

St Marc Grenoble  
Sunday 19th March  
Colossians 3: 12 - 17  
Luke 2: 33 - 35

**'Love, Forgiveness and Redemption'**

Good morning, and welcome everyone - both here in Church and joining on Zoom!  
Let's Pray ...

First, as usual, I'd like to ask you to share what you noticed in today's readings - what spoke to you and what seems important to your Christian life - what hit you today??  
... Thank you.

As David mentioned earlier, today the Church of England is celebrating 'Mothering Sunday', (Not the same as Mother's Day) it's a time when we traditionally honoured our Mothers and what they have taught us about love and our relationship with God.

But also, in the past in England, it was a time when people returned to the Church in which they grew up - to honour and give thanks for what they had been taught about God's love for them.

This morning I want to concentrate mainly on our second reading; but, first I'll have a brief look at the very short Gospel reading, which may seem difficult to understand.

Look at the context: Mary and Joseph had brought the baby Jesus to the Temple for the first time in His life (In effect to give thanks for Him) and they were blessed by Simeon, an elderly priest, who immediately recognised this child as the long promised Messiah. We're told His earthly parents were astonished by his revelation.

He also had a serious warning for Mary, which I think the Message translation helps us understand better: 'Listen', Simeon said to Mary Jesus' mother, 'This child has been placed here to make many in Israel fall and rise again; (what does this mean - doing away with the religious hierarchy, perhaps?) and as a sign that will be spoken against. (yes a sword will go through your own soul as well), so that the thoughts of many hearts may be disclosed.' This was a very stark prophecy of some of the challenges Jesus was bringing and what it would mean to follow Him faithfully - as we'll see in our readings in the coming days.

Let's move on to the reading from Paul's letter to the Colossians. I have often used it at weddings, because although Paul was writing to a new community of Christians - the Church in Colossae - what he says about relationships is really valuable both to families and to church communities. I believe it is very important for us all to hear it.

It is a valuable reminder to all families, communities and even church fellowships, of the wonderful way in which God has modelled forgiveness and harmonious behaviour, which as Christians we all need to use in our daily lives.

Remember, we say in the Lord's Prayer, 'Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.' and 1 John 1: 9,10 says 'If we confess our sins God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness' Also: 'If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar, and His Word is not in us.'

So, it makes sense we should hear this reading on a Sunday when we are giving thanks for children - because we know that life is not going to be easy for them as they grow up; and it is very important that we should teach them, especially by our own example: 'Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him!'

It is also a really timely reminder for each one of us during this time of Lent, when we should be reflecting on how we can draw closer to God and strengthen our relationships with Him and with each other - especially in our families.

Now, while I'm on the subject of families, here's a special word for our fathers - fathers would you please stand up?

One of the things that impresses me about families in France, unlike many other countries, is that despite being a very secular nation - which does not often seem to want to honour God - many 21C men here seem to be very involved, and hands on, in helping to bring up their families.

It is vital in the present self centred and materialistic culture that fathers especially should demonstrate real care and love for their children - modelling God's care, love and forgiveness for the children by the caring and Godly way they behave themselves.

Contrary to what some people appear to believe, it is not a sign of weakness to show love and encouragement for your children (and their mother), rather it is a strong sign of Godliness and Christian strength.

Remember in Matthew 18:5 Jesus said: 'If anyone welcomes one such child in my name, they welcome me.'

Also in 1 John 5:2 (Message) we read 'The reality test on whether we love God's children is this: Do we love God? Do we keep His commands?'

Being a good father (and indeed a good grandfather) takes time, effort and love - all the time! (Please sit)

The other vital need for any kind of community, but especially any Christian family, is good communication. It is essential that you make time in your busy lives, to be with each other, to talk to each other and to encourage each other; that needs to happen frequently; and it becomes even more important as you and your family grow older.

In these really difficult times for our community, our families and for our world, this reading from Colossians gives an important reminder and guideline for all of us, that we must try every day to imitate Jesus' model of total love, care and forgiveness, throughout our lives, wearing God's love and His upright ways like layers of clothing, which keep our family lives together and holy.

But that certainly doesn't mean we should indulge in, permit or allow unacceptable or immoral behaviour; and that starts with each one of us, ourselves and our family.

We must ask God to send His Holy Spirit to give us the wisdom, the energy and the love we need, to share His love within our families.

Let's Pray