

St Marc Grenoble
Sunday 16th April 2023
John 20: 19 - 31
Acts 2: 14A, 22 - 32
'Peace be with you'

Good morning and, as always, welcome everyone - both here in Church and those joining on Zoom - you are all very welcome! - Let's PRAY

Alleluia the Lord is Risen!! - **He is Risen indeed, Alleluia!!**

I'm sure some people think that 'shout' is only for Easter Day. But the fact is Jesus rose from the grave once - but remains our risen Saviour for eternity!!

Once again this morning I asked that we should read the Gospel first, because I think it sometimes helps us to understand things a little better, if the timeline is in order.

As usual, I'd like to hear your comments on what struck you in the readings today...
Thank you.

So, Jesus is risen today and every day - We need to remember that, especially when the going gets tough, which it will for all of us from time to time - we must remember Jesus is Alive! He is risen, He loves us and He will continue to be with us throughout our lives - especially during the tough times.

So, just to get this clear in our minds, let's look closely at today's Gospel reading: The very first thing to notice is that John is sending a clear, coded, message in verse 19. It is the way John writes: He refers to 'that day - the first day of the week' - that's his way of telling us, in his code, that this day was, and is, a vitally important day. - It's the beginning of a new era, new covenant or new promise - the day of Jesus' resurrection from the dead! John is saying to us - as I'm saying to you 'Listen up!!'

We're told the disciples were 'fearful' – not really surprising after what the Jewish leaders had done to Jesus, their rabbi, their master. The doors were shut, and bolted! The disciples were hiding from the authorities, behind locked doors. Disillusioned – dejected – depressed; their purpose gone! The sense of despair is palpable. That's sometimes hard for us to understand - because we have the benefit of hindsight.

Suddenly Jesus appeared, standing in the middle of them! Wow! How did that happen?? Did He have a key perhaps?? No, that's silly - the door was bolted!! 'Peace be with you' He said! – as if nothing was unusual!

Incredible - or what? It's hard to believe anyone who wasn't there, that's for sure!

Then, just so they could be certain He wasn't a ghost (even the Holy Ghost!) He showed them the wounds in His hands and side - It was, and is, the real Jesus!

We're told 'The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Master'. Personally, I think ecstatic may be a better description! – Or blown away!!

What did He say? 'Peace be with you'? Then: 'As the Father has sent me, so I'm sending you'. We must realise this isn't the end but the beginning of something new!

With that Jesus breathed on them, and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit!' then: "If you forgive anyone's sins they are forgiven. If you retain anyone's sins, they're retained." There's no doubt about it – the guidance of the Holy Spirit is vital for them - and us!

Jesus had come to reassure His disciples; and He brought four gifts ...

His first gift was peace – the peace which passes all understanding. He came and stood in the middle of them; His first words were "Peace be with you'. Jesus brought His everlasting gift of Peace. When our lives are turning upside down, it is that gift of peace we must ask for, and cling to - it is both life changing and life preserving.

At this point, Jesus showed the disciples the scars on His hands and His side - just to make sure they were quite certain it was Him – by showing them His scars He proved it beyond doubt (it says in 1 Peter 3:24 - by His wounds you are healed)

Jesus' second gift was Joy - Joy when the disciples saw their master. Joy that their Lord - our Lord, had not abandoned them, and He will not abandon us! He is ALWAYS with us; so we too should always delight in his joy!!

His third gift was a commission, Jesus said, 'As the Father has sent me, so I'm sending you' Jesus sent His disciples out to share the Good News, the Gospel! And, to be crystal clear, as His modern day disciples, Jesus is sending all of us out too ... There is no other reason I would be here in Grenoble, except that Jesus sent me! I thought I'd retired - but Jesus called me here because there was a need!

'Where is Jesus sending you?? As Julie Andrews once sang in 'The Sound of Music' - Let's start at the very beginning. First - are you a truly committed member of this church? - Jesus' church of English speaking disciples, here in Grenoble??

If so, are you baptised? - If not, why not?? Or are you sitting on the fence? Obinna and Fina have made the decision to be baptised today; they know Jesus died for them; He died for you too!!

We'll be offering baptism again soon, so NOW is the time to make your commitment!

If you're baptised, do you act as part of the church? Are you on the Electoral Roll? - if not WHY NOT? Fill the form in today - then you can vote at the AGM next week.

Jesus gave them His fourth, and most vital gift. He breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit!' They needed the Holy Spirit and we do too; to equip and empower us to preach and proclaim the love, healing and forgiveness Jesus brings.

Many of us find it hard to proclaim the Gospel, because we're shy, or afraid we'll make fools of ourselves. But the Holy Spirit equips us and will enable us to do that.

You can begin right here - in the safety of this church. We're always looking for people to help lead services, read the readings and lead prayers ... never done it before? Maybe now is the time to start - have a word with me if you'd like to try. Remember when Jesus calls YOU, the Holy Spirit will equip YOU!!

Back to John: What about Thomas ('Doubting Tom?'), what's his problem? If you've ever been the odd one out, you'll understand? (N.B. Didymus means The Twin)

Thomas wasn't there when Jesus came the first time. The others said: 'We've seen the Master!' ... Pull the other one! said Thomas; 'Honestly - we have.' 'Well I won't believe it - unless I can put my fingers in His wounds,' said Thomas.

Jesus understands, doubts are OK, we all get them! A week later, Jesus returned. Thomas was there this time 'Peace be with you!' said Jesus. 'Come on Thomas, bring your finger here. Inspect my hands and side for yourself. Don't doubt any more! Just believe!' 'Oh Lord! replied Thomas, 'My Master and my God!' Do you know it's the 1st time in John's Gospel Jesus is addressed as God by Thomas! No doubts!

'Is it because you've seen me you believe?' Asked Jesus 'Well, God bless those who don't see and yet believe!' Jesus understands when we doubt; He sends the Holy Spirit to resource us and help us believe. Whatever it takes! So, if like Thomas, you have doubts, just explain to Jesus what the problem is; and, in my personal experience, the Holy Spirit will always help you to believe!

The biggest step of faith comes in asking for help. The next step is to be faithful enough to open your heart to the Holy Spirit ... and let Him do the rest.

In v.30 John enlarges the picture: 'Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, (not written in this book) These are written so that YOU may believe the Messiah, son of God, is Jesus; and with this faith YOU may have Life in His name

One thing to note in the Acts reading; we're told the Apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great power; and that day about 3,000 people joined them. Grace was upon them, they worked together and shared everything. If we start sharing our faith people will start streaming through these doors too!

Faith in the Lord Jesus changes lives - mine, yours, all who turn to Him. Then, having changed us, He uses us to do His work ... Listen out for your call... As I close, **let's Pray** - and ask God to fill us with his Holy Spirit ... Amen