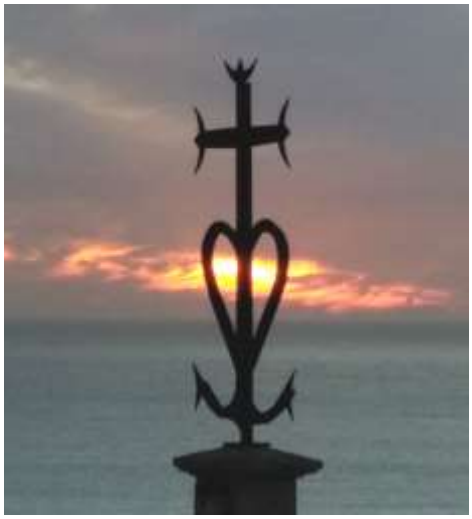


Chaplaincy of All Saints' Marseille
with Aix-En-Provence
and the Luberon

22nd March 2020
4th Sunday Of Lent – Mothering Sunday

Reflection
by Jane Quarmby, Reader

Mother's Day conjures up pictures of children giving their mothers little bunches of flowers, and a hand-drawn card. It's a lovely image but this year sadly it won't be the reality, as our churches close for public worship, and travel restrictions make it positively dangerous to see our mothers, especially if they are elderly. It's a worrying time for everyone, and hard to understand that we have to keep our distance from loved ones. No family lunches, no taking Mum out for a treat. The best we can do is phone or Skype. Technology does help at times like these, to keep in touch with our friends and families and let us see each other, albeit on a screen. But it's not the same!

Mothers have a special place in all our hearts. They bring us into the world and keep us safe –as far as they can. Not all can of course and it's not just today that the world can be a dangerous place for children – see Exodus 2 from verse 1 to 10. Moses only survived the Egyptian ruler's decree that all Hebrew male babies should be killed at birth because his mother was a clever lady who knew where Pharaoh's daughter went to bathe in the Nile and deliberately left her perfect little son there in a tiny boat for her to find. She knew that to the Egyptians, the Nile was a goddess, who had life-giving and healing properties. Pharaoh's

daughter wasn't just coming to bathe in the river, she was also completing her morning devotions. So to find a baby floating in the river, carried by the Nile goddess, would mean a great deal to her. And who wouldn't feel sorry for a 3 month old baby who was crying? So she does an extra-ordinary and courageous thing – she adopts this child whom she knew to be a Hebrew who should have been killed at birth. She gave him not only his life, but saw to it that he had the best of everything including the best education in administration, leadership and the military. She named him Moses which in the Egyptian meant "to give birth" – perhaps because in her mind, the river Nile which was revered as a source of life, had given birth to the child. The Israelites had a different meaning to his name – "to lift out".

And so in a sense Moses had two mothers – his birth mother who had left him there in the river, with his older sister handily nearby to offer the services of a wet nurse who just happened to be his natural mother, and his adopted mother. Those two women must have known, must have understood each other, to make such a happy outcome. Both, in their own way, made Moses into the man God wanted him to be, to be able to rescue his people from slavery. Both mothers, whether they knew it or not, were doing God's will.

There are many examples of mothers in the Bible, examples of them being blessed with children miraculously, or risking their lives to protect them. It must have broken Jesus's mother's heart to watch what happened to him on the cross. I can't imagine how she got through that experience. But she was there for her son, to do what little she could to comfort him by her presence. She showed great courage and love.

When we celebrate Mothering Sunday, we are honouring our mothers who brought us into the world. We may not always be with them when they need us, or vice versa, but they gave us a precious gift. It's up to us how we use it. We should remember that mothers are people too and they don't always get it right, any more than we do, which can come as a shock when we in our turn grow up!

Today we are all worried and anxious about the Coronavirus which stalks the world. It's not something we have experienced in our lives and it brings with it great challenges, not least to care for each other. It's particularly hard for those of us who are not allowed to leave our homes apart from essential trips, cooped up with our families or feeling very isolated if we are alone. We all know how ragged people's tempers can become on holiday or at Christmas, when we share extra time with our loved ones. St Paul has some good advice for us in Colossians chapter 3 verses 12 to 17 which is one of the readings for today: "clothe yourselves with tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony."

So this Mothering Sunday, wherever we are, let's give thanks to God for His love, his patience with us, and His constant care of us. Make sure we contact our families and friends as the

crisis deepens, reach out to the lonely and the afraid, the housebound and the neighbour. It doesn't take long to send an e mail or make a quick phone call. And above all, as we all turn into anchorites, let's not forget the power of prayer. We may feel helpless and alone, but prayer speaks directly to God – and as Psalm 34, verse 17 says "The Lord hears his people when they call to Him for help. He rescues them from all their troubles."

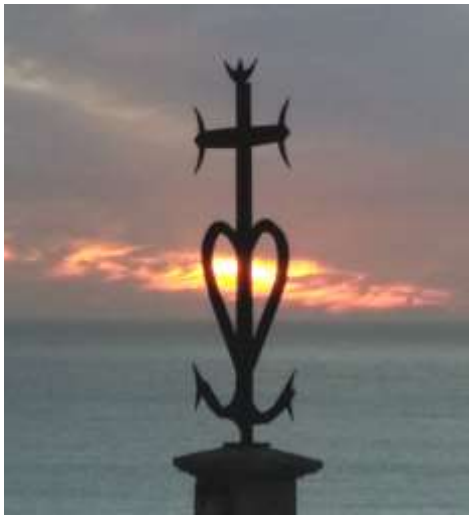
The chaplaincy ministry team are all available if you need help – ring the chaplaincy number on 07 66 01 71 50 or e mail anglican.marseille@gmail.com .

Just because we can't have public services doesn't mean we're closed as a chaplaincy!

Keep safe.

Jane

Photograph: *Croix camarguaise*, Notre-Dame de la Garde, Marseille.
The traditional Camargue Cross, seen across the area of the chaplaincy, combines three symbols: a cross, an anchor and a heart, representing faith, hope and love.



Chaplaincy of All Saints' Marseille
with Aix-En-Provence
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29th March 2020
5th Sunday of Lent – Passion Sunday

Reflection for Passion Sunday
by Revd John Smith

Today is Passion Sunday, the start of Passiontide. Passiontide marks a turning in the Lent season. Moving away from experiencing Christ's temptation in the wilderness and his preparation for His ministry, our eyes look toward the climax of His ministry, the cross and beyond that to the empty tomb. But first the cross has to be endured and our salvation secured.

In several ways the gospel reading set for today presages Christ's death and resurrection. We have a death of a loved one, weeping (wailing) women, a stone over the entrance of the cave to be rolled away, linen wrappings, the empty tomb and new life. Both cases demonstrated Christ's power over death and gave glory to God but for all these similarities the resurrection of Lazarus and Christ are not the same. With Lazarus it was more a case of being restored to life; restoration rather than resurrection. Lazarus was returned to his former self, perhaps psychologically changed in some way, but otherwise as he was before he died. After his resurrection Jesus appears as a human being with a body but with a body that has been transformed as ours will be - but that is a story for another day, Easter Day.

Our reading from the Old Testament also speaks of resurrection. Ezekiel, speaking for the Lord, says, "*O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them …Then you shall know that I am the Lord*" Resurrection and the pouring out of the Holy spirit are tied together as Ezekiel continues "*I shall put my spirit in you that you may live*". If Christ's coming to this earth to die for us was God's great gift of Himself to us in bodily form, the second great gift of God of Himself was when He came in spiritual form.

The overarching lesson from this miracle is that Christ is the regenerator of the dead, spiritually and physically. He is able to regenerate the hearts and minds of those who are spiritually dead in their waywardness, lostness and sin. Christ's life-giving miracle of grace is as remarkable as His miraculous ability to resurrect. And it is in the resurrection that Christians hope and believe.

Looking at the gospel for a lesson for today I am struck that Christ gave Lazarus more than life. He also gave him time. And this is a gift that many of us have been given at this time. So how are we using this unsought gift of time? Probably one of the most frequently said statements in this modern age is 'I don't have enough time'. Or 'there are not enough hours in the day'. How many people have wished they had more time I wonder? Well now we have got it. We have got free time having had all those things that we were planning to do removed from our calendars. For sure it has forced us to reorder our priorities, for priorities are what the shortage of time has always been about. We all have 24 hours in a day. It is how we choose to spend those hours that is the difference. Let us begin by allocating more time to God through prayer, reflection, worship and service. There are new opportunities to serve Him through serving others and so many fabulous resources available to enrich our daily walk with God.

I was also struck by the last words of our gospel, "*Unbind him and let him go*" or 'take off the grave clothes and set him free', for this is the condition we find ourselves in as believing Christians. We have been freed from the grave.

We wait to see if the period of our home confinement is extended again beyond April 15, but if you are praying for an end to this time and feel your prayers are not being answered just remember the distressed sisters, Mary and Martha, in our gospel. God's delays are not denials. We know from experience that unrelieved suffering can and does produce growth. Jesus Himself "*learned obedience by the things that He suffered*" (Hebrews 5:8) And Paul says to the Romans "*we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope*" (Romans 5:3-4) And one thing that we need at the moment is hope.

We take comfort and hope from God's words recorded in Jeremiah "*For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope*". (Jeremiah 29:11) And the reassurance of Paul, though it may be hard for us to see at this place and time, "*We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose*" (Romans 8:28)

I have to smile when I hear people (including myself) say that these are uncertain times. Whenever have we lived in certain times? Whenever were we certain what would happen in the next hour let alone the next day, week or month? Yes, it is unusual to have the world turned so completely upside down but there is only one thing certain in this life and that is God's love for us. I am equally struck when I hear speak about these "troubled times", as it is not the times that are troubled but the people experiencing the times. This is not to be unsympathetic to those who are troubled by the times (far from it - they are of deep concern to all of us) but we must remind ourselves that Jesus gives us the answer "*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me*". (John 14 v 1) And if we are anxious, Jesus also tells us "*do not be anxious about your life*" (Matthew 6:25). Let us hold onto his words through these times. As Paul writes to Timothy: "*For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love*". (2 Timothy 1:7)

So, let us commit to face the coming days and weeks turning fear into faith, panic into prayer and worry into worship.

Amen

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – Palm Sunday – 5th April 2020

The Revd Canon David Pickering

In parish ministry I always found the Palm Sunday Eucharist the most complicated to plan and organise. There was the challenge of the Palm Procession from the lychgate, through the churchyard and into the Church, singing that ancient wonderful hymn, *All glory, laud and honour*. Ready for the service to begin, everyone was settled in their pews and had to be uprooted to gather outside - often in the cold and the wind, sometimes in the pouring rain! Then there was the search for volunteers to take part in the dramatic reading of The Passion.

As these two liturgical acts take up a fair amount of time, some feel the sermon can be omitted. This on the grounds that the emotional drama of the solemn reading of the Passion has a message in itself. One year I omitted the sermon and the Churchwarden complained that, "I hadn't earned my crust!".

This year, with the suspension of all Palm Processions and Solemn Readings of the Passion, we can perhaps reflect ourselves on the Gospel whilst leaving the Passion Reading to speak for itself. Instead, let's consider this: how does the Palm Procession fit into the whole of Holy Week, Good Friday and Easter Day?

The wonderful traditional hymn, *All glory, laud and honour* is perhaps a good place to start. The original Latin version, *Gloria, Laus et honor*, goes back to St Theodulf, bishop of Orleans from 789 to 818. He wrote it while in prison at Angers, after being deposed by King Louis the Pious. In its early form the hymn had thirty nine verses - suitable for long Palm Sunday Processions. The English

version we use today was written by the great 19th century hymnologist, J.M. Neale, and included in the first edition of Hymns Ancient and Modern in 1861. Present versions are usually five verses long, with the first verse as a refrain. For long procession nine verse formats are available.

The words have a simple beauty: *Thou art the King of Israel, David's royal Son, The company of angels, The people of the Hebrews* ..... They capture the spirit and imagery of Jesus on his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Simply reading the words, rather than singing them, can become a prayer for Palm Sunday.

Thou didst accept their praises: it may seem that the crowd's Hosannas were a general, spontaneous and involuntary response as Jesus casually rode into Jerusalem. But the first three evangelists are clear: this was an event rich in symbolism and deliberately orchestrated by Jesus himself when he asked for two disciples to find him a donkey. It was to be a humble yet triumphant entrance into the holy city. But it was at the same time to be a messianic entrance, reflecting the Old Testament prophecy of Zachariah 14.4 where the victorious king would stand on the Mount of Olives to defeat the nations who had captured Jerusalem. That messianic entrance to the city was to be from the east, over the Mount of Olives. This contrasted clearly with what would have been the entrance of Pilate and other Roman governors who traditionally entered from a western gate. Jesus' messianic entrance was to be humble and peaceful in contrast to the violent conquering entrance of the Roman emperor or his generals. But his Palm Sunday entrance into Jerusalem was also to be much more.

By the manner in which he organised his ride into Jerusalem, Jesus shows that this was to be the crucial week of his life. The full meaning and purpose of his life and ministry were coming to a head. In his messianic entry into Jerusalem Jesus was fulfilling his mission with meaning and purpose. The events at the climax of the coming week were to show the true nature of the Messiah, even if this was not to be the Messiah the Jewish authorities of his day had in mind.

Jesus knew this was to be the fulfilment of his life and mission. But how much did he know of what was to actually happen? All the synoptic gospels are convinced that he did know, certainly in broad outline. Mark and Luke each give three detailed predictions, while Matthew has four, the final one being after his entry into Jerusalem. At the beginning of Chapter 26, Matthew's account of the

Passion tells us: *When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, 'You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.'*

Many biblical scholars would have us believe that the detailed predictions of the evangelists were written in the light of the events. The fact that there are so many, and almost in a repetitious patten could support this. Whatever the case may be, there can be no doubt that Jesus did warn those close to him that things would get difficult and come to a violent end. Perhaps after all that had happened, the evangelists filled in the details. Yet it is certain that Jesus knew the crunch time was rapidly approaching. Despite his words of desolation on the cross, he knew that God would not finally desert him: he would be vindicated. Jesus, as the Messiah, entered Jerusalem with determination and confidence.

We are all living in a time that requires determination and confidence. As Jesus organised his journey into Jerusalem, we need to organise the journey of our lives in this challenging time. It takes prayerful determination and organisation to live our lives as the present circumstances demand. We all have a full part to play according to our own situations and responsibilities.

As we go through Holy Week and come closer to the Cross and the Resurrection, perhaps we can renew our Lenten resolutions, and look at the meaning and pattern of our lives. We could reflect upon how and where we can die to the old ways of our lives, and where we can rise to a new way of life, not only in these present critical times, but also when life gets back to some kind of normality.

May the Holy Spirit guide us in our thoughts and prayers.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – Monday of Holy Week 2020

The sheer number of events and teachings which the Gospels record as taking place in Holy Week is breathtaking. Jesus and his disciples are constantly on the move, being jostled in the city, repeatedly questioned by the authorities as the noose of opposition gradually tightens around him.

Over time, the churches have come to focus on different aspects of the events of Holy Week on different days. Some traditions refer to them by name, as shorthand for the event that is particularly commemorated on that day: Fig Monday (the story of the withering of the fig tree), Temple Tuesday (the so-called cleansing of the temple, when Jesus drove out those who were buying and selling and overturned the tables of the money-changers) and Spy Wednesday (when Judas offered to betray Jesus to the authorities). In our daily reflections for the first part of this week we focus on these three events.

The withering of the fig tree occurs in the Gospels of both Matthew and Mark. In Matthew's account it is described in these terms:

> *In the morning, when he returned to the city, he was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the side of the road, he went to it and found nothing at all on it but leaves. Then he said to it, 'May no fruit ever come from you again!' and the fig tree withered at once.'* *Matthew 21.18-19*

In Mark's account the event is split into two: the command that no one eat fruit from the tree again occurs on one day, and the discovery that the tree has withered is made on the following morning. They are separated by the cleansing of the temple. In the Scriptures the fig tree is often used as a symbol of Israel. When it withers it means that judgment is imminent, often because of corruption that has affected the worship and system of the temple. It was, in some senses, punishment for hypocrisy. The first hearers of the Gospel would have had no difficulty linking the fate of the fig tree with Jesus's actions in the temple.

The withering of the fig tree puts a similar challenge to us as Christians. Do we simply go through the motions of our faith, without it having an impact on the way we treat others, ourselves and the creation around us? Or does our faith bear fruit in our lives?

Earlier in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples:

> *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. … Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.* *Matthew 7.15-20*

Jesus said that those who remained in him would bear much fruit (*John 15.4-6*). And the apostle Paul refers to the fruit of the Spirit in these terms:

> *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.* *Galatians 5.22-23*

One of the things which those of us not working on the front line of the coronavirus crisis have at present is time to reflect. We might use Fig Monday to ask ourselves some questions:

What will our fruits be as a result of this time?

Will we emerge more compassionate, more aware of our interdependence?

Will we be more grateful for whatever good health we enjoy?

Will we become more appreciative of those who work each day, often for minimal wages, to ensure our safety and food supply?

Will we become more respectful of the natural world? Will we be less profligate with its resources?

Will we show forth the fruits of the Spirit?

And what of our faith? Will it emerge stronger, deeper, through this time of testing? On what will we set our hope?

Let us set our hope on the one who suffered, died and rose for us. And let us try to be fruitful, for his sake.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – Tuesday of Holy Week 2020

As we noted yesterday, today is known in some traditions as Temple Tuesday, the Tuesday in Holy Week when the church reflects on the story of Christ entering the temple in Jerusalem and driving out those who bought and sold there, overturning the tables of the money-changers. It's a scene often portrayed in art, known as the Cleansing of the Temple, and it is so significant that it appears in all four Gospels. Matthew's account tells it in this way:

> *Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them, 'It is written,*
> *"My house shall be called a house of prayer";*
> *but you are making it a den of robbers.'* *Matthew 21.12-13*

The temple was the centre of everything in first century Jerusalem – worship, politics and national life. Above all, it was the place where the people of Israel had been given to understand that God had promised he would live among them. By the first century, the Passover festival had evolved into a celebration that lasted a whole week, turning it from a family ritual to a national pilgrimage centred on Jerusalem. All were encouraged to make the journey to the newly expanded temple which Herod was constructing. There was a temple tax, assessed on every family in order to maintain it. Only temple currency was accepted to pay the temple tax – Roman coins, bearing the image of the

emperor, were not accepted, but conveniently money changers were available around the temple, at a less than generous rate of exchange. Pilgrims often also wished to offer animals for sacrifice at the temple for Passover. The animals had to be without blemish, so – conveniently again – it was possible to buy them on arrival rather than travel with them and risk them becoming blemished along the way.

Into this busy scene, at the busiest time of the year, strode Jesus, denouncing the money changers, the animal sellers and all that they represented – challenging not only the economic basis of the temple cult, but the very cult itself. And, given its place in the story, the implication is that this action of Jesus was one of the events which triggered the authorities' determination to arrest him.

In John's Gospel there is an echo of the prophet Zechariah here, for the writer has Jesus saying: 'Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' Zechariah had written: 'There shall no longer be any traders in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day'[1] – that is, on the day when the Lord will come to a new and restored Jerusalem. The implication is: the Lord has come, and the traders must go.

