

St Marc, Grenoble

Sunday 13th March 2022 (2nd Sunday of Lent)

Philippians 3: 17 - 4:1

Psalm 27

Luke 13: 22 - 30

'First or - Last'

Good morning Everyone - here and those Zooming in!

Let's Pray

As usual, I'm really keen to know what you spotted, or what caught your attention in today's readings - including the Psalm we read together this morning ... What jumped out at you??

I must admit I've wrestled with the readings for today - what do we really need to hear? Where shall we start? It is actually quite difficult to choose.

I looked back to one of the first times I preached on this morning's Gospel reading - in March 2004, and I noticed the title I used then was 'The Truth', and I started with a glimpse at John 8: 31,32; so let's have a look

Jesus said to the people who claimed to believe in Him: 'If you stick with this, living out what I tell you, you are my disciples (followers) for sure. Then you will experience for yourselves the truth, and the truth will free you.'

The people Jesus was speaking to objected to that thought - they said ' We're descendants of Abraham. We've never been slaves to anyone. How can you say 'The truth will free you?' The problem was that they could not see that they were slaves to the sin that was controlling their lives - it was actually holding them in bondage.

Ironically, an old Yiddish proverb reminds us: 'A half truth is a whole lie'.

And 2000 years later, around the world, throughout Europe and here, in Grenoble, I believe sin and sinful deeds are still holding many people in bondage every day.

So, 'The Truth that will set us free' is what we really need in our lives.

Let's move on to today's Gospel reading:

We're told Jesus headed steadily on towards Jerusalem, towards His goal of bringing salvation by His death and resurrection, moving from town to village, village to town teaching and healing as He went.

A bystander (that is - someone not in the crowd following Jesus) asked:

'Master, will only a few be saved? Jesus' answer hit the nail on the head -

'Don't worry about the others! Concentrate on yourself and your life with God'

Jesus says: the way to life - that is real life with God, is vigorous and requires your total attention. Do not play at it.

Don't think you're going to join God's salvation party just because you've been hanging around the neighbourhood (as Peterson says) - or perhaps 'going to church' - all your lives.

To put it even more clearly, simply being baptised is not a season ticket to eternal life in God's presence - it's just the beginning of the journey of faith.

You actually need to work hard at getting to know God and learning His ways - how do we do that? Well we have to read His word - every day; and we have to converse with Him, that is talk with Him AND listen to Him every day - otherwise, you'll find yourselves out in the cold, with the party going on inside. (That's not what I say, that's what Jesus said.)

Peterson translates it "This is the Great Reversal" - the last in the line put to the head of the line, and the so-called first ending up last."

You need to keep in touch with Jesus; walking with Him day by day, talking to Him, reading His word. Learning His ways, being familiar with, talking to Him AND listening to Him. That doesn't just happen, you really have to work at it.

Let me share a personal story - when I fell in love with Julia - thirty years ago I lived in Scotland and she lived in New York, different time zones by 5 hours.

But I rang her every day, I longed to talk to her (I set my alarm for the middle of the night so that I could speak to her after she arrived home from work); I wrote letters to her nearly every day (when we were sorting out our things to come here, I was amazed to find she still has a box full of those letters!) You see, we were (and still are) in love and simply couldn't spend enough time together, whatever the difficulties.

Well, that's how it needs to be between us and our heavenly Father - it's a love affair - He loves us unconditionally, and we need to respond in the same way!! Otherwise the flame of our love will go cold, and we won't know how desperately He longs to hear from us.

Jesus says: 'The way to life, to God! is vigorous and requires your total attention!' A more familiar translation says: 'Enter through the narrow gate' (i.e. the difficult way)

Don't be concerned about who else is being saved - concentrate on your own salvation - your own personal relationship with God. 'Put your mind on your love life with Him'.

It is not just a case of accepting Jesus into our lives and then carrying on as before. Becoming a Christian *must be* life changing, *must* make a difference to the way we behave; we *must* 'strive' – We cannot sit back and simply expect Jesus to do all the work for us.

Sometimes, I wonder if people like me are guilty of implying that becoming a Christian is a 'cure-all' or 'save-all'; but Jesus warns us, there is real God-inspired effort required on our part - dedicated, hard work.

There's a clear picture in v.26 & 27: 'You'll protest we've known you all our lives! Only to be interrupted with His abrupt 'Your kind of knowing can hardly be called knowing. You don't know the first thing about me.'

That's a warning message for those who come to church; even come to the 'Communion Meal', and yet don't allow Jesus to make that necessary, life-changing difference in their lives.

Jesus says: That's when you'll find yourselves out in the cold, strangers to grace ... you'll be outside looking in and wondering what happened.

Be under no illusion; this is tough – don't play it down – don't be complacent, it applies to me, it applies to you: 'The way to life, to God! is vigorous and requires your total attention!' It's not easy street, nor plain sailing, it's not cut and dried, we must keep working at our faith, in all humility.

We cannot sit back and relax – Jesus never promised us a holiday camp for life – we have work to do, and plenty of it!

Our God offers true hope, in Jesus Who is the Way and the Truth and the Life – He alone can bring us to the Father.

Our job, without being arrogant, or complacent, is to make sure we offer that hope to the community around us too – it is not easy and we have to strive.

Remember these words: 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'

And so, as I close, Let's Pray ... **Amen**