

St Marc, Grenoble
Sunday 22nd May 2022
Ezekiel 37: 1 - 14
Acts 16: 9- 15
John 14: 23 -29
'All you need is Love'

Good morning everybody, here and on Zoom - it is good to be with you today.
Let's Pray ...

There's a lot to tackle this morning; but, first, I must ask for your responses to this morning's three readings, which I think you will agree are quite startling.

Please share what struck you, or caught your attention this morning ...

We live in very challenging times. Our world appears to be in chaos and uproar. There are wars in various countries around the world; one of which is instigated by the leader of one of the world's supposed 'Super Powers'

All wars cause pain, distress and unquantifiable damage; but the war in Ukraine is particularly disturbing because it appears to revolve around one leader, unilaterally, demanding more power, more control and more personal gain, which he has neither earned or deserved.

He seems to be holding the rest of the world to ransom; and is inflicting fear, pain and personal injury on vulnerable and perfectly innocent civilians.

He has no respect for international law, or anyone, or anything else; and, despite his protestations to the contrary, he also seems to have absolutely no respect or fear for God.

I long to see change in the way our nations are governed; but, even more, for signs of change in our culture; so we'll develop fresh concern and communal responsibility for the life, direction, morals and values of the nations we live in.

I especially long for the time when people will turn back once again and seek to serve God, rather than nurturing an outrageous sense of self-interest.

That was perhaps how the prophet Ezekiel was feeling, 'at the time when the hand of the Lord came upon him, brought him out by the Spirit of God and

set him down into the middle of a valley full of dry bones' - He was overwhelmed by impossible challenges? But then, along came God!

He says "The hand of the Lord came upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and dumped me in the middle of a valley, full of bones!"

Did that ring bells with you? Do you ever feel, as I sometimes do, that you are walking among dry bones? What is Ezekiel talking about here?

In various parts of the Old Testament, we read about God sending prophets to prophesy to a particular city, nation or group of people. Often they realised, what God told them to prophesy would not be popular.

God used the prophets to warn people, especially kings or rulers, to amend their wayward behaviour; or watch out!! – Because God was not happy!

As we read the Old Testament, we often find that the recipients took out their disdain for God on the prophets (which, for example, was why Jonah didn't fancy going to Ninevah – he was afraid he'd be beaten up!)

What about being sent to prophesy to a valley full of dry bones?? I must confess I occasionally feel like that!

But God was making it very clear to Ezekiel that with God *all things are possible!* Watch out for the power of the Holy Spirit at work in your life!

When things aren't going well, we sometimes pray, 'knowing, of course, God's not going to do anything'; but we feel we should go through the motions!

If a friend is sick or we are in trouble – we'll pray; but we doubt anything will happen! Then, when it does, our friend is healed or our situation is sorted, we're amazed and set about seeking medical or scientific explanations.

Was that what was happening to Ezekiel? Maybe God thought Ezekiel needed a bit of shock treatment, to remind him exactly who God is and what He can, and will, do if only we give Him the chance to be involved?

Can these bones live? – Well, God, only You know the answer to that!

In my experience, God doesn't mess about – IF only we are serious and IF only we are prepared to really trust Him!

The stories of Paul from the Book of Acts highlight just that. They're gripping! Better than any thriller fiction! Paul, during his journeys, was well acquainted

with riots, beatings, local jails and shipwrecks – all in the service of Jesus and His mission of proclaiming the Good News; and nothing could put him off.

Time and time again, we see the Holy Spirit working through Paul's amazing trust and faith, despite often being highly vulnerable, 'on thin ice', even in jail.

As I read the Book of Acts, I sometimes feel Paul must have been quite a difficult person to work with. He was totally single minded. But it has always fascinated me that he learned to listen carefully to God; and he did whatever God told him to do, without question.

Paul was willing to proclaim the Gospel in all kinds of hostile situations; to people of all levels in society - from sailors and jailers to captains and kings.

He had a personal prayer hotline to God, and did exactly what he was told to do; and he didn't do what he wasn't told to do. God honoured his faithfulness again and again; and we really should learn from that!!

Just like Ezekiel, Paul had a vision from God, which on this occasion sent him to Macedonia to share the Gospel there.

So, let's have a brief look at the Gospel reading.

Jesus promises that anyone who loves Him and does what He says, will find Father God will love them too; and Jesus and the Father will come and make their home with them. That sounds like a wonderful promise to me.

Jesus also promises He'll send an advocate (supporter, pleader) – the Holy Spirit - who will teach us everything we need to know; and will remind us of everything Jesus has already told us.

Jesus also says, "Don't worry – I'm leaving you my peace. (What a gift!)

'Trust me;' He says, 'I'm going to my Father's place, but I'll soon be back. I'm telling you all this now so that, when it happens you'll be able to remember what I've told you and put your hearts at rest.'

I'm fascinated that despite this 'heads up' from Jesus, when the resurrection happened, the disciples found it almost impossible to believe what was happening; just as if they hadn't heard what Jesus told them in advance.

Jesus tells us to trust Him and do the things He's instructed us to do! Then, we will enjoy His peace.

So this week, or whenever you're looking at that valley of dry bones in your

life; wherever you are, physically, mentally or emotionally, learn to trust Jesus, and open your heart and mind to allow the Holy Spirit to work in you (and help you get your head straight!).

If you feel as if you've been dumped into a rubbish tip of dry bones – and I have to confess, sometimes I feel just like that

Take heart, open your eyes, your ears and your brain – because it's highly probable that God is calling YOU – and that He has work for you to do - right now and right where you are!!

Let's pray