

St Marc, Grenoble
Sunday 26th June 2022
Galatians 5: 1, 13 – 25
Luke 9: 57 – 62
'Set Free'

PRAY

Good Morning! To everyone, here and joining on Zoom

What struck you about the readings today? What jumped out at you??

There's a challenging theme running through today's readings, about what God asks us to do when we promise to follow Him – and the effects of our commitment. As Christians we are challenged to be different – to turn our backs on 'the normal', if you like, and to walk in God's, very different, way.

We're called to put God, and other people – often strangers – first; and sometimes to put things that give us a sense of security, or more traditional ways of doing things, on the back burner.

This is definitely not normal in our 21st century culture; and, not surprisingly, it was similar in Jesus' time on earth; when everything was usually done rigidly according to the law of Moses, and Jewish tradition.

Following Jesus was never easy; we heard in the Gospel, in His answer to the man who said he'd follow wherever Jesus was going, He said 'Foxes have lairs, and birds in the sky have nests; but the Son of Man doesn't have anywhere to lay his head.'

Jesus was also clear His call is 'now' - that is when God needs us, not when we're ready; so, in v. 59: 'Let the dead bury their dead ... you must go and announce God's kingdom'. And to the person who wanted to say 'good-bye' to the people at home, v.61: 'Nobody who begins to plough and looks over his shoulder is fit for God's kingdom.' NB If you looked over your shoulder while ploughing the furrows went all over the place instead of being straight.

And today, God often asks us to show our commitment in unexpected and surprisingly demanding ways, which may mean standing up – or standing out – for what we believe in very public and open situations.

Sometimes it mean responding to a surprising call from God:

In my own case, it was giving up a very well paid job, with plenty of benefits, at the age of 50 – to go to University, for the first time in my life, to study theology – and, I had to pay my own fees!

(It was challenging enough for me; but my Dad had a heart attack on the strength of it, for which I was blamed!!) However, I soon realised my problems were tiny compared with some of my fellow students.

When my friend, Hilmy, from Malaysia, became a Christian, his family disinherited him; and the international company he worked for were required, by local law, to stop providing pension benefits and any other benefits for him.

And, when my friend Ramesh, in Nepal, was baptised as a Christian against the will of his father, his mother committed suicide; and his father never spoke to him again. Later, he was put in jail for six months, along with a group of friends, for teaching other people about Jesus.

So, the things we're called to do are, quite often, easy in comparison. Doing what God asks may not seem easy; but my experience is when you trust Him - and accept His call, He finds amazing ways to empower us.

We're often called to get involved in the growth of God's kingdom around the world. Paul reminds us the law is summed up in the commandment 'Love your neighbour as yourself' He says 'Jesus called us to set us free'.

We're never forced to serve God, we always have the choice. But, if we don't follow the commandment to love one another as we love ourselves; if we squabble and bite one another, we must accept the consequences.

In our selfish 21st C culture we need to be aware of that, we should encourage our politicians to be aware of it too. We're beginning to see the devastating effects in our communities, sadly, it's not just in the inner cities!

Paul tells us to put human inclinations to one side – He says: 'Don't gratify the desires of the flesh'. Get rid of the natural human tendencies towards selfishness and self indulgence; live by the Spirit'.

It isn't easy – it's human nature to be selfish and greedy. The only way to overcome those desires is to call for the help and empowerment of God's Holy Spirit – our 'helper'.

Paul continues to remind us that the 'Fruit of the Spirit' is: Love, joy, peace, great-heartedness (patience), kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. I know that, by myself, I'm not good at 'self control'! I really need the help of the Holy Spirit.

Paul says 'If we live by the Spirit let's line up with the Spirit.'

For some of us that may be challenging, but the rewards for making the effort are overwhelming – God literally drenches us with His grace.

My thought for you to take away today, and chew over in the coming week is: How is the Spirit guiding me? How should I serve God and neighbour? What is God calling me to do, right now?

So as I close, let's pray; and invite the Holy Spirit to fill and surround us with God's grace and help us harvest the fruit of the Spirit in our own lives

... Come Holy Spirit ...