The priest-poet Malcolm Guite has written a reflection on this idea:

> 'When Solomon dedicated the Temple he declared that not even the Heaven of Heavens could contain almighty God, much less this temple made with hands, yet in the Christian tradition God himself still came into

[1] Zechariah 14.21; 14.5.

the temple. He came as a baby, the essence of all light and purity in human flesh, he came as a young boy full of questions, seeking to know his father's will, and today he came in righteous anger to clear away the blasphemous barriers that human power-games try to erect between God and the world he loves. Then finally, by his death on the cross he took away the last barrier in the Temple, and in our hearts, the veil that stood between us and the Holy of Holies, the very presence of God, in us and beyond us.'

Malcolm Guite has also written this poem about the Cleansing of the Temple, from his collection *Sounding the Seasons*:

Come to your Temple here with liberation
And overturn these tables of exchange
Restore in me my lost imagination
Begin in me for good, the pure change.
Come as you came, an infant with your mother,
That innocence may cleanse and claim this ground
Come as you came, a boy who sought his father
With questions asked and certain answers found,
Come as you came this day, a man in anger
Unleash the lash that drives a pathway through
Face down for me the fear the shame the danger
Teach me again to whom my love is due.
Break down in me the barricades of death
And tear the veil in two with your last breath.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – Wednesday of Holy Week 2020

As we noted in our first reflection, today is sometimes known as Spy Wednesday, the day on which the disciple Judas went to the religious authorities offering to betray Jesus:

> *Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What will you give me if I betray him to you?' They paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.*
>
> *Matthew 26.14-16*

The betrayal takes place the following evening, in the Garden of Gethsemane, as a result of which Jesus is arrested, tried and handed over to the Roman authorities to be put to death. Matthew records that, the following morning:

> '*When Judas, the betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. He said: I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' But they said, 'What is that to us? See to it yourself.' Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself.'*
>
> *Matthew 27.4-5*

Judas's motivation for the betrayal of Jesus is not fully explained in the Gospels. The sum of money itself seems to have been insignificant. It is possible he was disappointed that Jesus's mission had not been more political, resulting in the

overthrow of those in power which many expected the Messiah would bring about. Some have wondered if Judas thought that, placed on trial, Jesus would be forced to provide a demonstration of the sort of power he seemed unwilling to use, provoking an uprising against the authorities. We will never know what was going through the mind of the one who approached the temple on Spy Wednesday.

What we see elsewhere in the Gospels suggests that Judas's following of Jesus may have been conflicted, just as ours can sometimes feel. Hence, in Matthew's account, not only the betrayal, but also the repentance and inconsolable grief at what he had done. From time to time different New Testament writers attribute motivations to Judas, though these are not always consistent. But the picture that builds up is of a man who at the very least was not *bien dans sa peau* – not at ease with himself.

The two 'great commandments' which Jesus gave us are that we are to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. By expressing the second in this way, Jesus draws attention to the fact that loving our neighbour is difficult unless we are capable of loving ourselves. If we set ourselves standards that are too demanding we will always be disappointed, both in ourselves and in others. We may find it difficult to forgive them the sort of frailties that are just as much ours as theirs. If, instead, we can accept that we are flawed and allow ourselves to feel Christ's love for us in our brokenness, it can open our hearts to forgive those around us and walk with them in the light and freedom of Christ's love. Learning to accept Christ's forgiveness for ourselves is sometimes the hardest part of all.

It is conceivable this sort of inner conflict was part of Judas's malaise. Did he have a vision of messiahship, and of his own role as a follower, that left him

angry when they didn't live up to expectation? Did he find Jesus's correction of his misunderstandings about messiahship hard to take? Did he find it difficult to feel accepted in his imperfections? Did all this leave him vulnerable to bitterness and anger – with himself, the other disciples and their leader? Was it, in the end, a fit of anger that drove him to the temple courts?

Whatever the reasons for Judas's betrayal, his life ended in tragedy just as Jesus was on the point of being lifted onto the cross, from where the first words he would speak were: 'Father, forgive them'. All we know of Jesus suggests that 'them' extended not only to the soldiers hammering in the nails but to all those who had brought him to the cross - including Judas, the friend who had betrayed him. We recall how Jesus later forgave Peter his betrayal, in one of the most moving scenes in the Gospels when, after the resurrection, they share breakfast on the beach. The tragedy of Judas is that he never heard those words from the cross, which might have been enough to console him.

There is an apocryphal story which suggests this might not have been the last encounter between the two. One tradition has it that, in the light of eternity, when the disciples are reunited with Christ and the heavenly banquet is about to begin, Jesus is found hovering by the door. Eventually Peter comes to him and says: 'Everyone is waiting to begin. Come and sit down.' Jesus looks at him. The same gaze Peter saw across the courtyard when the cock crowed, after denying three times that he knew him. The same gaze Peter saw on the beach, when Jesus forgave him the three denials by asking three times 'Do you love me?' and three times received the answer 'yes'.

There is a pause.

'We can't start yet,' says Jesus. 'I'm waiting for Judas.'

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – Maundy Thursday – 9th April 2020

The Revd Jamie Johnston

This is certainly a Maundy Thursday unlike the others. The word 'Maundy' comes from the Latin *mandatum*, a command. It's a reference to the 'new commandment' which, according to the Gospel of John, Jesus gave his followers on the night before his death: to love one another as he had loved them. And on that night he gave them two memorable things.

The first was, and is, highly counter-cultural. He washed their feet. In a place where roads were dusty and journeys made on foot, it was customary for a host to offer water to a guest so that they could wash their feet on arrival. And if the host had slaves, the washing was done by the lowest of the slaves. It was unheard of for hosts to do the washing. Peter reacts instinctively: Jesus should not be doing this. He is their leader. But Jesus insists, explaining to Peter that he cannot form part of the community of his followers unless he accepts this act of love. To learn how to love, we first have to learn how to receive it. Many of us resist this sort of vulnerability, preferring to remain in control. Yet a fact of our humanity is our dependence, on God and on each other, and it is in the mutual interdependence of community that we can best learn how to love others.

Jesus's washing of the disciples' feet is also a foretaste of the humiliation he will suffer on the Cross the next day. The self-emptying of God lies at the heart of the mystery of the Gospel. 'Taking the form of a slave', to use Paul's words in his Letter to the Philippians, includes doing the work of a slave, with towel and basin. This is not love in the form of romantic attachment or sentimental feeling. It is the deliberate and costly giving of oneself for the good of another, who may not even be someone we like. This sort of love involves giving time, attention, effort, and if need be our life itself.

We don't need to look far for examples of this kind of love, especially in the current crisis. All over France and across the world, medical and community staff are putting themselves at risk in order to save lives from the coronavirus. Some have paid the highest price. As we keep the Watch at the end of this service, let us hold on our hearts all who are working so sacrificially - in silent thanksgiving for their courage and dedication, and in prayer for their protection. Tonight they are closest to our Lord in Gethsemane.

The second thing Jesus gave his followers on the night before his death was the institution of the Eucharist. He took the simple elements of bread and wine, blessed them, broke them and poured them, and shared them with his friends. He told them they were his body and blood. And he asked them to do this in remembrance of him. 'Was ever another command so obeyed?', wrote the Benedictine monk Dom Gregory Dix, in *The Shape of the Liturgy*. 'For century after century, … this action has been done, in every conceivable human circumstance, for every conceivable human need from infancy and before it to extreme old age and after it … People have found no better thing than this to do for monarchs at their crowning and for criminals going to the scaffold; … one could fill many pages with the reasons why people have done this, and not tell a hundredth part of them.'

The fourfold action of taking, blessing, breaking and giving is a metaphor for what it means to love. In order to love we must first learn what it is to *be* loved – to be taken and to be blessed. We must also learn what it means to become vulnerable – to allow ourselves to be broken. It is only then that our lives can be truly shared with others.

The reason this is a Maundy Thursday not like the others is because sharing Communion and washing one another's feet – the two liturgical acts that are customarily performed this evening - are prohibited because of social distancing. How, in particular, are we to celebrate the institution of the Eucharist if we cannot receive it?

There are perhaps two extra ways in which we can be nourished by the Eucharist while we can't be present with one another at a service. First, the lockdown is giving us new perspectives on time. In thinking about the Eucharist in lockdown, it is worth recalling that the present tense is not the only one that is significant in this service. The past and the future are involved as well. The future is held out in the promise of eternal life, for which Jesus uses the image of a heavenly

banquet. The Eucharist is a foretaste of that banquet, as we are reminded by the words to the anthem by Mozart which we will hear shortly.

The past is recalled through a double lens. We re-enact Christ's actions at the Last Supper, and the Last Supper itself was a Passover meal recalling the liberation of the Hebrews from slavery. By inviting his followers to remember him in bread and wine, Jesus was harnessing the power of a shared meal that brings the past into the present so that the reassuring power of God's steadfast love is felt now, helping us to face the challenges of our own time. The sense of past and future are just as valid in a Eucharist when we can't be together in the present. We can use these weeks to deepen our understanding of their significance.

If all that sounds a bit academic, there's a second way of approaching the Eucharist in lockdown that involves a simple prayer. Tucked away in a footnote to the prayer book (both the original Book of Common Prayer and our modern Common Worship) is a thing called Spiritual Communion, which the church offers 'in extremity of sickness or any other just impediment'. The church has rediscovered it in lockdown, the current crisis being a 'just impediment' to receiving bread and wine physically.

In the original footnote to the Book of Common Prayer, clergy were instructed to assure those receiving Spiritual Communion that if they had repented of their sins and believed that Christ had died for their redemption, 'earnestly remembering the benefits they had thereby and giving hearty thanks therefor', then they would be 'eating and drinking spiritually the body and blood of our Saviour Christ, profitably to their soul's health, although they did not receive the sacrament with their mouths'.

The weeks of lockdown are reminding us that our encounter with God is not confined to the Eucharist on a Sunday, however precious it may be to us. We encounter God in myriad ways each day through the created order. And while Jesus instructed his friends at the Last Supper to 'do this' in remembrance of him, he also assured them he would be with them always, till the end of time.

So in the prayer of Spiritual Communion which we will make later in the service, may we feel close to Christ and to one another. And may we know God's love, his presence and his peace, today and always.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Good Friday 2020

Meditations on the Seven Last Words of Christ

by Readers Christine Portman and Jane Quarmby

In the 18th century, Haydn wrote his choral setting of The Seven Last Words: there was already a centuries'-old tradition of using the Words as a meditation for Good Friday devotions. A few years later the choral setting was reworked into a string quartet. First performed in the cathedral of Cadiz, each section was preceded by a short homily so that during the music, which beautifully echoes the rhythm of Christ's words, listeners might meditate on their meaning.

Today we offer you different ways of observing this holy day. Should you choose to follow these meditations, you might read the passage and then follow the link to the music. It may be helpful to listen rather than watch the performers. The pieces of music last between 5 and 8 minutes. You could choose to complete the seven sections one after another, in which case the whole meditation will take you around one hour. Alternatively you might prefer to do one, or several at a time. If you don't feel drawn to the music, you could simply read the seven short meditations.

We hope that these reflections will help you in your observance of Good Friday.

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

When they came to the place that is called “The Skull”, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them for they not know what they do”.

Luke 23.34

Perhaps you have heard the wonderful voice of Kathleen Ferrier singing the aria “He was despised” from Handel’s Messiah. The moving words continue: “A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”. On Good Friday it may be natural for us to focus on the Man of Sorrows - but in the Gospels, Jesus is more often the Man of Joys. His first miracle was to turn water into wine at wedding feast. Fully human and fully divine, his deep compassion for us comes from full knowledge of what it is like to be a human being. He knows at first hand what it is to be abandoned and to suffer at the hands of others.

This first Word offers us insight into what it means to forgive. As Jesus forgave, he also prayed to his Father. He understands that so many of our hurtful actions are committed without any thought, understanding or consciousness. He also understands that those who sin are much more than their actions. Condemning people for their actions and refusing to forgive keeps both parties trapped in sin: the victims paralysed by hatred, the perpetrators unable to free themselves from the prison of the others’ hatred.

In his meditations on the Seven Last Words, Fr. James Martin writes:

“Forgiveness is a gift you give the other person and yourself. Jesus knows this. And he not only tells us this several times in the Gospels, but he shows us this. He is teaching us, even from the Cross.”
Sometimes we may find it impossible to forgive someone. But we could start by recognising how much hurt is caused by the refusal to forgive. Once we have the desire to forgive, we are already in a place where we can ask for God’s grace to help us. With that grace, our prayer will be answered.

Dr John V Taylor, a late Bishop of Winchester, wrote:

“Forgiveness doesn’t make light of evil. It knows the swelling sense of outrage, the shock and shame of injury. But instead of throwing it back or nursing the grievance, forgiveness transforms it and turns the event of utmost evil into the occasion of utmost good.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMbGWPaXX8Y&feature=youtu.be

"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise"

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

Luke 23.39-44

It's a stark contrast between the two criminals, one who is with the rest of the crowd of Jesus's persecutors, still throwing insults at him even when all three men have had long nails hammered through their wrists and feet, in agony and near suffocation. Surely you'd think no-one would have the breath to spare just to be cruel to some-one else, hanging next to you, suffering the same pain? No thought for what might come after death, no thought that actually he himself might deserve what he's going through where-as the man in the middle didn't. But right to the end this man persisted in cruel jibes.

A real contrast to the other criminal, who accepted that he was being rightfully punished for his crimes (though nowadays we would question whether this inhumane, long drawn out torture would be acceptable for anyone whatever they'd done.) In the last hours, Jesus had one true believer right next to him. He may have been a criminal, he may have been a rebel or a robber, but at the end of Jesus' life on earth he showed himself to be a real believer in him as the Messiah, had faith in him. When no other adult male supporter was there, for fear of the Roman retaliation, there was one man at least. And for his faith, his repentance and his belief, Jesus promised him that he would be in Paradise that day. A huge reward, and what a comfort to that man as he died. There would be no halfway house, Jesus would be taking him straight to the Garden of Eden. Was that also a comfort to Jesus that he wasn't as alone that day as he might have been?

Let us pray that this Eastertide, our faith and our reaction to the dark times we live in will be as strong, and that we can bring comfort to others even as we suffer. It's easy to think as we live in isolation that we are the only ones who are worried, lonely, bored, depressed, or ill. It's all too easy to look just at our own troubles. It's easy to lash out when we are hurting. But there are many others alongside us who would benefit from a friendly word or message, or just to know that some-one is thinking of them.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJTKN-27YDM&feature=youtu.be

“Woman, here is your son ..... Here is your mother.”

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

John 19.26-27

Mary’s whole life as we read it in the Gospels was a life of letting go. At the Annunciation, though confused about what lay ahead, her response to God’s call was a clear “Yes”. Throughout her life with Jesus she had to learn to let him become the person God had fully intended. It could not have been easy. Think of her panic when she discovered her 12 year-old was missing and her hurt when he seemed to turn his back on his parents:

When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, “Child why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.” He said to them, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house? But they did not understand what he said to them.

Think of that seemingly-sharp comment when Mary asked him to help out at the wedding in Cana: “Woman, what concern is that to you and me?”

Now comes the worst of all. Mary has to witness her son’s torture and death. What love and strength was in her that she could be with him until the very last. And in return, what love and compassion pours down to her from the Cross: “Woman, here is your son .... Here is your mother”.

A different, self-pitying Jesus might have been referring to himself: “Mother - look at what’s become of me!” But no, even in his final moments, Jesus is caring for her. From now on she will be taken into John’s household. The beloved disciple will care for her as his own mother.

Even in his extreme pain and suffering Jesus teaches his Way: to love one another as he loves us.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtvVNu2bLmA&feature=youtu.be

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’

Mark 15.33-34

Right at the end, Jesus quotes from Psalm 22 “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far away when I groan for help? Even now, he is proving he is the Messiah, the one written about in the Old Testament.

A real cry from the heart. At this point Jesus has been enduring unimaginable pain, unable to straighten up on the cross, unable to relieve the pain from his wrists without more pain from his feet, his lungs squashed under the stance he has been literally nailed into. He feels abandoned – his male followers can't go near because the Romans would have seen them as a threat and they'd have been killed too. Despite his female relatives and friends being with him, who were allowed to be there as they were not seen as a threat, and the affirmation of his true nature from the criminal alongside him, he's had enough. He wants his Father from Heaven to do something, ease this terrible pain and suffering. Jesus has been bullied, tortured, scoffed at and humiliated – enough is enough. Why has God not been there, where is God?

How often do we all feel like this when things are at their blackest? How often do we feel that it's time for God to do something about it and help us? How often do we cry for help and feel abandoned when none comes? As Rowan Williams puts it:

"The cry to God as Father in the New Testament is not a calm acknowledgement of a universal truth about God's abstract fatherhood. It is the child's cry out of a nightmare. It is the cry of outrage, fear, shrinking away, when faced with the horror of the world – yet not simply or exclusively protest, but trust as well."

When things look at their worst for us, we know from these few words that Jesus also felt what we are feeling. He knows what it's like to be suffering and not hearing God, or seeing God in what's going on around us. He too complained to God, bitterly and despairingly. And it's OK to feel like that. As Jesus was being crushed by the weight of the world's evil, he too felt cut off from God by the magnitude of what his final job was to do – to die in payment for all the evil that humanity had done over the years, to wipe the slate clean for us all, not only then but now and in the future too. Sometimes we do feel alone, we do feel cut off from God and all help – but as day follows night, bringing light to all the dark corners of our minds, so does God's redeeming love follow us. But sometimes we do need to complain loudly to God too.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOk-nMrDQo4

"I thirst"

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), "I am thirsty". A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth

John 19.28-29

During Lent some of us have been looking at the part of the Pilgrim course which focuses on the Beatitudes. In session 2 we looked at *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled."* An opening question for that session was "Be honest. What do you hunger and thirst for more than anything else?" No one in our group answered "Water".

Luckily, few of us have experienced desperate thirst, still fewer a time when we didn't have fairly quick access to a clean drink. That, of course, is not the case for millions of people in our world today. According to the WHO, 3.4 million people, mostly children, die annually from water-related diseases.

Thirst is a basic survival instinct. The body is dehydrated, the brain detects the imbalance of salts in our blood, we cannot ignore the signals. Exposed to the elements, sweating in his pain, losing blood from his wounds, Christ is thirsty. He cries out. We can't doubt that he suffered the pain of any other human being in that situation. Immediately after crying out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?",

someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick to drink saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come and take him down".

While some commentators see this as evidence of mockery, others put a different slant on this act. John's account omits the mocking words. Mark tells us that the sour wine was mixed with myrrh or gall - a mixture that Roman soldiers sometimes administered to the crucified in order to numb the pain. So the soldiers' action might in fact have been an act of kindness.

Jesus fully understood our suffering. Here he thirsts physically, but in his whole life on earth he thirsted for righteousness. When others thirst, are we so kind?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TsTb4EdqM0

"It is finished"

When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' *John 19.30*

And what a relief it must have been to him. The ordeal is over, he's done everything God has asked of him, and finally he can move on to the next part of his task. He hasn't wavered, he's stuck to it through the good times and the bad, and now finally he can give up. He didn't turn back, he went through with God's plan but now that part is thankfully over.

