

St Marc Grenoble

Sunday 19th June 2022 (Trinity 1)

Galatians 3: 23 - 29

Luke 8: 26 - 39

'Children of God'

Good morning Everyone, both here in Church and joining on Zoom

Let's Pray

We have two quite different readings this morning - would anyone like to share what struck them in those readings??

Both the readings are really worth a sermon on their own, but I don't have that luxury. However, I do need to comment briefly on our first reading - then we'll consider the Gospel reading.

Paul's letter to the young Christian church in Galatia (that's in Southern Turkey today), which he helped to build up - was written in response to a challenge, from other Christians, to his own authenticity as an Apostle; and particularly his teaching that Gentiles (people other than Jews) are equal members of God's family through faith in Jesus Christ - without circumcision.

I want to look briefly at this short passage, because people sometimes ask me how we are affected by the Mosaic or Jewish law, or rules.

Paul refers to the 'Law' as being like a babysitter, or nanny, (or in his days a slave, whose duty was to look after and guard the children of a family) who looks after children until they are old enough to look after themselves. Paul suggests that, in the same way, the Law acted as a carer, or guide, for the Children of Israel between the time of the exodus from Egypt, until the arrival of the Messiah - Jesus who bought redemption, through His sacrificial death, for everyone who has faith and believes in Him..

Paul says that in Jesus we have what he describes as 'covenant membership' of God's family, on the basis of our faith in Jesus. He says that, by being baptised, we have 'put on' the Messiah - there's no discrimination between people of different races, different colour, or different financial or political status - we are all accepted into God's family, which known as Abraham's family. So, as Christians - believers in Jesus, we're all equally entitled to inherit God's promise of redemption and whole life.

Whoever we are, wherever we come from, whatever our race or background, we are equal children of God through our faith in the Lord Jesus. And, that's especially important for us to grasp and understand, in a multinational, multiracial church fellowship like ours. We are members of one family!

Now, let's move on to our Gospel reading: the story about Jesus meeting the man 'possessed by demons - or, in fact, a whole regiment, or legion of them.' The story has a series of different levels and some real challenges – not least that many of us don't feel comfortable talking about people possessed by demons. It's not usually something people in reserved British culture want to discuss. But, it's important we do; let's not get involved with the complex stuff – let's just try to look at the human issues we meet in our everyday lives.

How do we describe such 'demons' these days? – 'Mental illness; depression, compulsive behaviour, addictions, anxiety attacks' are a few. Many of our families experience these problems. It's a major issue for both sides of our own family; and I know others in this congregation are affected. Often, one member of a family's problems can spark issues for others too.

Thankfully, these days, we don't usually bind people with chains and shackles. But, straitjackets, padded cells, tranquillisers, sedating injections and electric shock therapy are all still in frequent use. Their effect can be devastating, not just for those receiving them, but on entire families.

Over the last few years, it has become much more acceptable to talk about mental illness – helped by some high profile sufferers being willing to talk about their struggles. Many families are at their wits' end, because there's little help available with treatment, cure, or even care for such loved ones.

Funding for mental health issues is very low on the list of health priorities. In many countries. Prompt and pragmatic help for sufferers – especially young people, with mental illness of any sort, is often almost impossible to find.

Fortunately, not many people physically wander off to solitary places, but many are mentally isolated; I've often met people with addictions and other mental illnesses wandering in churchyards. Not much has changed; but Police forces in the UK are now training officers to recognise mental illness, and to be able to offer basic mental health 'first aid'.

Coming back to the Gospel story, there's debate about the actual location; we know it was in 'Gentile country', not actually in Judea ... But, location is irrelevant – the important thing is that Jesus went out of His way to meet this tormented man, ministered to him, and healed him!

This should encourage us, because we know Jesus cares and heals. It's also a clear example of how Christians should respond in similar circumstances. We're not expected to turn our backs and walk away shaking our heads.

There are other points to notice. How did people in the area respond to this man's healing? Those who saw told others how the man had been cured.

Was everyone delighted, was Jesus asked to do more healing and teaching?? No, the people asked Jesus to go away, because they were terrified! The effect of expelling the demons into the herd of pigs was not only remarkable, it was also dramatic and terrifying. Not to mention the loss of income for the pigs owners. And, notice Jesus' response - He went away!

We must be aware that people have free will to follow Jesus, or not. Jesus does not impose himself. Neither must we try to force people to follow Him. That's not Jesus' way. He invites, they must respond of their own free will.

How did the man who was healed respond? His life was transformed. We're told He sat at Jesus feet, listening to Him and learning from Him; possibly also just enjoying close, caring human company for a change!

When Jesus left, he begged to be allowed to go with Him. But Jesus had another, more important, task for him: "Go back home and tell what God has done for you!"

It's often easier to witness Jesus away from home ground. But the most important and vital place to witness is on our own doorstep.

Following Jesus appears very attractive – but the things that HE wants us to do are not always what we want or expect, and they're often not the easy things to do either. But, one thing we've been promised is: Jesus will send His Holy Spirit to help us do the work He wants us to do.

So, what did the healed man do? He went through the town telling what Jesus had done for him!

As a closing thought – and you don't need to respond out loud – How often do you tell people just what Jesus has done for you??

Let's Pray. Spend a moment in silence reflecting on what we've heard and shared, this morning:

Lord Jesus thank you for caring for us, and being ready to heal us. Help us open our hearts to you. Forgive us Lord when we get it wrong; help us to serve you as you desire, to care for those in need and tell others what you have done for us and bring them to meet you?

We ask these things in your name Jesus. **Amen**