

St Marc Grenoble

21st August 2022 - African Sunday

Isaiah 58: 9b - 14

Luke 13: 10 - 17

'Call and Answer'

Good morning to everyone here in church, and those joining on Zoom, welcome to this very special celebration of what's called 'African Sunday'.

Let's Pray

We heard two interesting and challenging readings this morning, we could wrestle with them for hours; but, don't worry, I won't go on for as long as I would be expected to in Nigeria! But, before I start:

The concept of freedom from bondage seems to crop up quite a lot; and the Isaiah reading refers to the Lord's blessings and benefits and His provision and guidance.

As Anglicans, we're encouraged to pray for many things, but I wonder whether we always remember to thank God, for all the blessings he provides for us? Do we pause to give Him the glory, when remarkable things happen – or do we just shrug our shoulders and think we've been fortunate??

In the Isaiah passage God urges us to reach out to people bound by oppression; people who are victims of unfair practices or 'put down' by contempt and gossip.

It also encourages us to be generous to the hungry and to reach out to the down and out - those who are in need. God says, if you do that 'Your lives will begin to glow in the darkness, and your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight.' Do you ever feel your life is 'shadowed? - I certainly do sometimes.

God promises 'I will always show you where to go. I'll give you a full life in the emptiest of places"

Grenoble is not empty physically, but I'm sure that for some, lonely people, it can feel like quite a hollow, empty place. That's one of the reasons that Christian Fellowship of our Church family should be so important for all of us.

God says 'if you get rid of these unfair practices, if you stop gossiping about other people, if you care for other, less fortunate people - You'll be like a well watered garden with a gurgling spring that never runs dry.'

I think there are a good few gardens and parks around here that could do with

a really good watering (although maybe they've had a little this week?)

But there's a lot more in there - He says "you'll use the old rubble of past lives to build anew, rebuild the foundations from out of your past" What does all that mean??

I don't know about you, but I had a bit of a chequered past, before I came back to faith in the Lord Jesus. But, God is possibly suggesting that the times when we weren't walking with Him, give us some idea of how desperate those who don't yet know him as Lord and Saviour, can be.

If we encourage these people to turn to Jesus, and walk with Him as their friend and guide, we'll be assisting them to rebuild their foundations and get themselves on a firm footing, and help them become part of a 'livable community'; they may realise it's possible for them to rebuild their lives on a strong foundation, walking with Jesus day by day.

Or, maybe, it is more personal than that ...Are you part of the livable community?? DO YOU WALK with the Lord Jesus as your friend and guide day by day?? **Or do you need to welcome Him into your own life - to rebuild your own foundations with God??**
Because, if you do, TODAY IS THE DAY!!

But, there's another important lesson in here too ... This lovely reading from probably 3,000 years ago, reminds us to '**Watch our Step on the Sabbath**' We must treat it as a Day of Joy - it is the celebration of God's Holy Day.

What does that mean?? We must remember our Sabbath Day - Sunday, is a day of celebration for God! A day when we worship Him together - not thinking about making money, or running about here and there.

We should be here in Church - on time - to Worship our God joyfully and respectfully - and if that means we need to leave a party earlier the night before - so that we can be sure of being in Church **on time to worship God** - so be it!

It may also mean we need to turn off and put away our phones, which distract us and others during the service too!!

And by the way, the last line of that reading says: '**Yes! God says so!**'
Now, let's look at our Gospel reading - Another healing story: we all need and like to hear those - Is this just a healing, as we expect from Jesus?
Or is there something deeper in this story??

What do you make of the poor woman who's been 'crippled by a spirit' or bound by 'the satan' (in another translation) for eighteen years?

What about her condition - so twisted and bent over with arthritis that she

couldn't even look up - does that mean she cannot look up to Heaven??

Is she bent over because of some muscular or bone disease; or, has she really been bent out of shape by oppression and abuse from those around her, or the system – is that ‘the Spirit of oppression’??

I read a suggestion by one scholar, that this woman was a physical metaphor for the nation of Israel, which Jesus wanted to set free from an overwhelming spirit of oppression.

Jesus healing a woman, on the Sabbath, made at least two challenges to the system ... He was asserting that the Sabbath is the Lord's Day,

He wants all people to be healed and refreshed on the Sabbath but He also wants people to be set free, free from bondage.– especially those who, like this woman; indeed like most women in the culture of Judaism, and in some other cultures too, are treated very much as second class citizens.

The suggestions from some studies I've undertaken around this Gospel story are that there is a lot more going on here. Jesus is definitely concerned about this woman; he's concerned not only about her disability; but also about the culture or the spirit of oppression, which seems to have contributed to the disability she seems to be suffering from.

This is probably why Jesus refers to her as a ‘Daughter of Abraham’ and gives her, therefore, just as many rights as ‘Sons of Abraham’??

But, there's more – this healing takes place on the Sabbath; to the intense annoyance and indignation of the President, or Leader, of the Synagogue – the Church Warden if you like!

Jesus ruthlessly exposed the hypocrisy of the religious establishment, represented by the ‘leader of the synagogue’; and, in doing so, I believe He was showing us the way we should try to reach out to those around us, by responding to their needs.

It can be far too easy for us to be blown off course, by responding to the established conventions of our own tradition, rather than meeting people right where they are, and providing for their real needs.

You heard what Jesus said to the ‘leader of the synagogue – who was probably doing what he thought was ‘right and proper’ – “You hypocrites”!

So, BEWARE! Do not try to box in the Holy Spirit of God – expecting Him to do what we think He should be doing.

Instead, let's invite Him to come and work by His wonderful power, and

One of the most exciting things about my Christian journey has been that when I have been willing to simply let go, and invite the Holy Spirit to take over in my life, I have always been surprised and amazed by the ways in which God has been able to use me, and delight me at the same time!

In my experience, the Christian Life is like a roller-coaster ride, with ups and downs – often at breakneck speed – but, if you hang on tight and dare to open your eyes, the view is spectacular, and the arrival is pure delight!!

So now, as I close, **let's pray:**

Lord thank you for what you have revealed from scripture today.
Please help us in the coming weeks and months to 'Let go and let God' and, please surprise and delight us by the journey you take us on.

Lord, I especially pray for those people, here today, who have not yet opened their hearts to you - who are thinking ... Yes, please, I'd like some of that ...

Help them to open their hearts and their lives to you - **right now.**

COME LORD JESUS (say it with me) - COME LORD JESUS

Cast out the rubbish and Renew the foundations of our lives and fill them with the wonderful power, joy and peace of Your Holy Spirit.

We ask these things in Your Name Jesus' **Amen**