As John Fawcett puts it in his book "No Ordinary Man":
"His voice rang out: "It is finished!" An acknowledgement of defeat some said afterwards, a despairing cry of sorrow. But it wasn't, not for those who heard it… it was altogether different – like sunshine after storm, like rain after drought, like laughter after tears – gloriously unexpected, wonderfully surprising. He had stooped and conquered, staked all and won. Defeat was victory, darkness was light, and death was life. ….until that moment, until that last victorious shout, he had lived with the awful burden of holding the world's fate in his hands and wondering whether he could see it through. At last it was done – he had honoured his calling, fulfilled his mission, walked the way of the cross. It was finished."

Will we make it worth his while, what he went through for us?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rN_ykOcvURw

"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit "

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit". Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent". *Luke 23.46*

Jesus' first Word from the Cross begins "Father" - or in the Aramaic, Abba. This is the word he used when he taught his followers how to pray: Our Father - *Abba* - who art in heaven ... It was used at that time, and variations on it are still used by speakers of Semitic languages when talking in a close family context. Like "Mama" and "Papa", Abba is one of the first repetitive sounds that the baby Jesus would have learned to say.

But in that dark moment on the Cross, when he cries out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?", Abba was not the word he used. *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani!* - Lord, Lord. Did God seem very far away? Was this a despairing cry from a Jesus fearful of what may happen to him or to his followers after his death? When we think of his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and hear that anguished cry *My God!* this could well be so. But some commentaries point out that these are the opening words of Psalm 22, a psalm that starts in deep despair but ends with the psalmist putting his full trust in God:

To him, indeed, shall all who sleep
in the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go
down to the dust,
and I shall live for him.
Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord,
and proclaim his deliverance to a
people yet unborn,
saying he has done it.

Jesus may not have been in despair, but instead consoled and strengthened by a text he knew by heart. Whatever the case, with his final breath Jesus returns to that childlike closeness, entrusting his spirit to the loving care of his Father. Here Dr. John Taylor sums up his comments on this final Word:

At the beginning it was the rest of us he was thinking about - *Father, forgive them.* That prayer had been answered forever, and now his thought is fixed on the Father alone and his own homecoming. *Your hands, my spirit.* The faint pulse falters, the flame sinks, but his spirit is already soaring toward that Union like a lark ascending. So Jesus dies into God..... And now, out of the dark dissolution of Christ's death, the hands of the Creator were about to start fashioning a new man and a new beginning. The earthquake is the herald of the Resurrection.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6Nat88Uqw0

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – Easter Vigil and Service of Light – 11th April 2020

The Revd John Smith

The opening words of the gospel set the scene for us "*after the Sabbath, on the first day of the week*". Let us pause there and reflect on what God did on the very first first day of the week when the world was created. As we heard from our first reading a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep and God said, *"Let there be light"; and there was light"*. The very first thing God gave this world was light that overcame the darkness. John in his gospel tells us that Jesus was there at the creation of the world and goes on to say "*What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it*". (John 1:4-5) And later in John, Jesus says*, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.*" (John 8:12). Paul in his letter to the Corinthians writes "*It is God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* (Corinthians 2:4-6) and in his letter to Colossians "*God has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*. (Colossians 1:13)

And lastly, in his first letter, John writes "*God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin*." (1 John 1:5) Through to the last chapter of the last book of the bible, Revelation, where we have this glorious picture where there will be no more darkness but eternal light. We will have no need for light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be our light. (Revelation 22:5)

But back to our gospel reading. When we piece together the different accounts of the Resurrection in the gospels, we can probably say that Mary Magdalene left home in the dark but when she arrived at the tomb it was just after sunrise, light had come into the world. What a beautiful image. Mary had come into the

light or was it that the light had come into Mary's world? It doesn't matter which. The darkness that had come over Calvary when Jesus hung on the cross was replaced with light – the light of the resurrected Jesus, the Christ.

So why am I hammering on about light and darkness so much? It is because there is darkness in the world right now and darkness brings with it despondency, dejection, decline and depression. We hear reports of hundreds and thousands of deaths. In this area we are caught between the European hot spots, with Italy to the east of us with 19,000 dead so far and Spain to the west of us with 16,000 dead so far. And naturally this gives rise to fear; fear for the safety of our friends, families and perhaps ourselves. Fear simply rises in us when confronted with a threat of death. The fear is palpable, it's physical. It takes the form of an adrenaline burst, makes the heart race, giving us the energy to flee for survival, if necessary, but we cannot for now there is nowhere in the world to flee to; nowhere that is safe. We have to stay confined with this feeling of helplessness. Over time, the stresses of fear take their toll in many ways. They wear us down physically, mentally and possibly spiritually.

But listen to the gospel. First, we have the guards who are filled with fear when the earth quakes and the stone rolls away from the entrance to the tomb. As a side story this is an interesting picture. Those who are alive supposedly watching over the dead man who has become alive became like dead men themselves but it is the first words of the angel to the women that we should listen to. Do not be afraid. You need not fear. Do not be afraid for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, he is risen just as He said He would. These words 'do not be afraid' are not said as an instruction but as words of comforting assurance. Do not be afraid for God is true to His word. God has done, is doing now and always will do what He says.

So, what has God told us? He hasn't said that we won't get the virus. He hasn't said that we won't die from the virus but He has said that He will never leave us. He has said that He will always be with us through the end of life on this earth and beyond. Though we walk through fire we shall not be burned, the flames will not consume us. When we pass through waters I, God, will be with you, the rivers will not overwhelm you. And if you read last Sunday's reflection you will know that Jesus also said "*do not be anxious about your life*" (Matthew 6:25). If we choose to be troubled, if we choose to be anxious it is because we are not taking Jesus, God at his word "*For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love*" (2 Timothy 1:7)

There is darkness, despondency and depression in our Christian community and there should not be. We can be afraid if we walk in the darkness but not if we walk in the light of the resurrected Jesus. There was never a time like this when we can show the difference that believing in Jesus Christ makes to the Christian life. Wouldn't it be great if everybody we have contact with asked us why are you so peaceful, why are you so stress-free, why so tranquil, why so untroubled, why so happy? As followers of the resurrected Christ, we owe this to our friends and families, we owe it to ourselves, and we owe it to God to be that witness.

What a wonderful text to begin Easter with. This is the text which, if you believe it, makes you a Christian but if you don't believe it then you are a non-Christian. With the resurrection of Jesus, God's power has overturned all expectation in our world. We have nothing from which to coil into self-protection. It is not a story of long ago that has little relevance today. It is the story that has the most effect today for it gives us the power to be strong. It gives us the power to turn our fear into faith and fidelity; to turn our panic into prayer and praise and to turn our worry into worship and witness.

I wish you and yours a very happy and healthy Eastertide.

Amen

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – Easter Day – 12th April 2020

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

Unsurprisingly, in an international crisis of the proportions of the coronavirus pandemic, people are asking some searching questions of faith leaders. The one I haven't been yet been asked directly is: 'Why does God allow it?' But I suspect the question lurks beneath many of the conversations I am having with non-churchgoing friends, and that many who normally attend churches – clergy included, on their bleaker days – may find themselves asking the question too. There is something about the sight of mass burials in unmarked graves beside a derelict building in New York that makes the human spirit revolt, and it is only natural to ask where a loving God is to be found in all this.

The answer given by the writer Elie Wiesel, reflecting on his experiences as a prisoner in Auschwitz, was this. He recalled how two Jewish men and a youth had been hanged in front of the whole camp. The men died quickly, but the death throes of the youth lasted for half an hour, because his body was lighter.

> 'Where is God?' Where is he?' someone asked behind me. … And I heard a voice in myself answer: 'Where is he? He is here. He is hanging there on the gallows.'[1]

The theologian Jürgen Moltmann called this a 'shattering expression' of the theology of the cross, and it inspired him to write extensively about the notion of a suffering God. It spoke to the times, for in the second half of the twentieth century the sense of triumphalism that often characterised Christian language in the nineteenth century no longer resonated with people's lived experience in the aftermath of two World Wars and the Holocaust. As the German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in a letter, himself awaiting execution in a concentration camp for his involvement in the plot to assassinate Hitler, 'only a suffering God can help'. The message of Good Friday is that that's exactly the sort of God we have.

[1] Elie Wiesel, *Night*, 1967, p 75.

The idea of an omnipotent God who could somehow wave a magic wand and take away suffering but chooses not to do so is essentially a creation of 18th century philosophy. Such a God would be a monster, and I have no hesitation in telling my atheist friends that I don't believe in the God they don't believe in. But this is not the God we find in the pages of the Old and New Testaments. As Rowan Williams put it: 'If you want to know who God is and what God does, look at the Cross.' The idea is expressed by the priest W H Vanstone in his hymn 'Morning glory, sunlit sky':

> Therefore he who shows us God
> helpless hangs upon the tree;
> and the nails and crown of thorns
> tell of what God's love must be.
>
> Here is God: no monarch he,
> throned in easy state to reign;
> here is God, whose arms of love
> aching, spent, the world sustain.

The assurance we are given on Good Friday is that, whatever happens to us and to our world, nothing can separate us from the love of God, for God has been there before us. And the assurance we are given at Easter is that death itself could not contain God, and so (to quote St Paul) not even our own death 'can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus'. Easter does not end on Easter Day. Jesus's parting words to his disciples in Matthew's Gospel are 'Remember, I am with you always, till the end of time'.

That is Gospel. That is good news. And it's the reason we are here today, in these extraordinary times and in this unusual version of church.

The event of Easter is a mystery. No one knows how it happened. The raising of Christ took place without any of us present, nor any of the disciples. But we can see its effects. And its effects are seismic (literally, in Matthew's account). It changed a small group of frightened men, hiding behind locked doors, into the greatest missionary force the world has ever known, altering the course of human history.

Our Gospel reading pinpoints the moment when it began. Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb in the early light, to grieve for the Lord whose loss she can hardly bear, the violence of Good Friday reverberating within her. She is

traumatised, as many are traumatised now. A terrible price is being paid by front line workers in our health and social care systems, and by those who have lost loved ones, livelihoods, confidence in the very shape of things. We are facing a time of grief and dislocation that hasn't been known since the War, barely beginning to discern the shape of the changes that will follow. And across the world people are living in real fear of the virus. Hiding behind locked doors.

Mary jumps to the conclusion that Jesus's body has been stolen, and the grief which brought her to the tomb is compounded by the assumption that even the last vestige of him has been taken away. No wonder she weeps. The men who come with her go into the tomb, look at the evidence and go home, back behind their locked doors.

But Mary does something else. She bends down to look into the tomb. And it is then that she sees angels. And it is then that she hears the one whose voice she never thought she would hear again. By confronting the worst thing that has happened to her ('They have taken away my Lord'), looking into the darkness of the tomb, she turns and encounters the risen Christ, calling her by name. That moment has been captured by artists across the centuries, the moment of profound transformation. The moment when despair turns to hope, death is shattered into life and darkness turns to light. Throughout John's Gospel the promise has been repeated: 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.'

The coronavirus is often spoken of as an enemy to be conquered. The ability of the human spirit to overcome intense suffering through the assurance of the love of God was once described by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in these terms:

Goodness is stronger than evil
Love is stronger than hate
Light is stronger than darkness
Life is stronger than death
Victory is ours through him who loves us.

It is by looking into the darkness that Mary encounters the risen Christ, calling her by name. She turns, from despair to hope, from death to life, from darkness to light, and becomes the one who proclaims the good news to the disciples, who together become Christ's hands, Christ's feet, Christ's body in the world.

Will we find the courage to do the same?

Let us pray the prayer of St Francis of Assisi:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace
Where there is hatred, let me sow love
Where there is injury, pardon
Where there is doubt, faith
Where there is despair, hope
Where there is darkness, light
And where there is sadness, joy

O Divine Master, grant that I may
Not so much seek to be consoled as to console
To be understood, as to understand
To be loved, as to love
For it is in giving that we receive
In pardoning that we are pardoned
And in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – 2nd Sunday of Easter – 19th April 2020

Jane Quarmby, Reader

"We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when, but I know we'll meet again some sunny day."

Vera Lynn made this song famous over 70 years ago, during the dark days of the Second World War, when the world was a frightening place, people were dying before their time, rationing and restrictions were in place, people were losing loved ones without being able to say goodbye, or travel to be with them. Governments were focused on just getting by, as were ordinary people too. Rumours swirled around, and it wasn't easy to sort out what was true and what was false. Food was hard to come by and families were torn apart.

No one knew when their time might come – a bomb could fall from the sky, or soldiers come and kill you. There were many acts of heroism, of kindness, and a sense of common purpose. Most people just wanted to get through it, to a better place, to sunshine and laughter and love. Vera Lynn's song of hope, of meeting loved ones again, is suddenly very popular again – Radio Northampton is putting together a virtual choir to sing it. A friend recently e mailed me, stuck in South Africa on a much extended holiday, and finished with the words "we'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when."

The world is fighting another war now, a different war, against an unseen, indiscriminate enemy against which there are few defences other than to stay at home, have no contact with others face to face, and pray that neither we nor our loved ones are struck down by this modern day plague. The heroes in this war are the medical staff risking their own lives to care for the sick and the dying. It's a stark reminder to the human race that in the face of a tiny unseen virus, we are powerless and it is left to God's mercy whether we make it or not.

If you watch the constant stream of updates on the news, it's easy to feel that the world will never be the same again. Something frightening, uncontrolled, not

understood, is in the world which has suddenly become a dangerous place outside our own front doors. The majority of us are, literally, hiding behind closed doors. It's easy to get depressed, anxious and scared.

Just like the disciples of Jesus, over 2000 years ago, living in fear of what will happen to them if they show their faces outside because they followed a man called Jesus Christ. They'd only been with him a few years but in that time they had seen him do amazing, miraculous things, healed the sick, brought the dead back to life, taught them how to live. But he had upset the religious leaders and they had had their revenge – Jesus had been arrested, tortured and killed. And now those same religious leaders would be after the disciples. Small wonder they met behind locked doors.

But like spring following winter, new stirrings of hope, a glimpse of something new and even more amazing had come to most of the disciples. Mary had told them she had seen Jesus, that he had done as he'd told them he would do, he'd risen from the dead and she's seen him, talked to him. And then suddenly Jesus had appeared to most of his disciples, in a way they couldn't explain. He'd arrived in the middle of them, despite the closed doors, spoken to them and shown them the wounds in his hands, feet and side. They were beside themselves with joy.

All except the one who wasn't there. Thomas missed it. When he was told all about it, he wasn't having any of it, not unless he saw Jesus for himself and touched him. His name has gone down in history – Doubting Thomas. For Thomas didn't accept what other people told him, not without real evidence. Whilst the White Queen in Alice in Wonderland could "believe as many as six impossible things before breakfast", Thomas couldn't, not even when all his colleagues assured him they'd seen Jesus and that he was as real as they were – and as alive as they were. It wasn't in Thomas's nature. He was the one who had asked the questions others perhaps wanted to but did not dare – and he was the one who needed proof. I wonder how the other disciples reacted to that flat refusal to accept what they were saying? It is worth remembering that when Mary, the first one to see the risen Christ, dashed back to tell the disciples all about it, they didn't believe her. So it wasn't just Thomas who found it hard to believe until they actually saw Jesus for themselves.

But, a week later, Thomas is with the others when Jesus appears again, and reaches out to Thomas with those pierced hands – and Thomas realizes he was wrong. Jesus was alive, just as the others had said. Better late than never. Instantly Thomas goes from disbelief to a belief so strong that he makes one of the most

powerful statements of Jesus's deity in the New Testament which sums up John's entire gospel – "My Lord and my God!". The world had changed, and all our lives with it. Thomas was lucky, he saw the risen Christ and believed wholeheartedly in him. Jesus knew his Thomas, and also knew that there would be millions of people who wouldn't see him as those early disciples did, but would still believe their words and their testimony.

When challenged about our faith, it is sometimes hard to explain how come we believe in a man made God, who came to save the world in three short years of ministry, who rose from the dead. It is not something we can understand or touch. We have no concrete proof now other than the testimony of others. But that testimony is powerful – as Peter puts it in our reading from Acts: "God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this".

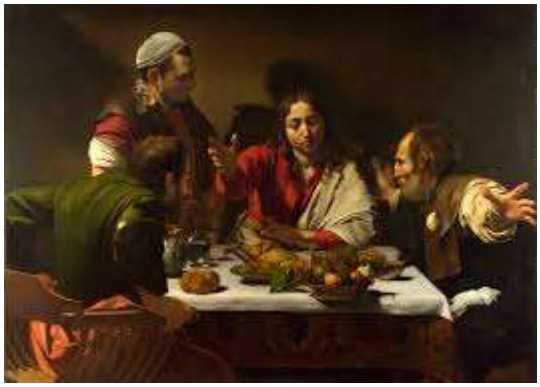
Tradition has it that Thomas went on to be a missionary to the East, to Persia and India, and died in India. He may be famous for his doubts, but Jesus welcomed his doubt, and knew that we all have our doubts from time to time. Only by confronting those doubts and working through them can we come to a richer and deeper faith. Jesus said: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed." He invites us all to investigate the truth of the resurrection, and explore Jesus as the way, the truth and the life.

In these troubled times, when we need our faith to be strong, we pray:

Lord, we do not always believe as we should. We try our hardest but out faith is weak and we lose sight of all you have promised and all you are able to do. There is so much in life which is a mystery, and there are so many things which seem to deny everything we believe about you. Despite our good intentions, doubt sometimes gets the upper hand so that we begin to question even the things most precious to us. Yet though we are faithless to you, always you are faithful to us, refusing to let go. Come to us now we pray, so that we may confess you again as our Lord and our God, in this time of worship and in the days ahead.

And, in the words of that old song:

"We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when
But I know we'll meet again some sunny day
Keep smiling through
Just like you always do
'til the blue skies drive the dark clouds far away."



Chaplaincy of All Saints' Marseille
with Aix-en-Provence
and the Luberon

26th April 2020
3rd Sunday of Easter

Reflection
The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

One of the things about the continuing lockdown is that it is triggering quite a lot of memory. There is something about being confined at home for a long period that makes us reflect on the past, in the course of which memories, both good and bad, begin to surface. As we look back through our lives it is not unusual to feel regret at things we have done or not done, or experienced. Such memories are currently set against a background of scarcity, so it is understandable if our thoughts move in the direction of loss.

What do we do with difficult memories? One thing we can do is use them as a form of inoculation against errors of the past. Albert Camus's 1947 novel *La Peste* (The Plague) about an outbreak of plague, which could hardly be more relevant to the times we are living in, has often been read as an allegorical treatment of how different types of individual responded to the occupation of France during the Second World War. The novel ends with a warning that plague will always return, so we must remain vigilant. It is to be hoped that one consequence of the recent centenary commemorations of the First World War will have been to sensitise a new generation to the horrors of global conflict, helping to ensure that it never happens again. The centenary of the 1918 influenza pandemic was not similarly marked. A world in which antibiotics and vaccines had been in plentiful supply for fifty years was apparently not interested in the memory of a respiratory disease that had triggered an

extreme immune response in some sufferers, causing millions of deaths worldwide. Perhaps the next generation may be better at learning than ours.

