

St Marc Grenoble
Sunday 30th October 2022 (All Saints)
Ephesians 1: 11 - 23
Luke 6: 20 - 31
'Inheritance and Blessings'

Good Morning Everyone, here in Church and following on Zoom - you are very welcome. Thanks for joining us.

Let's Pray

As usual, before I begin, I want to know what jumped out at you from our readings today; what questions do you have, what made you sit up and take notice, what challenged you. As a reminder, there are no wrong questions and no wrong answers ... Thank you

Today we celebrate a special day in the Church's Calendar - can anyone remember what we call it? It's All Saints Day (Although it is Actually on Tuesday). What do we celebrate? (God's Family of faithful followers, (Our loved ones) past, present - and future; The Saints!)

N.B. It's not to be confused with Halloween - All Hallows Eve, or All Saints Eve (which is actually tomorrow), was traditionally the day people prepared their homes, and their hearts to welcome and remember the 'Saints' particularly those loved ones who have passed away, and whom we still love; and we especially thank God for them today.

We are really thinking about God's family, of which we are members, today. So, it was really appropriate that we should have baptisms this morning, a time when we are welcoming new members into God's family.

The Gospel reading is very helpful, as we celebrate God's faithfulness, past, present and future; but also as we think about ourselves and our faith, and how we can try and become better 'saints', better followers trusting in Jesus and better holy ones.

'Holy' really means 'set apart for God'. This reading – sometimes referred to as 'The Beatitudes' – or 'Blessings' gives us an interesting view on the life of faith, or the walk of faith, as a Christian.

To understand it better, we need to go back a few verses and understand the circumstances, and the people Jesus was talking to when He gave these blessings.

First, v. 12 tells us Jesus had been praying all night. Then v. 13 tells us He called his disciples to him and chose 12 whom He also designated as 'Apostles'.

Interesting isn't it, before choosing His Apostles, Jesus spent a long time in conversation with His heavenly Father. That's a powerful example for us who are supposed to try and imitate Jesus; - when you need to make important life decisions, spend serious time in prayer.

An apostle is an official representative given a commission, or specific task. These apostles were commissioned by Jesus to advance the kingdom of God, by proclaiming the Gospel, or Good News, of Jesus, and we're told He sent them ahead of Him to the places He was intending to visit; to tell people about the healing and salvation which Jesus brings.

Jesus then went, taking His newly appointed 'apostles' with Him, to talk to (v. 17) a large crowd of followers (disciples) and a great number of people from all over the place (a huge congregation) who had come to hear Him and to be healed of their ailments or diseases. They were all trying to touch Him because so much energy, or power, was coming from Him and healing them.

The reading continues with the four Beatitudes, or blessings, (The heading is: You're Blessed) but the second part is the four corresponding woes. And the third part is about how we deal with our enemies. (Do we really have personal enemies?)

We need to have a look at these blessings, because they give us a remarkable guide about the life of a Christian, or the life we should be striving for.

Incidentally, in today's world, we've largely lost the art and practice of blessing; but in the Jewish community of Jesus' time on earth, blessings were very important.

Sadly, I think that our society has generally replaced them with greed and selfishness, whereas the use of blessings showed genuine care, concern and love for others.

The first thing it reminds us is that just because we are Christians, it doesn't mean that life will be a bowl of cherries, or an easy ride all the time. Quite the opposite.

I love this translation's pragmatic take on the blessings Jesus described:

'You're blessed when you've lost it all.' i.e. When you're at your lowest possible point in life (and we all get there sometimes) God's kingdom is there for you to find - God is just waiting to console and encourage you.

You're blessed when you're ravenously hungry - (not just peckish) but when there's nothing in the larder and you're longing for something to eat. Then you're ready for the Messianic Meal - for God's willingness and readiness to provide for you.

I wonder if that is why we occasionally need to fast? To get back to that point??

You're blessed when the tears flow freely ... haven't we all been in that desert place at

some time or other ... Jesus promises us - Joy (His Joy) comes with the morning. The long night of the soul will come to an end; however long and however hopeless it may seem.

Count yourself blessed every time other humans reject and try to destroy you - Jesus says 'REJOICE' - you are in good company; Jesus says my preachers and witnesses have always been treated like this. If you're really walking with God, you can expect others will try and undermine your relationship with him.

What it all says is that God has a commitment of love to the poor, and the outcasts and people who need healing – the unclean and ceremonially unclean - as the reading says: 'when you've lost it all, God's kingdom is there for the finding'.

That's why, during His time on earth, Jesus' teachings were often thought of as scandalous, because He demonstrated a real love for those who were right on the margins of society – for whatever reason.

So, these blessings promise those who are poor, or outcast, a genuine release from that degradation in God's kingdom. And that is good news for every one of us, because we are all poor, or rejected, in one way or another.

The good news is that we will not be defined like that in the Kingdom! Jesus promises relief from degradation of any sort in the Kingdom of heaven.

Within those blessings there's a challenge for us; we're called to mirror God's love as Jesus showed it – we're called to be like Jesus – that means we have to try and treat others who are poor, degraded or outcast in exactly the same way as ourselves.

Then, come the woes – potentially they balance out the blessings. You can't have it all – you either have what you want now, for a short while, or later for eternity - that is for ever! It's a stark reminder that the Christian life will not always be easy or smooth - Listen again ..

v. 24- 26 But it's trouble ahead if you think you have it made. What you have is all you'll ever get. And it's trouble ahead if you're satisfied with yourself. Your self will not satisfy you for long. And it's trouble ahead if you think life's all fun and games. There's suffering to be met, and you're going to meet it.

Then, we come to the bit about loving our enemies and praying for those who reject you. I must say I often find that bit really difficult – perhaps especially in the present world climate – but it is quite clear, that is what we are called by Jesus to do. 'Do to others what you want them to do to you!'

And, this is clearly echoed in our reading from Ephesians:

v.11 It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for... Long before

we first heard of Jesus and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us; He had designs on us for glorious living, part of the great overall purpose He is working out in everything and everyone.

13-14 It's in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this Message of your salvation), found yourselves home free—signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit. This signet from God is the first installment on what's coming, a reminder that we'll get everything God has planned for us, a praising and glorious life.

As I said before, Jesus doesn't ever promise our life here will be easy – but He does promise wonderful blessings in the Kingdom of God; worshipping and praising God, face to face for eternity - and that's something really worth looking forward to!!

So let's go into this week rejoicing, knowing that when the going gets really tough, our God is there underpinning us, supporting us and promising us the true Joy of heaven to look forward to

– Let's Pray