

St Marc, Grenoble
Sunday 14th August 2022 (Trinity 9)
Hebrews 12: 1 - 3 (Msg)
Luke 12: 49 - 56 (Msg)
'Running the Race'

Good Morning to you all, those here, and those joining by Zoom - You are all welcome! **Let's Pray**

OK, so this is your opportunity to share what you noticed in either of our readings today. What caught your eye? What did you notice? What challenged you, or puzzled you? ... Thank you

When I was at school, a long time ago (60+ years), sport was considered very important; but I was hopeless at anything that involved eye-arm coordination. (I've since learned that I have an astigmatism in my eyes, which helps to explain why).

But I discovered, almost by accident, that I was quite good at running. Not sprints, but longer distances - 1 mile was my favourite track distance; but I actually preferred Cross Country running, over 3 or 4 miles.

I was no good at very quick short distances, but I was able to keep up a steady pace over quite a long distance. If there was someone in front of me, I could lock in behind them, trying to wear them down - then when the end was in sight, I'd turn up the pace and try to overtake them before the finish.

It was about being determined and doggedly hanging in there, then switching into overdrive for the last little effort.

It makes a lot of sense to think about life as a race – not a sprint, more like a marathon; it's about doing your best to do the things Jesus asks us to do.

The author of this lovely letter to the 'Hebrews' (Nobody knows for certain who actually wrote it) – was trying to help them focus on the challenges of living out their Christian faith based on Jesus' perfect model of Christian life.

They were 'second generation' Christians, it was written around 70 AD; and, this letter asked 'how being Christian affected the way they were living their lives? It gives us the same challenge too.

The author's response, in Ch. 12, was 'Focus on the finishing line', where Jesus is waiting for us, encouraging us, cheering us on, because he has already run the race - with all its challenges – ahead of us.

He's been through the pain, he's come out on the other side. He's wearing the winner's crown - He came in first, and is sitting on the podium, on the right hand of God's throne.

We know that the Christian life is just like a long distance race, it will have plenty of good bits, but there'll be some very tough and painful times too.

But, the good news for all of us today is that Jesus, the winner of the Christian race, is standing by, to support us, when the going gets tough. Jesus is right there to offer his help to you too.

He loves us all, and He wants us to love him and open our hearts to the very real help he offers, whenever we are ready to ask Him.

Later in this same chapter, there's a thought about helping each other in the 'race of daily life' - it says: 'So, don't sit around on your hands! No more dragging your feet! Clear the path for long distance runners so no one will trip and fall, so no one will step in a hole and sprain an ankle. Help each other out. ~And run for it!'

Don't be obsessed with getting more material things. Be relaxed with what you have. Since God assured us, 'I'll never let you down, never walk off and leave you.' The writer responds: 'God is there, ready to help; I'm fearless no matter what - Who or what can get to me?' That's wonderful encouragement for every one of us, especially in these difficult and challenging times.

Now, let's continue to the Gospel reading. (Luke 12 49 - 56)

You will have heard me say, many times, that living the Christian faith is not easy, it is not a joyride and Jesus' comments at the start of this reading confirm that. Although His comments are often misunderstood.

He said I've come to start a fire on this earth - how I wish it were blazing right now! We must understand that fires are used for burning rubbish - Jesus wanted to change everything, and to get rid of the rubbish.

Then He makes a key statement, which is often missed, or misconstrued - **'I've come to change everything - turn everything rightside up - how I long for it to be finished!'**

If Jesus wanted to turn everything rightside up, then it must already have been upside down. In other words Jesus was saying that things were in a real mess, and needed sorting out. He says do you think I've come to smooth

things over and make everything nice? (that is - sweep things under the carpet, and pretend there is nothing wrong?)

He continues: 'Not so - I've come to disrupt and confront' - in other words to stir things up AND put things right.

Jesus knew the personal sacrifice He personally would have to make, to put things right with God. - To pay the price for our sins with His own life. But, of course, no one else realised what was about to happen, which would change the course of life in the world.

Jesus also knew that faith in Him would cause disagreement and tension; and split families down the middle: three against two and two against three ... and so on - because most would want to take the easy way: to go with the flow - not to rock the boat, but to keep things as they were; however wrong that may be.

But others would want to follow God's way, the narrow way, the difficult path

Jesus questions them - 'You can all read the signs in the weather, (You can tell when it's going to rain, or when it's going to be scorching hot); so why can't you understand the signs of change in God's season??'

You know how to reach a settlement with your accusers, to avoid going to court; yet you don't realise the price you will condemn yourselves to paying, in eternity, if you choose not to walk in God's way.

The country was occupied by the Romans, who didn't acknowledge God; and most of the Israelite people didn't want to rock the boat, and were willing to accept denial of God's rules - anything for a quiet life! While others wanted to put things right with God, to accept His rules and get life back on track.

In AD 70 it all came tumbling down, just as Jesus had predicted, with the fall of Jerusalem after being besieged by the Roman army for 5 months. That's when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed.

After Jesus' crucifixion - His ultimate sacrifice, the temple and its daily sacrifices were, in effect, no longer required, and it was never actually rebuilt - one of the major changes for God's reconciled people.

I don't know about you, but I see the awful mess our world is in at the moment

- Climate crisis, Financial crisis, Political crisis, Wildfires, Wars, Famines - and I simply cannot believe that none of our leaders appears to be able to realise or accept that these problems have arisen because we have corporately chosen to ignore God's rules, denied His existence and refused to walk in God's way.

But , we don't have to go along with that; we have a clear choice.

In the last paragraph of our Gospel reading, Jesus says; ' You don't have to be a genius to understand these things. Just use your common sense (as you would if someone was threatening to take you to court). That's the kind of decision I'm asking you to make.

Right at the start of the next chapter (chapter 13) we read that some people came to tell Jesus about some atrocities, and a disaster that had afflicted some Galilean people. Jesus' response was - Were they worse sinners than anyone else?

Not at all; unless you turn to God, you too will die!"

Other people came to tell him about some people who had been crushed by a tower, which fell down in Siloam. Again, Jesus responded - 'Were they worse sinners than all other Jerusalemites?

Not at all. Unless you turn to God, you too will die.

I don't know about you, but I think that warning - sent across more than two millennia (2,000+ years) is perfectly clear - Unless we turn to God, unless we faithfully run the race of life God has set before us: We too will die!!

Today we have a choice: **Turn to God for eternity; or die!**

I want to follow Jesus' in God's team, in the cross country race of life ...

What about you??

Let's pray: Lord Jesus, please help us to join your team, in the race of life - today. Help us to turn to you and LIVE with you for eternity ... **Amen**