What to do with difficult memories is a prominent feature of the resurrection narratives. The most poignant of these is the account in John's Gospel of Jesus meeting Peter and the other disciples early one day on the shores of Lake Galilee. They have gone back to fishing, almost as if the ministry of Jesus had never happened, and they have worked all night without a catch. A stranger on the shore suggests they put down the nets on the other side of the boat, and they make an enormous catch of fish, at which point they realise that the stranger is the risen Christ. Scarcity has become abundance, just like the first time they met him. The memory of Jesus returns, and it is no longer as if their years spent with him had never been. He invites them to share breakfast, offering them bread and fish (just like when five thousand were fed), cooking on a charcoal fire (just like in the courtyard of the High Priest's house).

For Peter, the sight of Christ standing beside the charcoal fire must have been a moment of deep shame, the memory of his threefold betrayal burning inside him. Yet Jesus asks him three times: 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' And his answer in the affirmative, three times, turns Simon back into Peter, the rock on which the new community of followers will be built. Peter must go forward with the knowledge of his betrayal, yet also the knowledge that it has been redeemed. It is from that assurance of the redemption of failure that the disciples are sent out into the world to make other disciples, a promise on which they make good. The difficult memories are faced in the presence of the risen Christ, where they are transformed and healed. The same can be true for us.

What might we do with our difficult memories? One fruit that we can bear is to offer the hand of reconciliation to those we have wronged, however trivially or seriously, and ask for forgiveness. And to offer forgiveness to those who have wronged us, however trivially or seriously. We could use these weeks of confinement to try to heal relationships that have been broken. The risen Christ transformed the experience of his disciples by offering forgiveness and a new start, at the very point when they thought all was lost. Is there anywhere in our lives we could do the same?

The story in our Gospel reading today, of the two disciples meeting the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus, is another occasion when his followers do not recognise him after the resurrection. He turns out to have been the stranger on the shore, the stranger on the road, the stranger in the garden. Why the lack of recognition? The risen Jesus is not only freed of the boundaries of time and space: he is freed, too, of the narrowness of people's expectations of him. Cleopas and his companion are told they have too narrow an understanding of messiahship. Jesus is not what they thought him to be, and they must learn afresh who he is. And yet it is when he breaks bread that they recognise him. Just like at the Last Supper. The risen Jesus is both strange and deeply familiar. Their minds having been instructed on the road, now their hearts beat with renewed energy and they race back to Jerusalem to find they are not alone, for others have encountered the risen Christ too.

This time of pandemic is teaching us that we have to learn from our memories but also start again, rediscover things and be ready to learn afresh. The risen Christ always calls us forward to new encounter, fullness of life. We are constantly challenged by this figure 'going before' us. We must allow ourselves to be energised by the freshness of the challenge, trust in its unpredictability, yet sustained too by the memory, handed to us across the centuries, of the one who turns scarcity into abundance, calling us by name. Calling us to compassion for others, to love them as he loved us. Calling us on, as Rowan Williams puts it, to 'the hope of a transformed future in which human relations will be fully what they can and should be'.

As we saw on the lakeshore, in the resurrection stories forgiveness is a precursor to sending out. The wounds of Christ are still visible in his hands and his side, yet he breathes forgiveness on the friends who have let him down. Knowing how crucial forgiveness is to fullness of life as humans, it is what Jesus commissions his followers to offer to the world: 'If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them.' (John 20.23). Those who have received forgiveness become a source of reconciliation.

What do we do with difficult memories? I would like to share with you one fragment I first heard of twenty-five years ago and which I have never forgotten, for it shows to a quite extraordinary degree how difficult memory can be transformed. Today, across France, churches that belong to the Amitié Judéo-Chrétienne de France are saying prayers to mark Holocaust Remembrance Day, which fell this week. The fragment of memory I want to share with you is of some words that were found in 1945, written on a piece of wrapping paper near the body of a dead child in the Ravensbruck concentration camp. In words reminiscent of the cry of forgiveness uttered by Jesus from the desolation of the cross, they tell of the power of the human spirit, made in the image of God, to find transformation and hope beyond suffering, possibility in place of despair, new life beyond unspeakable tragedy. They are words for our time, and for all time.

The words on the wrapping paper said this:

O Lord, remember not only the men and women of good will,
but also those of ill will.
But do not remember all the suffering they inflicted on us.
Remember the fruits we bought, thanks to this suffering:
our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility,
the courage, the generosity, the greatness of heart
which has grown out of this;
and, when they come to judgment,
let all the fruits that we have borne
be their forgiveness.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – 4th Sunday of Easter – 3rd May 2020

Christine Portman, Reader

Today's Old Testament reading - was too good to miss! Not only is it a story most of us will have known since childhood, it's also particularly apt in the current circumstances. Tomorrow marks 49 days since we began '*le confinement*' and some people have found these last weeks difficult to bear. But imagine a year cooped up in a confined space with the whole family and hundreds of animals! And remember, Noah didn't open the window to let out the raven until 40 days had passed.

But joking apart, this story must be known by millions of us, even those who have very little to do with church. How many of us drew pictures of the ark on the waters at Sunday School, complete with a rainbow and a dove? It's an ancient tale, appearing in many forms in both Mesopotamia and the wider world. There are many inconsistencies in the Genesis account - for example did Noah take in seven pairs of clean animals, or just one, "two by two"? Scholars believe this shows that the writer took two versions that he knew and spliced them together. It doesn't spoil the story, but the way the text differs from its sources should interest us.

Instead of many warring gods, wreaking violence upon the world, now there is ONE God who from the very start has a moral purpose to his actions. So dissatisfied with his human creation, he decides to destroy it but from the outset he intends to rebuild. Pairs of every imaginable creature are to be saved in the ark - both *clean* and *unclean.* God makes no distinction. But there is to be a better future for humankind. The sole person God finds *righteous before me in this generation* will begin a renewed world. Once the waters have dried up, God tells Noah *"I have set my bow in the clouds ... This is the sign of the covenant*

that I have established between me and all the flesh that is on the earth." The covenant re-establishes a world where God and humanity are in a right relationship.

During this confinement, all over the world children have been drawing rainbows and displaying them to the outside world from their windows. The rainbow which spoke of the covenant between God and his people lives on as a lasting symbol of hope. Even in what some writers depressingly try to label "the post-Christian age", people still talk of a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. But Christian hope is far greater than a wish for 'somewhere over the rainbow'. It's a *certainty* that whoever chooses Jesus Christ as the gateway to life '*will be saved*'. In today's gospel he tells us: "*I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly".* Through him a final covenant will be established for all people and for all time.

The Good Shepherd appears at the top of your service sheet. As in the well-loved psalm, he seems comforting and full of reassurance. In today's gospel we see Jesus comparing himself to a good shepherd who safely leads his sheep as they go out from the fold into the dangers of the wider world. In many ways it's easier to understand the idea of a good shepherd than the image Jesus uses here: "*Very truly, I tell you, **I am the gate for the sheep**. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. **I am the gate**".*

This is only one of many *I am st*atements we find in John's gospel: *the bread of life, the light of the world, the true vine* - statements that outraged most of his contemporaries and continue to outrage many non-Christians today. In John 8:58, Jesus astounds the Pharisees: "*Very truly I tell you, before Abraham was born, **I am**!*" They react immediately: *At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.* They're revolted by what they see as blasphemy. These are the words of God to Moses from the burning bush: *I am who I am* - a name so holy that it would not be spoken aloud by a Jew. Whenever Jesus uses these words he is clearly identifying himself with the Godhead.

In his book 'Water into Wine', Bishop Stephen Verney discusses Jesus' seemingly-strange comparison of himself to a gate: *"A door has two sides, an inside and an outside. In the figure of speech Jesus has used, one side of the door is the door of the courtyard of the sheepfold, and the other side is the open country. In our own houses, one side of the front door is home and the other side is the street. The truth of I AM is also a door with two sides - one side is a man on earth and the other side is God in heaven, and through that door of I AM the love of the human race goes up to God, and the love of God comes down on the human race".*

To pass through that door, follow the Good Shepherd, have life *abundantly,* we need first to recognise the door. In today's passage from Acts, the lives of the early Christians seem simpler than ours, but surely they faced the same everyday pressures of earning a living and raising families? Yes, life in first century Palestine was in some ways less complex, but this doesn't mean that there's nothing we can learn from the early Church. We might consider why so many were drawn *day by day* to join them. *Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts.* Worshipping together, particularly in the Eucharist, Christ was at the centre of their lives. They recognised Jesus as the gate. They heard his voice. People were attracted by their *abundant* life.

During the last few weeks we have been so fortunate in being able to continue worshipping and praying together. In some ways our three distant congregations have even grown closer. And perhaps we've begun, like so many people, to reflect on the changes this epidemic has brought about. Listening to the BBC, I've been struck by the discoveries being made: people noticing clear, trail-free skies, city dwellers able to hear birdsong, showing their children the stars in the night skies for the first time, perhaps marvelling at how very small we are in our universe. And interestingly, another finding: far more British people are tuning into online services and prayer meetings than were seen in church in recent years. The hectic rhythm of what we've come to believe is "normal" has been broken. This unprecedented situation is causing many people to pause and think.

Coronavirus is no respecter of international borders. Rich nations no longer have the option of ignoring the plight of the poor - hit twice as hard by the virus as more affluent communities both at home or abroad. The whole world is in this crisis together. On Thursday night's evening news, US commentator Naomi Klein was discussing the possible outcomes from the pandemic. She referred to this moment as a *portal* - in other words a gateway or door. We are now facing, she said, a turning point where human society can make some life-changing decisions. The choices are stark. We can continue with more of the same: we could opt for ceaseless development, an ever-widening gap between rich and poor, increasing injustice and further destruction of the fragile habitat we share with other creatures. But we might learn lessons and make different choices.

As we emerge from our individual arks of isolation, will we, like Noah, see a rainbow? As we approach the coming portal of change, who will be our gate? Who will we choose to guide us out of the sheepfold? We may not be able to return to the simplicity of life of those first Christians, but we are intelligent creatures, able to reflect and learn. And we are spiritual creatures. Today's Collect urges us *to seek those things which are above*. We pray for the wisdom to see the gate and to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd calling us on.

Amen.

Chaplaincy of All Saints' Marseille with Aix-en-Provence and the Luberon

10th May 2020
5th Sunday of Easter

Reflection
by The Revd John Smith

There is so much in our readings that would provide a solid topic for several sermons. Given what I have been banging on about since we have been struck by this pandemic, I could start with the first words of our gospel "*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me*" Then I would sit down and we could spend the next ten minutes reflecting on why we let our hearts be troubled despite what Jesus tells us. Perhaps Jamie could go round our houses and picture us in deep reflection but probably you and Jamie would not be happy with that.

Instead I want us to consider one statement from our gospel reading, verse six "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*"**.** The question I would like us to consider is this: Is Jesus the only pathway to the true God? Not coincidentally, this question picks up from where Christine took us last week. Jesus said "*I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved*" (John 10:9) and by extension, those who do not enter through Jesus (the gate) will not be saved. I also noted in Christine's script that ONE God was capitalised. I assume you intended this Christine as it raises the question who is the one God and how do we get access to Him?

So, this morning I want to attempt something that I am not good at – exegesis, the interpretation of scripture – on a difficult topic that involves eschatology – that part of theology concerned with death, judgement, and the destiny of the soul and of humankind, that I am not learned about.

Before I delve too deeply into answering this question "Is Jesus the only way to God?", you need to know where I am coming from, my history and the experiences that have shaped my understanding; some may say my biases and prejudices.

Probably the most important thing to know is that I was born into an evangelical family. My mother and father first met at a Pentecostal church and for the first twelve years of my life we worshiped, as a family, at a Pentecostal church. I continued to attend this church into my early teens as a crusader and answered the call to give my life to Christ at the age of fifteen in this church. Fast forward to 1986 when I went to an international hospital conference in Japan. We had a tour in Tokyo when I came face to face with a statue of Buddha. I say face to face but this was a very big buddha sitting on a plinth maybe 15 meters high at the top of his head. The tour party moved on but I just stood there, frozen. I could feel the spirit drain out of me. I don't know how long I stood there. It was if I became lifeless. Later on, when the party moved to Osaka, I got up very early one morning, went for a walk and came upon a Shinto shrine. It was very peaceful. It was cherry blossom time and I just stood and watched the Shinto priests in their robes and ballooning trousers going about their early morning tasks opening up the shrine. Their dedication was undeniable but I had the same distant feeling. There was such a huge gulf between my faith and theirs.

Fast forward again to theological college which changed my opinions on several things including the sacraments, abortion, homosexuality, and immigration. We had a course on appreciation of other religions. This involved visiting several places of worship including a Jewish temple, a Muslim mosque and the great Hindu temple in Neasden in north west London which is Britain's first authentic Hindu temple. The multiple towers reminded me of Disney World which is not being disrespectful as I went with a lot of respect. We watched one of the ceremonies where I could not help noticing a flannel and tooth brush in the corner which were used every day to clean that god's face and brush that god's teeth.

That is enough of the full disclosure. It carries more warnings than on a packet of cigarettes which is appropriate because what follows is a matter of life and death.

Throughout Easter our gospel readings are from John and before we examine the text it is as well to know why John was writing his gospel. He helpfully tells us: "*These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name*" (John 20:31). The prologue to the gospel of St. John is probably the most profound passage in the whole Bible. In the prologue John presents the two paradoxes that underpin everything in his gospel: the paradox of Jesus' unity with and distinction from God and the paradox of his simultaneous deity and humanity. John addresses the unity of Jesus with God at the very beginning of the Gospel. Jesus is the incarnation of the Word who both was God and was responsible for creation. John defines their relationship and their unity as Father and Son. As Son, Jesus does what the Father does and only what the Father does. The purpose of Christ's mission is to do the will of the one who sent him. So how we answer the question we are addressing will all depend on our Christology i.e. who we believe Jesus to be.

Since Nietzsche reiterated Kant's view that "ultimate truth is unknowable" there seems to be no justification for holding to an ultimate truth. Since ultimate truth/reality is unknowable and hence pragmatically useless we should not bother ourselves to worry about it, so says Nietzsche. Everyone is entitled to an opinion, one that is born out of a person's own experience. I believe that that statement is a self-contradictory belief and a violation of its own ideological premise. The result is that since no one can really know the truth we must be content with a multiplicity of opinions. In the world of religion this is called pluralism; the acceptance that no one religion is the sole and

exclusive source of the truth; an acceptance that religions with mutually exclusive beliefs are equally valid.

Religious pluralism is not a new experience for either Old Testament Israel or the New Testament church. Both were born into the context of religious pluralism (a world of "many gods and many lords"). Christianity has never existed outside of pluralism. What is new in the context of "post-modern" pluralism is the impossibility of making any universally justifiable truth-claims on any matter, whether religious or otherwise. Today, the claim to know a universal truth is perceived as arrogant, conceited, egotistical, intolerant.

So, the debate begins and we hear the statement that all religions are the same underneath; at least they have more in common than what differentiates them. It is true that the world's religions do have some things in common - they all recognise a spiritual dimension and have broadly similar moral codes. When it comes to the other two monotheistic religions, Judaism and Islam, there are even more similarities. We share common history, prophets, concepts and the Jewish Bible is 75% of the Christian Bible. But we cannot possibly ignore the differences. For despite the similarities, the differences are huge. It is not just a case of 'believe in God and be nice to other people - all the rest is mere detail'. It is those very details that make the difference.

Christianity makes three distinct claims with which no other religion agrees:

i) Jesus is God – Judaism sees Jesus as an impostor, Islam sees Jesus as merely a human prophet; other religions often see him as a good moral teacher or as one of many incarnations of God.
ii) The authority of the Bible – Christians believe that the Hebrew and Greek scriptures (or Old and New Testaments) together constitute the authoritative word of God. Jews accept only the Hebrew scriptures (OT). Muslims only accept those parts of the bible that agree with the Qur'an.
(iii) Salvation by grace through faith in Christ's death and resurrection – Islam tells us that mankind is essentially good and that we just need to live a certain way to earn God's forgiveness. Judaism still relies on the observance of the Law as given to the children of Israel. The biblical view is that humans are essentially evil and unable to live up to God's righteous standards. Only the perfect sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf could satisfy his justice and restore the broken relationship between God and man.

These three examples show us that all religions are certainly not the same and in fact they are totally incompatible.

Some will say that the differences are not really that important as 'we are all on paths going up the same mountain', climbing different sides and unable to see the others, but once we reach the top all will become clear and we will see the same God. But be assured the triune God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) that I see at the top of the mountain is not the God any other of the world's religions and even some sub-Christian denominations would recognise.

I come now to another challenge that is usually raised. So, what about those people who never heard about Jesus and could not accept Him as God's son perhaps because they lived before Jesus and those who have lived since who have never heard about Jesus? And here, we need to look at what happens after we die.

Unfortunately and surprisingly, there is no agreement in the church about what happens to us when we die. While the Bible speaks often of death, we know little of one death in particular, the "second death." The term "second death" is found only in the book of Revelation (Rev 20:4-6). Here we learn that on Christ's return the martyrs will be raised first after which there will be a period before everybody else who has lived throughout human history is raised; believers and non-believers alike including those who have never had an opportunity for salvation. Christ will raise all the Gentiles and extend to them the same offer He does to Israel. If they satisfy Christ's judgement, He will grant them eternal life with Him. Those who will not repent of their rebellion against God will be excluded from God's presence and receive a merciful, permanent, second death. At most we can speculate that if the martyrs are in some sense priests of God and of Christ (v. 6), they might mediate salvation to others, but we have no explicit evidence that this is the case.

But this is why I believe that David could write, "*As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness*". (Psalm 17: 5) and Job to say, "*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God*" (Job 19 :25-26).

But one last clinching point that became so real to me as I was preparing this talk. Paul quotes a verse from Isaiah (45:23) in his letter to the Romans (14:11) and his letter to the Philippians (2:10-11): "*at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord*". This tells me that at Christ's second coming everybody who has ever lived will bow before Jesus; Moses, Abraham, the apostles, Mary, Christ's mother, all of us will bow before Jesus and acknowledge that Christ is Lord of all. These verses do not indicate universal, unconditional salvation but universal recognition that Christ is Lord of all. Being God He is the only way to God.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – 6th Sunday of Easter – 17th May 2020

Canon David Pickering.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever.

All four gospels record that Jesus shared a final meal with his disciples before his death. However, as is often the case, St. John has his own distinct version. Whereas the Synoptic Gospels focus on the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, in common with rest of his gospel style, St. John records what has come to be known as Jesus' "farewell discourse". This begins in chapter 13 and concludes with Jesus' High Priestly Prayer in chapter 17.

Last Sunday we read the first fourteen verses of chapter 14 where Jesus gives a general assurance about his and his disciples' relationship with the Father. John's reflection last week reminded us that this relationship with the Father is open to everyone. Today's good news comes in the following seven verses, and takes this idea one stage further: Jesus promises in detail the coming of the Holy Spirit, which the evangelist calls the Advocate and Spirit of Truth. He will not be abandoning his disciples, nor us. Verse 18 tells us, *" I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you."* The Holy Spirit will be Jesus' continuing presence with his disciples, and with us.

