

St Marc, Grenoble  
Sunday 10th September 2023 (Trinity 14)  
Matthew 18: 15 - 20  
Romans 13: 8 - 14  
**'Farewell!'**

Good Morning Everyone! Whether you are here in Church or joining us by Zoom you are very welcome! **Let's PRAY.**

This may be my last service here, but - as usual, I'd like to know what struck you about today's readings, before I launch into my own reflections .... Thank You!

As you may have noticed, today's readings could be described as 'quite challenging', and there are several words, which help to encapsulate what we heard in them. (By the way I didn't choose the readings, they are some of the set readings for today!)

Family, sin, misbehaviour, love and reconciliation are all single word summaries of what we heard in the readings. Probably, the most important word is: Family!

I sincerely hope that in our two and three quarter years with you here, you have noticed that one of my consistent goals has been to emphasise the fact that every one of us here - from the very youngest - to Nell, whom we regard as the 'Grandma' of our congregation and to Alan who must be regarded as the 'Grandpa', are all equal in their importance as members of God's family.

As in every family, each one of us has very specific roles and duties within the family - although still not everyone has realised that yet. Also, of course, as in every family, we have our ups and downs. Like most families we're bound to have differences; sometimes even misconceptions about our individual responsibilities; but Jesus encourages us to offer an example to the rest of the world as to how to deal with them, without doing permanent damage to each other.

Another one of those important words is: 'Reconciliation'! Not that I would know much about it, because as you've probably noticed I never speak my mind, and I never fall out with anyone! (If you believe that, you'll believe anything!)

I've sometimes been referred to as 'direct' or 'upfront' and I know some people find that difficult to cope with; but, the upside is, you usually know exactly where you stand with me - and I don't hold grudges!

One of the problems for us, as Christians, is that often the easiest way out seems to be to 'take our ball home' or 'go off in a huff'. But if we really treated each other as family, we'd know it's neither right, nor sensible to do that. We need to try and sort things out and get straightened out with each other.

We need to learn to see things from the other person's point of view and to say sorry more often; and accept each other, with our weaknesses and our strengths, for who and what we are. Jesus tells us: "If you have a problem with another disciple, another member of the family – try and sort it out just between the two of you alone." v.15. If they listen you've won back a brother or sister. For me it's actually even more powerful than that; because, in my experience, if you can sort it out between you, like that, you often build a much stronger friendship than you had in the first place.

A fellowship of Christians who can be open and honest with each other, and who can disagree, without falling out, is a really powerful example to all around; but it also makes for fellowship with really strong bonds.

A fellowship built on Christ-like values in this way, has immense power when it joins together in prayer. You could say that a faith filled consensus on earth is assured of heavenly action; and that's what this church needs, right now, in this time of change.

Jesus says v.20: "Where two or three come together in my name, I'll be there in the midst of them." In my experience that presence is self evident and, when you experience it, it is simply 'awesome'!

But, let me say it once again - as I've said many times before, being a Christian does not mean life suddenly becomes easy. While I was preparing this Matthew 7:13,14 came to mind:

Jesus explains that the way into the Christian life is the more difficult way: He says 13 'Go in by the narrow gate. The gate that leads to destruction, you see, is nice and wide, and the road going there has plenty of room. Lots of people go that way. 14 **But the gate leading to life is narrow, and the road going there is a tight squeeze.** Not many people find their way through.'

So make sure you don't fall into the temptation of taking the easy path, the one that leads to a life of destruction - perhaps another clear way of saying it, is 'Don't follow the crowd"! Jesus said 'I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.' John 14: 6

Now, before we finish, let's have a look at what Paul had to say to the early Christians in Rome. He refers to the Ten Commandments, given by God to the Children of Israel in the wilderness, but he sums them all up in one short phrase from Jesus: 'Love your neighbour as yourself'; and he continues: 'Love does no wrong to its neighbour; so love is the fulfilment of the law.'

Paul also reminds us that 'The hour has come to wake up!' To open our eyes and ears to the call of Jesus; to put on the armour of light, to await, expect and be prepared for His return.' Paul seems to be speaking directly to us: Rom 13:12 'Let's put off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.' As family members we should be setting the example to our children and younger members too. He says 'Let's behave appropriately - as in the daytime, or the daylight; not in wild parties, and drunkenness,. Or shameless immorality; nor in bad temper, or jealousy.

Let's think about the final words of chapter 13 of Paul's letter to the Romans, which I've rearranged slightly: "Don't make allowance for the flesh and its lusts; but put on the Lord Jesus, the Messiah - the head of our family. In other words do what Jesus would do, what He teaches us to do and, by your example, teach your children to do it too.

Remember, especially you Dads: you have a duty to guide your children in their faith - and the only way to do that is by letting them see and follow your own example.

If you put parties before worship, so will your children (and you will have to deal with all the difficulties that will bring with it, later in their lives) - but if you put Jesus first in your life, so will your children.

When the disciples asked: Matthew 18: 1 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' Jesus replied <sup>3</sup> 'I'm telling you the truth,' he said. 'Unless you turn inside out and become like children, you will never, ever, get into the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> So if any of you make yourselves humble like this child, you will be great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup> And if anyone welcomes one such child in my name, they welcome me.'

But in v.6 He also says: 'Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to trip up,' he went on, 'it would be better for them to have a huge millstone hung around their neck and be drowned far out in the deep sea.'

Our children are the future of the church; so be clear, it is your duty, our duty, to nurture them in it.

This is the last time, for a while, at least, that I have the joy of speaking to you - thanks for your support and encouragement over the last 33 months - Julia and I have loved being a part of this Church - it has been a real privilege and probably the most fulfilling time of my ordained ministry.

Please remember, every one of you is a vital part of the Family of Jesus and the future of this church; and the way it shares the Good News around here depends on every single one of you - working closely together as the body of Jesus Christ.

May the Lord richly bless you in that challenging task ... Amen

Let's Pray