

St Mark Grenoble
Sunday 3rd October 2021
1 Peter 2: 1 - 10
John 10: 22 - 29
'Follow Jesus'

Good morning and welcome, both to those of you here and those joining on Zoom. It is really good to be home, and worshipping with you again.

While we were away, we've been reminded how close the Christian family is. We worshipped in a tiny congregation in Ramsgate, currently without a vicar, and about to become part of a new Town Centre team ministry.

On our first Sunday, service was led by Canterbury's Director of Communities and Partnerships; who works with refugees and asylum seekers; who's recently been working with our Archdeacon - Peter Hooper.

He grew up in Herefordshire, in the house next door to the founder of the Charity I worked with for nearly ten years; and I'd met him there - years ago!

On the second Sunday, the service was led by a retired Director of Mission in Canterbury Diocese, with whom I'd worked on various occasions, and who is a close friend of my former mentor.

LET's Pray

You'll be pleased to hear that I don't intend to speak for long, this morning. I'm very grateful to Helene for giving us a glimpse of her pilgrimage along the Chemin of St Jacques, and the deep impact it has made on her.

And, I thought it would be a good to remind ourselves of some of the challenges of following Jesus. In the reading from John's Gospel, chapter 10; we hear Jesus was walking in the temple during the Jewish festival of Dedication, or Hanukkah.

This festival (at roughly the same time as we celebrate Christmas) marks the occasion in BC 167, when the Judeans purified the Temple, and offered sacrifices, (after three years when the tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes had invaded Jerusalem and desecrated the Temple) to celebrate being able to worship in the Temple again.

It was also an occasion when the Judeans celebrated their heritage and the royal line of King David.

So this was a truly explosive time for Jesus to be claiming that He is the Good Shepherd, and - as they would understand, the long awaited Messiah, God's anointed, the King of Kings.

But the Judeans surrounded Him and demanded He should confirm or deny His claim; 'How much longer are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah' they said 'say so out loud'.

Well, of course, Jesus did not back down 'I already told you and you didn't believe. (But) The works I am doing in my Father's Name give evidence about me. In effect, what more proof do you want??

'You don't believe, because you don't belong to my sheep (my Flock)

Jesus affirmed: 'My sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow me. I give them the life of the coming age. They will never, ever perish and nobody can snatch them out of my hand. I and the Father are one.'

This was dynamite, 'Blasphemy' to the Judeans, and we're told later in the chapter that they picked up stones to stone Jesus; they tried to arrest Him, but He managed to get away from them.

Too often we paint the 'Good Shepherd' as a cosy, peaceful, gentle leader; but these were challenging words. What Jesus was saying was dynamite, a direct challenge to the self-promoting religious leaders of the day.

Our faith is definitely not cosy, we mustn't ever become complacent. We're called to follow Jesus, in counter cultural ways: healing the sick, caring for the poor and rejected. Loving God with everything we have, and loving and caring for our neighbours as ourselves. Not easy?!

Following Jesus was never going to be easy!

But, if we look briefly at the reading from 1 Peter, we see that the stone which the builders rejected - that is Jesus - has become the head cornerstone. That's the stone which binds the entire building together and makes it strong.

We may be weak, but we have the Rock of Ages as our living cornerstone - to

strengthen us and give us the stability we need to be able to follow Him!

Let's Pray ...