Now I have to be careful here, because I don't want to spoil John's thunder for Pentecost, in two weeks' time, when he will no doubt give us a full exposition on the Holy Spirit. But, if we move on to verse 19, we find that Jesus also seems to be referring to his resurrection, *" In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live."*

When we think of the coming of the Holy Spirit, we tend to follow the Lucan chronology as found in Acts chapter 2. But John gives us quite a different picture. For him the Holy Spirit is an integral part of the resurrection experience. From verse 19 onwards we read, *" When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, ... Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' . . . . . After he said this he showed them his hands and his side. . . . . he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' "*

For John the coming of the Holy Spirit is part of the Easter Day event. Not something that occurred fifty days later.

It's interesting to compare the words of the Ordination Service as seen in the modern Common Worship with those used previously:

"Here the bishop and priests lay their hands on the head of each ordinand, and the bishop says:

Send down the Holy Spirit on your servant N
for the office and work of a priest in your Church."

But when I was ordained, the Bishop used words from the Book of Common Prayer Ordination Service: *"Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a Priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands. <u>Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained.</u> . . ."* so reflecting John 20, verses 22 & 23.

For St John, the resurrection and the Holy Spirit are one and the same. The resurrection life of Jesus is the life of the Holy Spirit. We need to remember that the resurrection of Jesus was not just a coming back to life again. When Jesus raised Lazarus and others from the dead it was a resuscitation to a physical life from which they would eventually die. But for Jesus this was very different: he was resurrected, something far greater and more wonderful than mere physical reanimation. In his risen form Jesus could appear and disappear, he could arrive through closed doors. None of these would be possible for a simply resuscitated physical body.

The resurrection life is a life lived in, with, and through the Holy Spirit. And it is a life that can be lived now. We may only know and experience the fullness of

that life when we have completed this physical existence, but that doesn't mean it cannot be the mainstay, guide and inspiration of our present journey.

Here, I make an apology to all those who over the years have heard me insisting on my hobby horse, the fruits of the Spirit. As Galatians 5.22 shows us, it is when we live the fruits of the Sprit that we become a living part of the resurrection life. St. Paul writes that the fruits of the Spirit are:

Love Joy

Peace Patience

Kindness Generosity (or, in some translations, Goodness)

Faithfulness Gentleness

Self-control

We shouldn't just reel these off as some kind of memorised list or formula.

They need to be reflected upon, slowly and thoughtfully. Here lies our resurrection life, here in this life, the mainstay of our humanity. Without the rich and positive fruits of the Spirit, (and sadly even without their negative counterparts), we would be mere organisms.

As we read through the resurrection stories in the gospels we find all of the fruits of the Spirit in one way or another.

To take a few examples from St John's resurrection stories:-

"Then the disciples <u>rejoiced</u> when they saw the Lord."

" *Jesus came and stood among them and said, '<u>Peace</u> be with you'."*

Following Peter's denial, Jesus restores him with the threefold questioning,

" Do you <u>love</u> me...? "

To which Peter thee times replies,

" Yes, Lord; you know that I <u>love</u> you."

And can there be anything more full of <u>goodness</u> and <u>generosity</u> than the catch of the hundred and fifty-three fish after a fruitless night of fishing? I suspect it also took a lot of <u>patience</u> and <u>self-control</u> to cast the net on the other side!!

Over these past few Sundays we have been living through the weeks of Eastertide, and today is the 6th Sunday of Easter, not as in the old calendar a Sunday *after* Easter. This coming Thursday we celebrate Ascension Day, and then in a couple of weeks it will be Pentecost. But our commemorations of these great festivals are not just celebrations of past events; they are celebrations of the most important realities of human life. They rejoice in the richness and vitality of our life with God. The key to our relationship with God lies in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. In today's reading from Acts, St Paul emphasises that intimacy with the divine. He quotes to his Athenian audience from one of their own Greek poets: the sixth-century BC writer Epimenides of Crete, " *In him we live and move and have our being."*, and then, *"For we too are his offspring"* from the pen of the third century BC Aratus, from Paul's own region of Cilicia.

For us today, as in any generation of history, amid the troubles and challenges of our times, we can know that God, through the fruits of the Spirt, gives us a share in the resurrection life revealed in Jesus. And in the ordinary, yet extraordinary fruits of the Spirit expressed in our own lives and the lives of everyone around us, we have a share in the resurrection life, that God, in his love for us, wishes us to have.

To the same God, be praise and glory, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – Ascension Day – 21th May 2020

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

We have reached the end of the Eastertide, the forty days since Easter Day in which we have absorbed the beauty of its message in word and sacrament, image and song, balancing the forty days of Lent which went before them. The trajectory of that spiritual journey culminates in the Ascension, after which the risen Christ ceases to be experienced as a tangible presence by his followers, as they wait in prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Of all the events that took place after Good Friday – so unprecedented that they took the New Testament writers to the very limits of language - the Ascension is perhaps the hardest for us to absorb. Artists have struggled to portray it, with awkward feet disappearing through the tops of ceilings or stained glass. The painting by Salvador Dali at the top of our service sheet is one of the better renditions of the Ascension, but even that is still somehow awkward.

It is not just artists who find the imagery difficult. The same is true for many Christians. There is something particularly physical about the way it is described in the passage from Acts ('he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight') which can leave people wondering whether, if they find the physical image difficult to grasp, their faith is somehow compromised. For those who feel a sense of tension because of this, how might it be resolved?

Around sixty years ago Bishop John Robinson wrote a book called *Honest to God,* which caused a furore when it was first published. In it the author admitted that

he no longer found helpful the traditional imagery of a God who was 'up there', or even 'out there' somewhere beyond the known universe. He argued that such unease was actually a good thing, as it enabled those who struggled with the traditional imagery yet still identified themselves as Christian to explore how it might be possible to continue to speak of God in a way that connected with the postmodern world. Such exploration would involve leaving behind a set of images often absorbed in childhood (at its simplest, the notion of God as an old man with a white beard), growing beyond them to a mature, adult faith.

There isn't space here to detail the ways Robinson suggested for understanding the traditional imagery in new ways. For now, we should simply note that in terms of cosmology, in the New Testament era God was understood as 'up' and the earth as 'down', and we should not be troubled by it. And we must not think that in order to be Christian we somehow have to *un*know the physical laws that have been discerned in the intervening centuries. Our faith requires us instead to understand what the Gospel writers were seeking to convey in their own time, and then to ask ourselves what truths the writings reveal in ours.

The answer to the first question is that the Gospel writers sought to express the deepest truths in the way that was most vivid to them. And, as in every age, to do this they resorted to the language of poetry and metaphor. The writer Mark Oakley, a former chaplain in this Diocese, writes that 'poetry is the person of faith's native language'. He adds: 'from its very beginnings, the human intuition that the world is a gift, that it has a divine origin, and that life and love come from this same source, was explored and shared poetically. Our faith is nothing without metaphor. Poetry is the language that most truly reflects the life of the soul.'

If the language of the Ascension is the language of poetry, what does it tell us? First and foremost, it tells us of the unique and ultimate significance of Jesus. And it uses a specific literary technique, one that is often overlooked when talking about the Ascension – the technique of intertext, or cross-reference. The notion of Jesus being taken up to heaven in a cloud cross-refers to the stories of Moses and Elijah, the two most important Old Testament figures who between them represented the law and the prophets – the two figures of whom Jesus's closest companions became aware at his transfiguration. Moses had entered the cloud to be with God. Elijah had been taken up to heaven in a whirlwind when his mantle passed to Elisha. On one level, the New Testament writers were seeking to convey that Jesus was every bit as important as Moses and Elijah. Moreover, the Gentile author of Luke and Acts, from which our two readings today are taken, was insistent: not only was Jesus as significant as Moses and Elijah, he was even more so, because the salvation he offered was for the whole world – the fulfilment of the ancient promise that Israel would be a blessing to all the nations.

What truths does the Ascension story reveal to us in our time? In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul writes that Christ is 'far above all rule and authority and power and dominion', and that God has 'put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body'. The Ascension reminds us that Christ's is the authority to which we are to look in shaping our relations with one another, as individuals and communities. His example of unconditional, self-sacrificial love must inform the way we are and the way we behave. The Ascension is also the event that changes the focus of Christ's ministry from himself to those who follow him. It is a trajectory that began at the resurrection when Jesus said to Mary Magdalene: 'Do not hold on to me … but go to my brothers.' The two men in white robes (Moses and Elijah

again?) say: 'why do you stand looking up into heaven?' They say, by implication: turn instead and look at one another, for you will find Christ there. Look with new eyes on the hungry, the poor, the prisoner, the unwell. All your human divisions do not matter: each one of you is of infinite worth.

It was St Teresa of Avila who expressed the insight that Christ has no body now on earth but ours, no eyes, no hands, no feet but ours. We are to continue his work. It will be difficult, costly, but we will not be without help. The disciples were to stay in the city until they had been 'clothed with power from on high', with the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Being Christ's eyes, hands and feet is something we have seen a lot of in these weeks of the coronavirus pandemic. All over the world people have expressed surprise and gratitude at the courage and self-sacrifice of those who have placed themselves at risk to save others. Gratitude, yes. But surprise? The Christian faith teaches us that the impulse of self-giving love is wired into humanity, made in the image of God, the God who is Love. Everything about Jesus of Nazareth expressed that self-giving love. Those who witnessed him treating each damaged person he encountered with a recognition of their unique, infinite worth in the sight of God; who watched him include those whom their society excluded or despised, risking infection to touch the untouchable; who learned from him the nature and cost of forgiveness; who saw him kneeling to wash their feet, turning on its head the world's understanding of power and authority; who lived through the desolation of his death on the cross yet after three days found him present again among them – they knew that everything must be redefined in the light of what they had seen. God's very nature had been revealed as costly, self-giving love. And the action of that love would continue

to the end of time through the outworking of the new commandment: 'You are to love, to give attention, to value, one another as I have loved you.'

The instinct for that love is wired into us, and by no means confined to those who call themselves Christian. Yet for those who do seek to follow Christ it is the thing that makes the difference, the thing that makes sense of it all. The ultimate significance of Christ is what we celebrate at Ascensiontide. The turning to find him in others is what gives life to all in his name. Waiting on and being open to the Holy Spirit is what makes it possible.

As an example of how this works, Michael Mayne, the former head of religious broadcasting at the BBC, once told a story of how he visited Calcutta to make a radio programme about the work of Mother Teresa. [1] In the Home for Dying Destitutes run by her order of sisters, he noticed that over the tub where the destitute and the dying were washed, these words had been written: 'The body of Christ.'

Who says that isn't Ascension?

Amen.

[1] Michael Mayne, *Alleluia is our Song*, pp 56, 67.

Chaplaincy of All Saints' Marseille
with Aix-en-Provence
and the Luberon

24th May 2020
7th Sunday of Easter
(Sunday after Ascension Day)

Reflection
Jane Quarmby, Reader

Have you ever been on a long car journey with a very bored child who keeps asking "are we there yet?" It's a sore trial in many ways, particularly as usually the child has no idea where they are going or how to get there – they just want to **be** there. It's hard to explain that its going to take hours whilst trying to drive and or navigate. It's also very annoying.

So I have a lot of sympathy for Jesus who had much the same with his disciples who kept asking him "is it time yet for you to free Israel and restore our Kingdom?" They still had very little idea of the journey they were on, or what their destination was going to be. They were still hankering after their own idea of what Jesus was about – he was there to get rid of the Romans and put Israel in charge. Of course, we know, with the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, that Jesus had quite a different journey and destination in mind, an altogether bigger plan than they could ever dream of. His destination was to go on ahead to take his place again with God, to get things ready for his followers and to bring God's world into our own.

His ascension into heaven, however hard it is to explain, was the beginning of a new world, a new relationship with God, reached through Jesus and belief in Him. It wasn't going to be more of the same, with skirmishes and battles with the Romans. All that has now been superseded by the beginning of Christ's church in Jerusalem. Jesus was off home and although he would return, for now he was leaving things to the apostles. He was not, however, leaving them to their own devices, or reliant upon their own resources, for he was going to send them power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. Which it did and which we

celebrate every year at Pentecost. But he also leaves them something else, before the Holy Spirit came, and that was the power of prayer. The apostles used that, as we hear later in this chapter of Acts – the apostles "were constantly united in prayer".

Understandable, when they have been told that they are to tell the whole world about Jesus. These days, with all the information technology around, getting a message to the whole world is a lot faster and easier to do than 2000 years ago when you had to physically go and deliver a message yourself, or send a messenger. That's what happened when a king died in those days. Heralds were sent all over the kingdom to tell everyone that they had a new ruler, a new King, to obey and no doubt pay taxes to. However, the apostles' job was more complicated than that because this new King, Jesus Christ, doesn't want money or armies, he has no use for "stuff". He wants everyone, from every nation, to live differently, to love one another, to help and heal one another, to care for each other and protect the vulnerable. It wasn't how things were done in those days. To be honest, it isn't how things are done in large parts of the world today.

It's a job which still needs doing, this telling the world about Jesus. We all have a part to play in this great work, and we all do it differently. For example, in this next week we celebrate (according to the Lectionary) the Venerable Bede on Monday, St Augustine and John Calvin on Tuesday, Lanfranc on Thursday, and Josephine Butler and Joan of Arc on Saturday. The Venerable Bede was a monk, the most notable chronicler and ecclesiastical historian of the 7th century; St Augustine was a 4th century theologian who influenced the church reforms some 1100 year later; John Calvin was a 16th century French theologian and protestant reformer, Lanfranc was an 11th century Italian Benedictine monk who became Archbishop of Canterbury and trusted counsellor of William the Conqueror, who reformed the church in England and maintained the church's independence from secular affairs; Josephine Butler was the 19th social reformer who campaigned for the abolition of child prostitution and human trafficking of women and young children into European prostitution along with the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, and finally Joan of Arc, the young girl who became a heroine in the 100 Years war in the 15th century with her visions and tactical advice to the French side. All were staunch Christians in their own way.

All were to some extent, and in some way, following Christ's orders to tell the world about him. We too have our part to play in this. It's been interesting over the past few months to see how churches have adapted to being locked out of their buildings, and how resilient ministers and their flocks have become. Overnight, online services popped up all over the place, from the homespun and heartfelt to the more glossy and technically polished services. From small congregations like ours to cathedrals, from purely local to nationally televised, access to worship has never been easier, providing you can get to a radio, a tv, a phone, a letter box or a computer. Our chaplaincy has doubled the services we put on, with a regular Sunday service for anyone who wants to join us via Zoom, and a midweek Compline service too. There's never been such a choice – on a Sunday morning I can, if I want, listen to a service in Northamptonshire, Marseille or Auckland in NZ. There are prayer resources,

reflections, poems and wonderful music flying about in all directions as people share what has moved them and helped them. And as Jamie mentioned in his e mail of resources on Thursday, before the pandemic, between 5 and 7% of the population reported attending church services, but with online provision this has increased to 24% during the crisis, with the percentage of those between the ages of 18 and 35 being higher at 34%. It has taken a crisis of global proportions to nudge people back to Christ.

'Back to Church Sunday', and all the other well-meaning initiatives, have often met with a good deal of squirming from regular churchgoers and excuses, largely down to reluctance to invite someone they know to come with them to church. Now there's no excuse – just forward out the e mails about our services and the resources that we are publishing to people you know and see what happens. God moves in mysterious ways, and this is the easiest way yet for us to become Christ's heralds. We may not be able to meet each other in a building made for the purpose, but it's not the buildings that are the church of Christ, it's us. We are Christ's body in the here and now, and we need to reach out to everyone we know who is hurting, alone, frightened, ill or in despair. So go on – press send!

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection

The Holy Spirit

Pentecost, 31st May 2020

Reflection
The Revd John Smith

I was very happy when I saw that I was assigned this Sunday's reflection. Whitsunday as we used to call it.

The reason for my joy is that it is an opportunity to tell you about a very dear friend of mine. A friend who is closer to me than anybody I know. A friend who knows me better than anybody else in this world. In fact, my friend has known me since before I was born. My friend has been with me all my life but it took an act of acceptance on my part to confirm the relationship. This happened when I was fifteen years old when I accepted an invitation to give my life to Christ. I was sitting in the balcony of a church when I accepted the invitation. I had to go down to the church office to sign a form and I could hardly walk. When it came to filling in the form my hand and body were shaking so much, I could not do it. The Holy Spirit had overpowered me. The next time that the Spirit forcibly made his presence felt was when the family were holidaying in Sarasota, Florida in the mid-80s. I was walking down the shopping mall repeating over and over in a loud voice "I serve a king who rides a donkey". I got some strange looks but people mostly just steered away from me. But the best time of experiencing the Holy Spirit was on my first Alpha programme when I accepted an invitation to be filled with the Holy Spirit and I was filled to overflowing.

So, let me tell you more about my friend the Holy Spirit; who he is, where he comes from, what he does. I'll tell you as much as we have time for.

Who is the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is one person of the triune God that we Christians worship. Now I know the concept of the Trinity is hard for us all to grasp. I have heard many attempts to explain the relationship but none of them are totally satisfactory. The Trinity remains for me a mystery.

We know that Jesus spoke about the Holy Spirit as a person not an impersonal force (gravity/magnetism). The Holy Spirit has human attributes; experiences, emotions. He has an intellect and a will:

- Speaks: who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says (Revelations 2:29 & 3:22)
- Leads: The Holy Spirit said to Philip go up to the Ethiopian's chariot (Acts 8:29)
- Intercedes: we do not know how to pray but the Holy Spirit intercedes for us (Romans 8:26)
- Testifies: The Holy Spirit will witness/testify to me (John 15:26)

And the Holy Spirit can be grieved, lied to, insulted, and blasphemed.

Throughout the Bible it is clear that the Holy Spirit is God himself as His attributes/characteristics are those of God himself:

- Eternal/Is not was: alive yesterday, today and tomorrow. Pre-existent before the world was created. The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters (Genesis 1:2)
- Omnipotent: in announcing to Mary that she was to have a child, the angel Gabriel said the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you (Luke 1:35);
- Omnipresent: where can I go from your spirit, where can I flee from your presence (Ps 139:7)
- Omniscient: no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:11)

The Holy Spirit is called God: why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, not lied to men but God? (Acts 5:3&4)

Oddly, in John's gospel alone we have three versions of who sent the Holy Spirit to be with us:

- Jesus said God will send the Holy Spirit in my name. (John 14:26)
- But Jesus also said 'if I go away, I will send him (the Holy Spirit) to you (John 16:7)
- And six verse later John says 'when the spirit of truth comes' suggesting the Holy Spirit gave and sent himself (John 16:13)

We are much clearer as to how the Holy Spirit was sent. Visibly as a:

- Dove at Christ's baptism (John 1:32)
- Shining cloud at Christ's transfiguration (Matt. 17:2, Mark 9:2)
- Breath, as David told us two weeks ago, 'Jesus breathed on them and said "receive the Holy Spirit"' (John 20:22)
- Tongues of fire (Acts 2v3)

Aurally: at the first Pentecost the disciples heard a sound like the blowing of a violent wind (Acts 2:2)
And almost invisibly as a "breath".

