nothing to do with their Gentile neighbours and Jesus obviously believed He had been sent as Messiah first and foremost to the Judean people.

He said, I'm really here to care for the Children of Israel (the Judean people) and 'It's not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs' (Even then, there was no love lost between the two races)

But Jesus simply could not ignore the determined, but respectful, repartee from this desperate mother: 'Well Master, she replied 'Even the dogs under the table eat the crumbs that the children drop'.

What an amazingly graphic, true to life, word picture Mark is painting here...

Jesus replied with quite remarkable compassion 'Well said!' replied Jesus 'Off you go, the demon has left your daughter.'

That response was outstanding in itself; but, what I find amazing is the woman's trust in Jesus - she didn't question or seek any further promises from Jesus; she believed what He said and went home. We're simply told, 'So she went home and found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.' His compassion responded to and was then mirrored by her faith.

New Testament scholars cite this lovely, brief and very human story as a precursor - or as we might say a trailer, for things to come.

The redemption offered by Jesus was opened to the Gentiles of all nations, after His rejection by the Jewish people as their Messiah and His crucifixion at the behest of those He had first come to save.

It was only after His resurrection that Jesus instructed His disciples: 'Go into all the world, and announce the message to all creation. Anyone who believes and is baptized will be rescued, but people who don't believe will be condemned.' (Mark 16: 15 - 16)

The question we need to ask ourselves is: 'Am I prepared to be condemned or am I ready to believe and be baptised (and stay true to my baptism).

Before I finish, I like us to have just a brief glance at our first reading, from James 2: 1 - 7.

Although no one is certain, many scholars believe the author may have been James the brother of Jesus; and that this letter may have been written as early as 60 AD - just around 30 years after Jesus's crucifixion. If so that makes it one of the earliest Christian writings still available to us.

The letter of James always encourages me, because it reflects challenges experienced by the early Christian church, which we still have to deal with today, and it gives clear direction on how to handle some of them!

What I love about this particular short reading is that it affirms we are all equal in God's sight, and no-one deserves any exclusive treatment because of their perceived wealth or status, race or colour.

Fortunately, we don't seem to have issues about seating or, thank goodness, issues of equality written into that, here! Where you sit has to do more with when you arrive at church. And, as I said last week, we all need to arrive on time wherever possible. If we all do that, there'll be a more even distribution of seating!!

[This is God's 'worship and fellowship time' in our lives; and we shouldn't be reducing its value by arriving late, or clock watching while we're here!]

The letter of James reminds us we have to observe and honour God's entire law; which includes loving our neighbours as ourselves.

He reminds us that we pray 'forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us' Judgement is without mercy, for those who show no mercy.

Faith is useless without practical evidence of its effect in the way we live our lives. He says 'Faith, all by itself and without works, is dead.'

True, effective faith is not easy; and it is not self-centred.

Faith requires total commitment throughout our entire lives; not just for an hour or two on a Sunday. It is, in fact, a life's work ...

Let's Pray ...