How has the role and scope of the Holy Spirit's work changed from Old Testament times, when Jesus was on earth and post-Pentecost?

In the Old Testament there are many references to the Spirit of God but only two to the Holy Spirit (Psalm 51:11 and Isaiah 63:10). Prior to Jesus coming to earth the Holy Spirit only came on particular people at particular times for particular tasks. Three quick examples: Bezalel who made the articles for the tabernacle (Exodus 31:3), Samson in his fights with the Philistines (Judges 14:6, 14:19 and 15:14 and Saul, the first king of Israel (1 Samuel 10:10) and most tragically departed from Saul (1 Samuel 16v14).

The coming of the Holy Spirit was foretold by the prophets, e.g. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, but their prophecy was unfulfilled for 300+ years. The Holy Spirit becomes more active around the

time of Jesus birth but still given to particular people for particular tasks. During Jesus life the work of the Holy Spirit centred around the person of Jesus Christ who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, baptized by the Holy Spirit, anointed by the Holy Spirit, led by the Holy Spirit, offered Himself as an atonement for our sins by the Holy Spirit, was raised by the Holy Spirit.

But the spirit had not been given to anyone else or even the disciples (John 7:39), that is until as David told us two weeks ago, Jesus gave the disciples the Holy Spirit. John also tells us that Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would come after his ascension (John 14: 16). As it surely did fifty days after Jesus resurrection as we heard in today's reading (Acts 2:1-4). From this moment on the Holy Spirit was no longer reserved for particular people at particular times for particular tasks but the Holy Spirit is for all people, for all of the time for everything we need in our lives.

What is clear is that we are no longer living in the time of promise and expectation but in the time of fulfilment. We are no longer waiting for the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is waiting for us. The promise of Jesus has been fulfilled. The Holy Spirit is alive today and I am very happy to say that the Holy Spirit is available to all of us. The Holy Spirit is for everyone who believes in Jesus. I need Jesus for my eternal life. I need the Holy Spirit for my day to day life. For me the Holy Spirit is the active person in the Trinity. I liken it to the active ingredient in a drug, the ingredient that is biologically active and works to bring about a desired result.

So, what does the Holy Spirit do? First and most critically, the Holy Spirit gets us started on our Christian journey. If we do not start on the journey then all of the other things that the Holy Spirit does are not relevant to us. There are three things that the Holy Spirit does to get us started on our Christian journey.

- Convicts us of our sin (John 16:8) – helps us see that our attitudes, beliefs and behaviours are meaningless at best and destructive at worst
- Convinces us that Jesus is the answer – gives us insight, understanding and realisation that what Jesus taught and lived is a better way
- Converts us to the Christian life through a rebirth – a supernatural act that we cannot do alone but which the Holy Spirit does when we indicate our willingness and our readiness to believe and follow Jesus

And the good news about the Holy Spirit is that the work of the Holy Spirit does not stop there. There are many other things that the Holy Spirit goes on to do in the lives of those who believe including: He comforts us, guides us, sanctifies us – sets us apart for sacred use, makes us holy – and helps us in our infirmities. He is my constant companion.

I want to touch briefly on the fruits of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit in our lives, we come in time to bear what are called the fruits of the Holy Spirit; David's favourite topic which he talked about two weeks ago. I will not go over these again except to summarise that the nine fruits mentioned can be divided into three groups of three, with each group defining different relationships:

- Love, joy and peace speak (our relationship with God)
- Patience, kindness, goodness (our relationship with others)

- Faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (our inward relationship with ourselves)

And this is what authentic Christian living is – God first, others second, and ourselves third. The Spirit works in us so that He might work through us. How desirable are those fruits? When we are what we should be inside, we will bring forth fruit, much fruit and more fruit.

And what about the gifts of the Holy Spirit? Here when we say gift, we mean a talent or a capability that is given by the Holy Spirit to be used for building God's kingdom here on earth. There are three separate lists of the gifts of the Spirit in the New Testament: Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 and Ephesians 4 v 11 (There is a fourth listing in 1 Peter 4:10 and 11 but this duplicates the other lists). From the list of nine gifts in Corinthians, the first three gifts are personal attributes – wisdom, knowledge and faith – and then we have the six so-called 'sign gifts' because they are outward indications of or signs of the working of God in our lives. They are healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between good and evil spirits and the speaking in tongues and the interpretation of that speech.

We all have received one or more gifts and we are to use them. We are given gifts for the common good! They are not for our own selfish/solitary use as all gifts are essential for the full and proper functioning of the body of Christ that we belong to.

In closing, we should recognise that not everybody has the Holy Spirit in them and Paul tells us that if we do not, then we do not belong to Christ. I hope you have learnt enough about the Holy Spirit this morning to want to know more about the Holy Spirit and if you haven't asked the Holy Spirit into your life then I hope you will think about doing so.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – Trinity Sunday – 7th June 2020

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

While talking to a friend this week, I was reminded how for most people the sort of things chaplains talk about on Sundays seem of little relevance. When I mentioned that I was preparing to write a reflection on the Trinity, the unspoken question was: what possible relevance could that have to our times, in a week when racial unrest has dominated the news across the US and Europe following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis while under arrest? Don't you live in the real world?

It has been shockingly sad that, in a week when for the first time in months the news hasn't been dominated by the effects of the coronavirus, we have been confronted instead with the depressing reality that, more than fifty years since the death of Martin Luther King in Memphis, twenty-seven years since the death of Stephen Lawrence in London, we seem in so many ways to be no further forward in eradicating the deep wound of racism in our societies. And yet, *pace* my friend, I believe that the Gospel has something profound to speak into that reality.

In the Scriptures, the instincts that underlie racism are often dealt with in terms of sibling rivalry – Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Esau and Jacob. The stories articulate the deep personal insecurity that affects sibling relationships: if he or

she has enough – of love, affection, opportunity, money - there won't be enough for me. It's an example of the fear of scarcity, a fear that runs deep in the human psyche. It affects relationships between individuals and between groups. This mindset of scarcity underlies the notion that one ethnic group might seek to dominate another, on which whole economies and societies have been built. If I don't dominate them, they will get ahead of me.

No society – and no individual - is immune from this tendency. Anyone who has been a sibling knows how it works first hand. There was an extraordinary moment this week when a journalist asked President Trudeau of Canada to comment on Donald Trump's response to the events in the US, inviting him to condemn it. His reply was reminiscent of Jesus's reaction in the story when he was invited to condemn the woman taken in adultery. Trudeau paused for a long time – twenty-two seconds, which is a long time on camera - as it were, writing with his finger in the dust. Then he replied: 'Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone.' What he actually said was that this is a time to listen and to learn, and he spoke powerfully of the lived reality of discrimination faced by black and racialised people in Canada 'every single day', and how that needed to change. It was the reply of a statesman. He didn't need to say anything about President Trump. What Trudeau understood, what we all need to understand, is that given the circumstances, given the history, given our collective failure to address this issue properly, any of us has the potential to have been that policeman. And that our willingness to ignore the issue of racism, even our silence about it, is culpable.

What does the Gospel bring to any of this? The closing verses of Matthew's account, which we have just heard read, point towards a world freed from the

thought that one group might ever think it had superiority over another. Jesus's parting words to his followers – the so-called Great Commission – are that they are to 'Go therefore and make disciples of *all the nations*, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. This Gospel is for everyone, regardless of the markers of human difference that make up their identity. Paul puts it even more forcefully in his Letter to the Galatians (3.28): 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.' Or as he tells the Romans (2.11): 'God shows no partiality.' Ethnicity, nationality, gender and all the other marks of human difference are not fundamental to how God sees our identity. The key mark of identity is baptism – our 'immersion' in the life of God.

This is Trinity Sunday, the day on which we celebrate that God is both One and Three: a God for whom unity matters (One) and in whom diversity is also celebrated (Three). A God who treasures our diverse identities as gifts to one another, ourselves and the world, not things to be apologised for, ostracised on the basis of, or threatened by. We retain our distinct identities, but in baptism we are all one.

Sadly, the Church is not immune from discrimination on the grounds of difference – far from it. But there is a sense now in the Church of England that it is becoming more aware of it, even if it doesn't yet know how to fix it. With faltering steps, it is coming to see how without acknowledging and embracing the contribution of all God's people, the Kingdom it preaches is impoverished. In moving forward, it could do worse than heed these words of the American theologian and human rights activist William Stringfellow: 'Baptism doesn't

abolish difference, but it transforms difference from a cause for fear into a manifestation of abundance'.

'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. It's a very suitable Gospel for Trinity Sunday. Don't worry - I am not about to embark on a long discourse on the nature of the Trinity. It is best understood instinctively rather than rationally, in the dimension of the imagination. Some have said it is easier to communicate the idea of the Trinity through art than through language. Rather than trying to articulate in words the idea of God who, as Father, is transcendent and mystical creator; who, as Son, who lived among us and taught us how to live well; who, as Spirit, is a felt presence, an enabler of prayer and an encourager to do God's work - rather than push words to the limits of description, it may sometimes be better to try and draw the reciprocity of love, the mutual indwelling, that exists between the three.

The best known of those drawings is the 15th century icon of the Trinity by Andrei Rublev which is at the top of our service sheet, in which three figures are seated round a table. With its echo of the account in Genesis of Abraham offering hospitality to three angels without knowing who they were, like all icons it bears almost infinite contemplation. Each of the figures is looking at the one next to them whilst somehow also pointing to and including the third figure. There is stillness and expectancy, yet at the same time a continuous, graceful movement. The picture is reminiscent of a Gloria which is sometimes used when saying the psalms: 'Glory to God, Source of all Being, Eternal Word and Holy Spirit.' Three facets of God's nature, in constant relationship. Both the icon and the Gloria

speak of a God who is at once beyond us, beside us and within us. Unity in diversity. Being as communion.

The other thing we notice in contemplating Rublev's icon is that there is a space at the front of the table, a space for us. For we are invited to join in the relationship of love that flows within the life of God, and by standing in front of the icon we see that invitation extended to us. It's a reminder of our baptism, by which we were immersed in that relationship. And if we look a little longer we may notice that the table itself is in the shape of a chalice. The symbol of the cost of the love of God, that cost Jesus everything. For although we are looking at a picture of tranquillity and harmony, it tells us also, quietly, of the horror and the pain in which God is present too, and which have been overcome through the Cross. Affirming life and love above hatred and destruction. That's a good thing to contemplate as we seek to come to terms with the sense of fracture that has erupted this week. To be drawn deeper into relationship, with God and one another, points the way to the beginning of healing.

The Trinity is, above all, about relationship - relational abundance rather than scarcity. For the Trinity is ultimately about love – eternal, dynamic, perfect. And, as the first Letter of John puts it, perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4.18).

That seems to me to have a lot to do with the events of this week, in the real world. It also offers a vision and a promise of how one day, through God's grace, such events will cease to be.

'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.' That's addressed to us.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection

1st Sunday after Trinity - 14th June 2020

Christine Portman, Reader

This week my French group looked at an article about a young Parisian couple. Two years ago they decided they'd had enough of their lives - the French call it "metro-boulot-dodo": the daily grind of commute-work-bed. 'Our youth was passing us by", they said. So they gave up their jobs and set off on a 10,000 km trek across Europe, from Portugal to the Bosphorus, en route crossing some of the highest mountains of Europe. They called their adventure "2PVA: Deux pas vers l'autre" - or "Two steps towards the other".

As I looked through today's Gospel reading, I was struck by the many similarities between their journey and that of the men commissioned by Jesus: young people, turning their backs on their old lives, facing an exciting, risky future. People in search of encounters with others. Of course, there are big differences too. The disciples were to take far less with them than the young couple. They wouldn't be going to such remote places: Jesus directed his apostles specifically to seek out towns and villages where they would find "the lost sheep of the house of Israel". They were given a clear mission: to bring healing and to proclaim the good news.

This past few weeks have hardly been packed with good news. Just as the Coronavirus epidemic seemed to be loosening its grip here in Europe, we began to hear about its devastating impact in other countries. And then on 25th May came the news of the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Held down for 8 minutes and 46 seconds as a white policeman knelt on his neck, he repeatedly pleaded, "I can't breathe". We joined hundreds of people from across the diocese for an online service on Friday. We waited in silent prayer for those 8 minutes and 46 seconds. It was a long time. I wondered what it took to do that, what it took for the officers to look on as that man's life drained away.

What happened subsequently, the explosion of fury followed by worldwide protest, is hardly surprising, but what we could do this morning is to think about what our readings say about how we, the Christian community, should respond.

"'*Everything that the Lord has spoken we will* **do***.' Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord*". What had the Israelites promised? God had said: "*If you* **obey my voice and keep my covenant***, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples*". In his commentary on Exodus, Walter Houston explains: "This solemn imposition of requirements and undertaking of obedience is what this part of the book means by 'covenant'". The relationship between God and his people is "above all a moral one - not a matter of morals in a narrow sense, but based on how God and people behave toward one another".

St Paul often wrote about the difference between following the letter of the Law and following Christ. Jesus himself had no time for those who comply with all the outward

demands of religion whilst denying God in their hearts. He called them, "whited sepulchres" - like clean and whitewashed tombs on the outside but rotten within. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul also reflects on the relationship between God and humanity, but he talks about a new covenant. Through the Cross we have "*peace with God*" and "*access to this grace in which we stand*". That peace and grace come with responsibilities.

On Tuesday, David and I watched George Floyd's funeral service. The preacher, The Revd Al Sharpton, pulled no punches about what Christians should be doing when injustice is staring them in the face. His text was from Ephesians 6: "*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*".

Another speaker, a white pastor from the Southern Baptist Church, remarked that his congregations "have way to go" in terms of standing up to racism and other forms of social injustice that prevent people from being what God intends. Because our faith is not a simple matter of a comfortable private relationship with God. Private prayer and public worship are fine - but where do they take us? We're commanded to love our neighbours as ourselves. An expert in the law asked Jesus to tell him what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus responded with the Parable of the Good Samaritan. He made it clear who our neighbour is. He also showed how easy it is for people like the priest who passed by on the other side - those who call themselves religious - to ignore the central tenets of their faith. There is much evil and *present darkness* in our world. It is our duty as Christians to speak out when we see injustice. Silence is complicity. We need to call out wrong where we see it - racism, privilege that exploits the weak, reckless behaviour that destroys the world given for all of us. ... all, in fact, that stands in opposition to the goodness of God. "*Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?",* asks Jesus. The lawyer replies, "*The one who had mercy on him*." Jesus told him, "*Go and do likewise*."

We in the Church have been given a mission: to "*proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near."* Those first apostles had no written gospels; in fact, when Jesus was talking to them, they did not yet know the good news of the resurrection. But there was good news already: in the person of Jesus, God's kingdom was already near. Proclaiming the good news is so much more than teaching people about the Bible and what we do in church. It's about our relationship with a God who cares for his creation, who finds it good, who wants us to do justice, show mercy, pray like Jesus, that *'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'.*

Jesus had compassion for the crowds "because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd". There are many like that today, people in need of good news about a better way of being. Christ expects us to continue his work: we are, as St Teresa said, his only hands and feet in the world today.

That young couple had a wonderful adventure - but it came to an end when they reached the Bosphorus. Our journey with Christ has no end, but like theirs it will be full of challenges and risks. "*Sheep into the midst of wolves*", we need to "*be wise as serpents and innocent as*

doves". Above all we must be faithful to our part of God's bargain in proclaiming the good news - that the gospel is for all people and for all time. We don't set out with rucksacks and camping kits, but on our way we do need to put on the armour of God. Unless we're careful, those *wiles* of the enemy that St Paul talked about can be comfort and complacency, insufficient care for those whom our action could help.

Many of us live very privileged lives, but let us never forget that all that we have comes not from us, but from God. As we take our own 'Deux pas vers l'autre' - 'Two steps towards the other', let's keep in mind the words of today's Collect:
"because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without you, grant us the help of your grace, that in the keeping of your commandments we may please you both in will and deed".

Amen

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – 2nd Sunday after Trinity – 21st June 2020

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

It's a day of mixed emotions. Today we are holding the first service at All Saints since the lockdown began. It is a cause for celebration, but somehow a muted one. We are back in church, but we are wearing face masks, surgical gloves, not singing and everyone is standing two metres apart. This is not back to normal by any means. We are constantly reminded that the coronavirus has not gone away, though it appears to be in retreat enough to allow this limited contact. We have longed for community, since community is what humans are made for. The story of salvation in the Scriptures contains the early observation that it is 'not good for the man to be alone' (Genesis 2.18) and it ends in a city of incomparable beauty, filled with people celebrating: the new Jerusalem, about which we will hear in our anthem this morning, a setting of words from the Book of Revelation. It is a beautiful vision, where death will be no more, mourning and crying and pain will be no more. A vision of the heaven which our souls somehow know to be their true home. It reminds us that today's homecoming to our building is but a stage along the way of our pilgrimage.

There are many reasons why today's emotions are mixed. A few weeks ago we marked the 75th anniversary of the ending of the Second World War in Europe. Familiar scenes from newsreels were shown of people hugging each other in the streets and climbing lamp-posts in excitement. But it was pointed out that those pictures only told part of the story. There's a scene in my favourite French film that captures this painfully well.

The film is called *Les Uns et Les Autres*, made by Claude Lelouch in 1981. It tells the story of four families with intertwining destinies, and the impact on each family of the Second World War. The scene that has stayed with me is the moment when a soldier returns home at the end of the conflict. He has to walk past the house of two brothers he had fought alongside and who had died in the D-Day landings. The camera shows the parents of the two brothers watching the survivor walk past their house, as they quietly lower the blinds. The survivor arrives home to find a welcome party, but he is not jubilant. He has seen too

much. That scene has always seemed to me more real than the newsreel ones. VE Day was a time of mixed emotions, and Lelouch captures it with compassion and understanding.

As the pandemic begins to recede, most of us know someone (or someone who knows someone) who has been profoundly affected by it. Death, illness, loss of livelihood, fragile mental health, are now front of focus in a generalised way that is unusual for us. Mostly we are able to busy ourselves with things and keep the deeper questions at bay. But not in these weeks.

In our Gospel today, Jesus warns his followers (and, through them, us) that what is offered in the Christian life is a mixed experience, from which we will experience mixed emotions. We may be maligned, criticised, even brutalised as a result of our willingness to follow him. But God cares for us: he offers us the beautiful images of sparrows not falling to the ground unheeded, the very hairs of our head being numbered – images that are important to hold onto as we navigate this time of uncertainty. We must hold on, too, to the heavenly vision for which we strive, not only in the future but here and now: for we pray 'your will be done on earth as it is in heaven', and it is up to us to help bring that about in whatever ways we can.

It may sometimes mean we have to take a stand, which can make us unpopular and bring us into tension with other things that we value. That's what Jesus is warning his followers when he says: 'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword [or, as Luke's version puts it, division]. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother…'

The prophet Jeremiah writes of similar pressures in our Old Testament reading. He was often vilified for the warnings he felt he had no choice but to give to the people he served. He observes that not to speak is as painful as the fear and loneliness that follow after he has spoken.

For any of us, taking a stand can be problematic. At its simplest level we may find ourselves at a meal with friends and someone is being joked about or criticised. Do we stand up for the person and challenge the harmony around the table? I can think of three occasions when I have done that in recent years and none of them went well. But, in each case, something deep within me could not stand by and let the person or category who were being joked about or criticised be demeaned.

At its toughest, taking a stand can involve us losing the 'life' we had (our reputation in public or private, even friendship or family relationships). But if it means we are standing with Christ, then we will find our life in him, always. These are defining moments for us. And in them we will find that we are cared for by God. For the 'new Jerusalem' is our goal, where we will ultimately be at home. Not in a church building, or even on Zoom, but with the God who gave us being, who loves us through our lives and beyond, and whom we will finally see face to face.

What are the things we have learned from these weeks of turmoil and disruption? We should try to hold on to some of them. They will be different for each of us, though there will be common threads. I can think of three things I have learned since 17th March that I don't want to forget.

First, the reminder of the constant need to care for one another. To keep our relationships in good repair. To notice our neighbours. One of the best articles I have read over the last three months was by the theologian John Swinton about an elderly lady called Amanda, who suddenly found her neighbours wanting to know her name and whether there was anything they could do to help her. They had never asked her those questions before, despite living in the same building for years. Will they go on doing so now?

Secondly, we have been reminded of the importance of taking a stand. We have learned from the death of George Floyd, and countless others who have suffered and died for no reason other than that they were perceived as different, that in the third decade of the 21st century it is unacceptable that this should happen. (That has always been true, but George Floyd's death was a wake-up call.)

Thirdly, we have learned again the need to attend to our inner lives. If we don't look after them, we cannot function well in our outer lives - the combined commitments of family, work and community. One by-product of the lockdown is that the church has had many more tentative explorers than it has known for years - people who instinctively know that their inner life matters and that faith is part of how it finds its expression and its anchor. For that we should give thanks.

Taking care of our inner lives also helps us process our mixed emotions after a time of turmoil. For they are part of what it means to be human. William Blake observed that:

‘Man is meant for joy and woe
and, when this we rightly know,
through the world we safely go.
Joy and woe are woven fine,
a clothing for the soul divine.’ *Auguries of Innocence (1805)*

These three things have a common thread, for they all reflect the two great commandments of Jesus. When someone asked him which were the most important commandments of the Law, he replied: love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength (the importance of attending to our inner lives), and love your neighbour as yourself (the importance of attending to those around us, to treat them kindly and well). So it may turn out to be that, having journeyed through these months of turmoil, we will discover that the answers we have learned are the ones we had all along. But we have learned them afresh, albeit for some of us in the hardest of ways.

That process of relearning is not new. T S Eliot, in the closing poem of his Four Quartets, *Little Gidding*, wrote:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

That’s what happens when we have to do with a God who is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. The verses from the Book of Revelation that follow the words of our anthem today say just that: ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.’ And they go on to say this: ‘To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life (Revelation 21, 6-7).’ Endlessly renewing and refreshing us. Let us give thanks for that too.

Amen.

Chaplaincy of All Saints' Marseille with Aix-en-Provence and the Luberon

28th June 2020
3rd Sunday after Trinity

Reflection

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

Our three readings today are, in their different ways, about where we place our allegiance.

The message in our Gospel reading lies at the heart of Matthew's account of Jesus's ministry. It is all about welcome. The divine implications of hospitality were a common theme in the Ancient Mediterranean world. We think of Abraham entertaining angels unawares, and there were similar traditions for the Greeks and Romans – by extending welcome to a stranger you might be welcoming a god. Here, Jesus is concluding his instructions to the twelve to go out and proclaim that the kingdom of heaven has come near. They are both to receive hospitality and to give it. And, through them, we too are invited both to represent Christ to the stranger and to encounter Christ in the stranger.

Jesus gives three examples of hospitality. First, the obvious ones that it should be extended to prophets and righteous people, from which reward will follow. But then he goes further: hospitality must also be given to those with no status. Followers of Christ are to go out into the world and welcome all in his name, especially those referred to as the 'little ones' – people whom the world rejects: the poor, the vulnerable, the homeless, the marginalised. For it is in them that we will meet Christ. This passage in chapter 10 anticipates the better known one in chapter 25 in which Jesus instructs his disciples that each time they provide for the hungry and thirsty, clothe the naked and visit the sick or those in prison, they will be doing it for him. They will both have encountered and embodied Christ, and their reward will be the kingdom of heaven.

The message for us is clear: if we align ourselves with Christ, stand in solidarity with the dispossessed, our allegiance will be to God and his kingdom of justice. And we will find that the kingdom of heaven has come near.

The passage we heard from Paul's Letter to the Romans is about our deepest drives. In language we may find slightly shocking today, he talks of 'slavery' to sin as opposed to 'slavery' to righteousness (that is, 'being right' with God). Sin is often defined as what separates us from God, and there are patterns of behaviour in all of us that cause that separation - when we become self-centred, preoccupied with selfish desires and no longer turned outward towards God and neighbour. It is a good image for addiction, too – when desire for whatever temporary sense of wellbeing is being chased becomes out of control. That *is* a form of slavery, and it is always to be met with compassion rather than judgment. Months of lockdown have exacerbated addictive responses for some; and, for some, professional help will be needed. But for all of us, however we

may be feeling as we emerge from these strange weeks, to be reminded where we put our allegiance can be a starting point on the road to rebalancing, getting things back into perspective. If we can hold onto God through the difficult times, we will find freedom.

Paul's language suggests there is almost a battle going on within us, and it is true that it can sometimes feel like that. So deeply are we enslaved to what Paul generically calls 'sin' – the things that separate us from God - that it is only a strong and opposing enslavement which can make a difference. It's a battle which the priest-poet John Donne, in the 17th century, wrote of in his poem 'Batter my heart':

> 'Batter my heart, three-person'd God …
> …
> That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
> Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
>
> … dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain,
> But am betroth'd unto your enemy;
> Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,
> Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
> Except you enthrall me, never shall be free…'

It does us good sometimes to reflect how we are enslaved to things. What Paul is asking is this: What matters most to us? Where do we place our allegiance? With our own desires, or with God?

Our Old Testament reading presents the most extreme example of where we place our allegiance. Abraham, the father of the people of Israel, is shown time and again trusting God despite a series of increasingly unsettling calls upon him.

In chapter 12 of Genesis, when he is 75, the Lord says to him 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.' … The account says simply: 'So Abram went.' And, when he is 99, God promises that he and his wife Sarah, then aged 90, will have a son, Isaac. They are so astonished that they laugh, but they trust in what they have been told and in due course Isaac is born. Then comes the greatest test, which we heard read this morning, when God instructs Abraham to sacrifice his son to him. With astonishing faith he sets out to obey God's call on him. And after the passage we heard, an angel gives Abraham this message (which is one of the lessons we hear read in our service of nine lessons and carols at Christmas, so completely does it reverse the story of the disobedience in the Garden of Eden at the beginning of Genesis): 'Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. … And by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.'

Abraham shows God that he is willing to give up the thing he loves most for something that he loves even more. God stops short of requiring such sacrifice from Abraham, but in the fullness of time God does not stop short of offering it from himself. For he gave his own Son for us – giving up the thing he loved most for something he loved even more: us.

In return, where do *we* place our allegiance?

Amen.

Chaplaincy of All Saints' Marseille
with Aix-en-Provence
and the Luberon

28th June 2020
3rd Sunday after Trinity

Reflection
Reader Jane Quarmby

I find it strange that if a gifted artist paints something horrific, it's still accepted as great art. Think of Michelangelo's Last Judgement, or the Blinding of Samson by Rembrandt, both of which are enough to give anyone nightmares. The picture above this reflection is actually embroidered and hangs on our wall downstairs. It shows an old man wielding an enormous knife over a teenage boy who is tied up. If that picture were to be on the news, we'd all be horrified. To make matters worse, it's of a scene in the Bible, from Genesis, the first book in the Bible. It forms part of the history of our faith and the basis of the Old Testament. In it we see Abraham who will be the father of the Israelite nation, about to kill his son Isaac.

All sorts of questions spring to mind about this. Who could kill their own child? Why would anyone do such a thing? Were children of such little value in Abraham's time? What sort of God would ask a father to kill their own son? Who puts pleasing their God before the life of their child? Didn't Abraham love his son?

As it turns out, God didn't want Abraham to kill his son and sends an angel to tell him not to. He has passed the test of faith. Which gives rise to another question – this time about a God who would test someone's faith in this way? Who amongst us would unquestioningly take our child and prepare to kill him if we thought God wanted us to?

There's a lot going on here for us to think about and unravel.

In Abraham's time it wasn't unheard of to sacrifice children to various deities. The Israelites weren't exempt from this. Children were not usually valued too much until they got to adulthood, and many never reached maturity at all. In a number of cultures, a child would be sacrificed for all manner of reasons – winning battles, getting a good harvest, making the rain stop – or start. But this was a very special child to Abraham – his only son from his beloved wife Sarah, born long after both were far too old to have children. A winter child is very special. And this one was even more special because God had told Abraham that through Isaac, Abraham would become the father of a great nation. Abraham loved Isaac with all his heart.

So being told by God to take Isaac and sacrifice him didn't make sense of His previous promises. Astonishingly, however, Abraham sets out to do what God has told him to do. What was he thinking? At all other times when he had obeyed God, it had turned out well. Abraham's faith that this time would also be OK is astounding to me. He passes the test with flying colours. I still struggle, however, with the thought that God put Abraham through this test. God of course knew that He didn't want Isaac to be killed, but Abraham didn't know that – he obeyed in blind faith. He shut his eyes to what he had been told to do and complied. Enormous faith. As it turns out, God doesn't want any human sacrifice at all and makes it clear in various other books of the Old Testament that He doesn't want it. Abraham's unshakeable faith here, though, gives us a vivid example of how we can all trust God no matter what He seems to be asking of us. It may seem too much, but we need to trust God that all will be well in the end.

There are also hints in this story of what is to come for God's own Son, Jesus Christ, who was sacrificed for us. He too, like Isaac, carried the wood that he was to die upon. It took Isaac and his father three days to get to the place of death, on a mountain.

This story also to me highlights what is of value to me, to all of us. Is the life of one of our family of more value to me than my God? What do I give to God that costs me dear – or what am I prepared to give to God that would cost me dear? Do I give enough? Do I trust God so much that whatever He asks of me is fine by me and I'll do my best to do it or to give it? Big questions for all of us. But if we really believe that everything comes to us from God, then we must realise that it is still actually God's possession and if He asks us to give it back, then we should obediently do just that. We need to trust that God will always provide for all our needs – and, like Abraham, we too will discover from experience that God always does so.

God didn't want to break Abraham's heart and had never intended to do so. What He really wanted was for Abraham not to sacrifice his son, but his self-will, to obey God and have absolute trust in Him. He wanted to be sure that Abraham would hold nothing back from Him.

I recently saw a film where a young schoolteacher over 100 years ago had a class of children in a mining town on the Canadian border. These children didn't have much, but they had more than a party of orphans passing through on their way to an orphanage. It was Christmas, and the orphans would have no presents. So the children of the town thought it would be a nice idea to each give one of the toys they didn't play with any more to one of the orphans. Their teacher, however, challenged them to think about what toy they would most love to receive from all the toys they had – and to give that special toy to the orphans. And, it being TV, they did!

Those children were learning to give – not reluctantly, but with love and generosity. How much more did God love us when He gave his only Son for us.

After that, it seems only right that we should give back to God as generously as He gives to us. And we must never forget that God wants our trust and our belief. These days many of us go our own way, driven by our own self-will and self-reliance, and only turn to God when things go badly. As Abraham went on to discover, obeying God without protest and trusting Him implicitly was the best thing he had ever done. We might try it ourselves...

Picture: Faith, hope and love – The Camargue Cross, Notre-Dame de la Garde, Marseille (Photo: Chaplaincy)

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – 4th Sunday after Trinity – 5th July 2020

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

When I saw our Gospel reading today, I was reminded of a conversation I had on the day of my ordination. A friend of mine came to the service and said 'what's that thing round your neck?' I explained that it was a stole, the colour of which changes to mark the different seasons of the church's year: white for celebration (Christmas, Easter), purple for seasons of penitence (Lent, Advent), red for the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and green for the time in between - what we call 'ordinary time'. The summer months in which we reflect on Jesus's ministry as recounted in the Gospels – his stories, his healings, his jokes, his challenges, his arguments with the authorities, his care of the people he met and the comfort he brought to many.

I explained to my friend that the stole of a deacon or priest symbolises the yoke of Christ. 'Doesn't that make you feel like a beast of burden?', she commented. Well, no. The point lies in our Gospel reading this morning. It is true that for quite a lot of our lives we feel as though we are dragging a heavy load along – of pressures, responsibilities, other people's or our own expectations (both sometimes unattainable), a sense of our unworthiness, financial worries, health concerns, uncertainty about the future. But Jesus offers us his yoke. What does it mean?

If we look at a yoke without knowing anything about farming, it's easy to assume that it is something constricting, uncomfortable to wear. But in fact a yoke does the opposite: it is designed to help animals (typically oxen) pull a plough or cart more easily. It is more comfortable for the two who are yoked together, because it enables them to walk in step and share the load evenly. The one who is yoked to another is better able to bear the load.

In Matthew's account, Jesus was probably paraphrasing a sentence from the Wisdom literature, the Sirach, which refers to spiritual teaching in terms of a yoke: 'Put your neck under her yoke, and let your souls receive instruction.' (Sirach 51:26) It's a clever image, for yokes were also used in training animals – a young ox was placed alongside a more experienced one in order to learn how to pull the weight of the plough. Jesus promises that by walking closer to him, our loads will be lessened and we will find rest in what would otherwise have been a burdensome and lonely journey.

There is a prayer of blessing which refers to 'the simplicity of the Gospel'. There *is* a simplicity in Jesus's message which we do well to hold onto. He often challenged the Pharisees for making religion too complicated, becoming anxiously legalistic and obsessed with detail. Their expertise in the Law had prevented them from recognising the coming of God's kingdom and God's Messiah. Instead, Jesus found an audience among the ones who found themselves unable to keep the Law in all its rigour and who were considered outcasts as a result: the tax collectors and sinners, who heard his message and felt the force of his inclusive welcome. It's a human tendency that in anxiety we fall back on rules and regulations. Anxiety is one of the things that holds us back from being the people we could more fully become.

Paul displays anxiety in our epistle today, in the passage from his Letter to the Romans. Like the young Martin Luther, he seems to feel almost overwhelmed by the impossibility of being 'good'. Luther, as a young monk, used to agonise over what might happen to him if he forgot one of his sins and hadn't confessed it, getting up at night to pray each time he remembered a new one and almost exhausting himself in the process. Then one day he had his so-called 'tower experience', a revelation that came to him in his room in the tower of the monastery where he was living, when he realised that it wasn't all about what *he* did, but about what God had done for him in Christ, and that what was important was to have faith in that. It is interesting that Luther's 'tower experience' took place while he was reading the Letter to the Romans.

Paul seems to have suffered similar agonies. In the extract from the Letter which we heard last Sunday, he used the metaphor of slavery to describe sin, and in our reflection in Marseille we noted that it was also a good metaphor for the pain of addiction. One wonders what the source of Paul's worry was in today's passage. Paul, who had grown up a strict Pharisee, must have been fearful of doing anything that would condemn him by reference to the strict moral code by which he tried to live. I suspect that in his youth he was secretly drawn to what he had been taught were the heretical views of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, so he set out to persecute them, to suppress them so completely that they would no longer be there to tempt him. But there was something deeper within Paul that responded to the unconditional welcome of Jesus, that offered him a sense of acceptance above and beyond his sense of sinfulness, a welcome which in the end he found irresistible, and he sank to his knees in a mixture of

gratitude and terror on the Damascus road. 'Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!'

The welcome Jesus offers is this: 'Take my yoke upon you and learn from me'. Follow me and I will show you a different way of living. Christ doesn't want people in straitjackets, anxiously ticking off how good they have been. Teeth-sucking scribes and Pharisees telling him that John was too austere and Jesus not austere enough. He wants them to love, and in loving to be fully alive, becoming the people God meant them to be. To be gentle with themselves and others. To be humble, acknowledging that they can't do this on their own but to walk in step with Christ, feeling the movement beside them of the one in whom their peace lies.

What matters is to love, and as a result to live in peace. Jesus's own summary of the Law – that we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbour as ourselves – is a good test if we are about to do, or say, something we are unsure about. Will this be for the glory of God? Will it be for the wellbeing of another person? Or is it about the satisfaction of my own desires, possibly at someone else's expense? Am I building up, or tearing down? Will it, when all is said and done, be loving? And what would Jesus have done?

By linking ourselves to Christ, walking in step with him, letting him guide our way, we will also enter more fully into the intimacy he had with the one he called Father. We will find the burdens we are carrying lighten, and it will strengthen us to bear other, perhaps heavier, burdens that we may one day have to carry before we reach the end of our human journey. Christ's presence with us will balance the weight of the pressures we live under, help us see them in better

perspective and, in doing so, find rest. And then, God willing, as our Collect today puts it, ‘we may so pass through things temporal that we lose not our hold on things eternal’.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – 5th Sunday after Trinity – 12th July 2020

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

The Parable of the Sower is one of Jesus's best-known teachings. Phrases from it have passed into the language – fragments like 'fell by the wayside' or 'on stony ground' are still in daily use without most people realising their source. As Jesus moved through Galilee, teaching by the lakeside and in the villages, he often used parables or analogies beginning 'the Kingdom of Heaven is like…', taking examples from the world around him, many of them drawn from agriculture. Today's is the first of three stories in a row in Matthew's Gospel that are about seeds. Next week we will hear the story of the wheat and the weeds, and the following week the one about the mustard seed.

Unlike most of Jesus's parables, the parable of the sower is followed by an interpretation given to his disciples. Most commentators feel that this interpretation belongs to early Christian tradition rather than to Jesus himself, who used parables precisely because they are open-ended, capable of carrying more than one meaning. He encouraged his hearers to reflect on them, discerning different layers of significance in them as they went about their daily lives.

As a way of teaching, parables invite us to deepen our thinking. They speak sideways, or parabolically, about their subject matter. They raise questions that

invite theological enquiry. Is God the sower, or is Jesus? Or the Spirit? Or perhaps anyone who speaks the word? How is a divine sower like or unlike a human sower? Are other functions (watering, tending, weeding and harvesting) also necessary in the analogy? What exactly is the seed?

Some have seen echoes in this parable of Isaiah's prophecy, which we heard in our Old Testament reading today, that God's word will not return to heaven empty but will accomplish his purpose and 'succeed in the thing for which [God] sent it'. (Isaiah 55.11). If we place that notion alongside the Prologue to John's Gospel, which writes of Jesus as the Word, we might see in the different types of soil different parts of the Gospel accounts of the story of Jesus.

By reflecting on Jesus's parables, we enter more deeply into the mystery of the divine. I used to attend a church whose mission statement included the words: 'We do not seek to provide easy answers, but to uphold one another in living with the questions.' Human understanding lacks the full capacity to know God, but we see glimpses of the divine in a world shot through with beauty and a sense of the transcendent. And Christian belief is that the closest insight into the nature of God that we will ever encounter in this world is in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus speaks in parables because theological language can only ever be an approximation, pointing towards the mystery that is God. They are like impressionist art, made up of colour and light rather than straight lines. Jesus plants parables in the imaginations of his hearers to do the work that Scripture and theological language are supposed to do: to take root, mature and bear

fruit. He does not promise results, for how they are received depends also on the recipient.

I will admit that, when I was younger, I used to find the explanation of the parable about the different types of soil rather depressing. Three out of the four types on which the seeds fall are incapable of bringing life, and when I heard the reasons listed, I reckoned I had already failed on the first or second soil types before we had even got to the third (on which I would definitely have failed). This meant that the fourth – where the growth finally happened – was simply beyond reach. Even the worst type of school exam didn't come with a 75% failure rate. How on earth was one to live the Christian life?

But one of the benefits of age is that it brings perspective, and I have gradually come to see that, as receivers of Jesus's message, we are in reality all four of the types of soil all of the time. The important thing is to be as fruitful as we can be, accepting that the amount we produce will not be the same all the time. The question the parable asks of us is: how are we to bear fruit, whatever the challenges we face?

Looking back at the weeks of lockdown, a lot of the time our imaginations have felt stony, the sense of being among thorns has predominated, and brief moments of joy have been followed by a slump in optimism as the troubled times got the better of us. (Perhaps that's just me, and you have had a different experience!) But there *have* been times, too, when it has felt like a fertile process, when we gained insights which we wouldn't have had in 'normal' times, when we felt a deepening of our faith and of our trust in God.

Let us pause for a moment from worrying about which soil type we are, and consider instead the seed. A seed contains forces of life and transformation. It encapsulates potential; its future is open. It unfolds relationally, for it depends not only upon its own potential but upon the potential within the soil, and how they interact. It is like a parable.

In the parable, seed is cast wherever growth might be found. I wonder if we do that enough in our attempts to live out the values of the Kingdom? Or are we too cautious, like the one who buried their talent in the ground, afraid of failure? If we keep on speaking the Gospel, keep on showing compassion, keep on crossing the road to help those whom the world has ignored or marginalised, we may lose our life - or we may find it. Elsewhere, in John's Gospel, Jesus teaches us that 'unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.' One thing the parable of the sower teaches us is that, in seeking to build up the Kingdom, we must be prepared to fail. It also reminds us there is reason for hope, as the harvest of the risen Christ knows no limits: thirty, sixty, a hundredfold.

That, in the end, is the message. We are capable of being the fourth type of soil, and we mustn't beat ourselves up on the days when we feel like the other three. We must pick ourselves up, trust in God's abundance, his forgiveness and his overwhelming love, and see what a new day brings. For he wants us to bear fruit. And on those days when we don't feel we are bearing any fruit, or if we are still depressed about our soil type, we could do worse than remember that other agricultural parable of Jesus: the one about the fig tree. When the owner of the fig tree came looking for fruit on it and found none, he said to the gardener: 'Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' But the gardener

replied: ‘Let it alone, until I dig round it and fertilise it. If it bears fruit, well and good.’ (Luke 13.7-9)

That’s a gardener of infinite patience. A gardener of infinite mercy. And we know who he is - for Mary Magdalene met him, on the morning of resurrection.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – 6th Sunday after Trinity – 19th July 2020

Online Service

The Revd John Smith

The Parable of Weeds among the Wheat

Our gospel this week is another agricultural parable – a situation that all who heard Jesus would be well familiar with. In this parable a sower sows good seed but whilst everybody was asleep an enemy came and scattered weeds. When the wheat grew the weeds grew also which surprised the sower's workmen as they knew that the sower had sown only good seed. They asked the sower if they should do a bit of weeding and get rid of the weeds but the man who had sowed the good seed said no, because in taking up the weeds you might also take up the good growth of the wheat.

Just as with the parable of the soils we read last week, Jesus gives the meaning of the parable to his disciples when they were alone together and the crowds had left. Jesus explained that the sower is himself, the son of man, the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the children of the evil one and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age and the reapers are angels. The weeds, the children of the evil one, will be burned up and the children of the kingdom will, and I like this description, "shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father".

The weeds referred to are thought to be darnel, a poisonous weed organically related to wheat and difficult to distinguish from wheat in the early stages of its growth. Given the occasional feuding of rival farmers, it is not surprising that Roman law would specifically forbid rival farmers sowing such poisonous plants in another's field or that a farmer, who found an abundance of such weeds, would suspect an enemy's hand. By the time the wheat and the weeds were grown to a point that they could be distinguished the roots would be so intertwined that in uprooting the darnel the workmen would also uproot the wheat. The only use for the darnel was to burn it as fuel.

We can take two perspectives on this parable – its relevance to the present day and the end times. For the present time we learn that the righteous will co-exist with the unrighteous and we had better get used to it. Jesus explains that God tolerates the wicked in the present for the sake of his elect, but will distinguish between the two at the end of time. The kingdom remains obscure in the present world and only the final day will bring God's true children into their glory and banish the wicked from among them. At the end of time unrepentant sinners, those who refuse to acknowledge God and even rebel against him, will be gathered out first and cast into the furnace of fire, and then the faithful, those who are counted as 'righteous', will shine forth in God's kingdom.

This parable raises two or three topics – evil, the day of judgement and hell – that the church seems surprisingly uncomfortable talking about, at least judged by our lectionary readings and the liberal universalist sermons we hear. We don't have time today to address all three topics so we will look only at evil because my brother Christopher Morgan has been haranguing us to talk about evil for several weeks now.

I have to say my understanding of evil has been greatly influenced by the writings of Tom Wright, research professor at St. Andrew's University, Scotland, but the best exposition on evil I have heard is by Robert Charles Sproul, a theologian and ordained Presbyterian minister who died in 2017. His talk on evil is available on youtube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzrC7KuMj6o) and I urge you to take an hour to listen to what he has to say. Unfortunately, I cannot do his talk justice but I will attempt to hit the highlights.

In this parable, the weeds are called the children of the evil one and their sower is called Satan or the evil one himself, the children's father. So, what is evil and where did evil come from? These are some of the most difficult questions that we as Christians wrestle with. Paul calls evil the mystery of iniquity and evil remains a mystery but because of theologians that have lived over the ages we can take a reasonable shot at defining what evil is. It is altogether more difficult to say where evil came from and how it entered a world that was created by and is governed by a sovereign God who is holy, loving and good.

Reverend Sproul postulates that evil has no independent being. It has no substance nor is it a force like gravity or magnetism but evil is the quality of acts done by humans that can be defined as good or evil. He draws on the work of Thomas Aquinas and Saint Augustine in using two approaches of philosophical argument – negation and privation. Negation seeks to define evil by what it is

not. Negation cites the opposite qualities of that which is the opposite of evil i.e. good. For example: if good is godliness, holiness, righteousness and justice; evil is ungodliness, unholiness, unrighteousness and injustice. Privation defines evil in terms of a lack or deficiency. So, sin/evil can be defined as being a "transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto" (Westminster Confession of Faith 1647). In this definition, evil is simply a lack of living to the standards of God's law. Evil could be compared to a parasite which depends on its host (we humans) for its life and sustenance but when the host dies the parasite dies too. Whilst evil has no independent being, when humans do evil acts, its effects are real and can be devastating.

So much for the attempts of philosophers and theologians to define evil. We can now turn to where evil comes from which is altogether a thornier problem and despite the best efforts of all those philosophers and theologians we have to say "we do not know". I personally take refuge in verse six from today's psalm: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it". The undeniable existence of evil in the world calls the very existence of God into question. If God has all the attributes that we ascribe to him including being omniscient (all knowing), omnipotent (all powerful) and a God of love, how can He permit the evil that we see in the world today to continue and wreak the havoc it does? Karl Barth called this the 'impossible possibility' – an insoluble conundrum. Various theories for the origin of evil have been proposed. You are probably most familiar with the free will argument which says God gave us the ability to choose between different courses of action unimpeded - which is true, but it does not explain the source of evil. Why do we have the inclination to disobey God even though we know full well that He requires our obedience?

Whilst admitting that he does not know the origin of evil, Reverend Sproul comes up with a statement that was very surprising to me. Quoting Saint Augustine, he says that in a way God ordained that evil would come into the world. If God did not ordain it then it would not be here for evil does not have the power to overcome God's sovereign and providential governance of this world. Romans 28 verse 8 says "all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." Unless God has sovereign power over evil, He could not keep this promise. This is not to say that evil things are good but God can and does use our evil acts to work for good.

The story of Joseph is a good illustration of this. Joseph's brothers wished him evil. They first wanted to kill him but then they sold him as a slave. Their intentions were decidedly evil. However, God used their evil acts to bring about

the good that Joseph's brothers and father would eventually benefit from when famine struck the land and Joseph had by that time been promoted to be second only to Pharaoh. And this was after somebody else – Potiphar's wife – had also done evil to Joseph.

An even more powerful illustration is what happened at Calvary. Without doubt, Caiaphas, the high priest, the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin pursued an evil path, the soldiers and eventually all the people did evil by crucifying an innocent man. Yet God trumped this evil using Christ's death to bring the ultimate good – salvation to the world. "It was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer" (Isaiah 53 v 10). If there is one thing we have to admit, it is that we do not know how the atrocities of this world can result in good and we will not know that until all is revealed when we are united with God in His kingdom.

You may be disappointed that I have not been able to answer the question about the source of evil but as Reverend Sproul concludes, although we do not know the origin of evil, we do know its future. We know that evil has been overcome and there will be no evil nor sin of any kind when God's kingdom is complete on earth.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection

7th Sunday after Trinity – 26th July 2020

Canon David Pickering

Words that occur in the verse following our gospel passage this morning: Matthew 13.53 *"When Jesus had finished these parables, he left that place.*

Over the past three weeks our gospel readings from Matthew 13 have taken us through the seven parables of this chapter of the first gospel. Two weeks ago we heard about the sower; last Sunday, continuing the agricultural theme, the parable of the weeds. Today we had the rich variety of the final five parables; the mustard seed, the leaven, the treasure, the pearl and the net.

In all of these there is a reference to the kingdom of heaven, Matthew's term for the kingdom of God. Each one tells us something important about the kingdom of Heaven-God; not necessarily in allegorical terms, but in more general terms arising out of our faith relationship with God, or wherever we may find ourselves on our journey.

Sadly, two weeks ago, our gospel reading omitted the important verse, *"To you it has been given to know the secrets (or mysteries) of the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 13.11) Each time we hear, read or reflect on a parable there will often be a new message. As Jamie reminded us a couple of weeks ago, the word parable is related to the Greek 'parabola'. These words of Jesus are subtle and open to a rich variety of interpretations. They don't come at us directly and the message we receive will depend on where we are in our faith life at the time.

Over the past couple of weeks the gospel reading has presented a single parable for our reflection and thoughts. Today we are presented with no less than five. But, fear not! Instead of reflecting on individual parables, I'd like us to focus on their collective nature and variety - a rich variety we see in other parts of today's lectionary.

In our New Testament passage from the end of Romans 8, St Paul gives us a variety of assurances of our security in the love of God. He writes, '*For I am*

convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.' In pastoral ministry, I've always found this a helpful text to discuss with people going through difficult times. It assures us of the sincerity and honesty of God's love, a love that it is there for us in the whole variety of situations that life, and even death, can throw at us.

I'm sure it's a text that we've needed over the past few months, as we've tried to see our way through the continuing pandemic. For most of us, our daily lives have been turned upside down, affecting relationships, our outlook on life, even how we face up to the new challenges of the present time. And again most of us may be finding that we've never needed more the assurance of God's love.

Our psalmist this morning also seems certain of the love God, as he reflects on and delights in living his life according to the will of God. Because of its length it's easy to shy away from Psalm 119. Yet it is uniquely rich. The 176 verses are divided up into 22 eight-verse stanzas. Cleverly, for literary effect, in each group of eight, the verse begins with the same Hebrew letter, and the groups themselves form the order of the alphabet. Today's lectionary provides us with eight verses from the seventeenth stanza. My Old Testament lecturer summed it up as: *"The psalmist hymns the Law as a storehouse of wisdom and light; he prays for continued opportunity to share these good things."*

This reflects the general tenor and theme of the whole psalm: throughout the 176 verses there is a repetition of a rich variety of eight words that express the psalmist's understanding of the Divine Will: *"word," "law," "testimonies," "precepts," "statutes," "commandments," "ordinances," " way."* One or other of these words occurs in every verse of the psalm - one long pouring out of the heart that loves the divine will of God.

In the sixth century, when apportioning how the psalms should be ordered in the monastic hours of prayer, St Benedict set Psalm 119 for the lesser hours of Prime, Terce, Sext and None for Sunday and Monday. The monks were to begin their week praising and delighting in the will of God in this rich and varied psalmody. As a theological student at Kelham, under the auspices of the Anglican Order of the Society of the Sacred Mission, we as students joined the members of the community for the midday office of Sext, reciting verses 81 to 128 of Psalm 119 each day, doubling up the stanzas to make three psalms.

Psalm 119, with the rest of the Psalter, have been at the core of daily worship down the ages and have provided a rich and varied expression of our relationship with God. The traditional monastic orders recite the entirety of the Psalter each week. From Reformation times, the Book of Common Prayer set out a pattern for their complete recital at Morning and Evening Prayer over thirty days. Liturgical developments of the past fifty years have found a place for psalms in the lectionary for the Eucharist, and this is good, for within them we encounter the whole range of our human existence in relation to God.

St. Paul writes of the varied depths of the love of God. The parables show us the many ways in which we are to live out our lives in accord with the Kingdom of Heaven-God.

It was the nineteenth century poet, William Cowper, who coined the phrase *variety is the spice of life* in his poem The Task. He actually wrote*, Variety is the very spice of life, that gives it all its flavour.* For us in our Christian life, we find its full flavour when we draw on the deep variety of experience that God presents to us each and every day.

In her *A Reading of the Parables of Jesus*, Ruth Etchells quotes John Bunyan. Responding to criticism of his use of allegory in The Pilgrim's Progress, he wrote:

..... Were not God's laws,
His gospel laws, in olden times held forth
By shadows, types and metaphors? .....
God speaketh to him; and happy is he
That finds the light and grace that in them be.

Ruth Etchells comments: '*through the Holy Spirit, God is himself active in the metaphor'.* On our journey with Christ, his wonderful gift of these parables allows us to see ever-increasing depths of meaning as the Holy Spirit opens up his words within us. What a treasure house we have within the parables and the psalms! We may well find ourselves living through strange times - but these are circumstances that have given many of us more opportunity for reflection. Let us pray for eagerness to reflect and for understanding, for a mind ready to be moved by the Holy Spirit, and for a heart to love the richness and diversity of God's glorious creation.

To him be glory and praise, now and for ever. Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 7th Sunday after Trinity – 26th July 2020

Service at All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

Our Gospel today brings us to the end of the great series of parables in Matthew's account, leaving us with a kaleidoscope of images to meditate on. As with a kaleidoscope, we should not seek to pin them down with rigid explanations but instead to enjoy them, allowing them to enlighten us, becoming open to new insights and patterns each time we come back to them.

'The kingdom of heaven is like…' – a mixture of the ordinary and the extraordinary. A seed planted in the ground, yeast placed in dough - small, hidden things that few people know about but which grow and become visible and striking. Then buried treasure or a priceless pearl - special and valuable things you come across by accident or spend your whole life searching for.

As we saw in earlier weeks while looking at Jesus's parables, they defy any single meaning. They come at us sideways, subtly, with images that become puzzling if we apply our minds to them too literally. For example, the mustard seed may be the smallest of seeds and grow exceptionally large, but why would anyone plant it? In Jesus's time it was a weed that was apt to grow out of control, even though it had medicinal properties. Perhaps the reference was an ironic dig at

the religious authorities – they looked on Jesus as a weed that had got into their field and needed to be pulled up. Yet nothing, not even his death, could stop the impact of his teaching and ministry from growing, and it offered shelter to everyone who sought it.

Similarly with the yeast. It has been noted that the amount of flour the woman was preparing was enormous - enough to provide bread for a hundred people. Yet leaven was associated with decay and therefore used as an image of moral corruption. Jesus himself later warns his disciples to 'beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees' (Matthew 16.11), which Matthew goes on to explain meant not 'the yeast of bread, but of [their] teaching'. The teaching of Jesus was regarded by the religious authorities as corrupting, yet even a small amount of it was feeding vast numbers. The work of transformation in the hearts of those who heard the teaching, like the work of transformation in the dough and the planted seed, were of God.

Small beginnings of good things can yield a lot of fruit. Many charities have grown from the smallest of seeds. Changes in fundamental human rights have come about through the actions of individuals – Rosa Parks's refusal to change seats on a bus helped start the US civil rights movement. Some see the key to the parable of the mustard seed in its reference to a tree in which birds make their nests. In the Old Testament trees with nesting birds were sometimes used to refer to empires (Judges 9.7-15, Ezekiel 17.1-10, Daniel 4.10-12). Was Matthew offering encouragement that, although his original hearers were living under the oppression of the Roman Empire, the kingdom of God would ultimately overcome it?

The small seeds of beginning are present in our lives too. Small acts of kindness and generosity can bear fruit that we may never see. The breaking-in of the kingdom of heaven in the here and now, offering transformation and hope. But growth is mysterious, and sometimes we don't know what will promote it and what will not.

The parables about treasure buried in a field and the pearl of great price are, on one level, to do with the response required of us in order to receive the gift offered to us in Christ. Some, like Matthew's Magi, go looking for it. Others, like the first disciples, encounter it unexpectedly. The emphasis is on the value of what is found, if we are open to the invitation.

The kingdom requires a change of heart in us. Earlier in Matthew's account Jesus says 'where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.' It asks of us what we truly value, and how it will affect the way we live our lives now. And it also offers us joy – not dutiful seriousness but the word that rings out through Matthew's Gospel: the 'joy' of the Magi returning from Bethlehem; the 'joy' of the women returning from the empty tomb on Easter morning. It's a recurring theme, part of the freeing from other entanglements that characterises the response to Christ's call. Nets left on the beach, Matthew's tax booth left unattended. Being prepared to leave behind all we have – mentally, spiritually, even physically - in order to possess what is priceless. R S Thomas puts it like this in his poem The Bright Field:

> I have seen the sun break through
> to illuminate a small field
> for a while, and gone my way

and forgotten it. But that was the
pearl of great price, the one field that had
treasure in it. I realise now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it.

Yet might there be another possible reading of these two parables? What if we turn them upside down? Could it be that the merchant seeking the pearl is God, and the pearl is us? God in Christ sells everything that God has to earn the pearl that is of great price to him. Could this be a parable that in two verses gives us the whole Gospel? The same might be said of the treasure - that it's a story of how God relates to us, searching for us and, in Christ, giving up everything for us. The conviction which Paul expressed in his Letter to the Romans - in words that often bring comfort to us in times of trouble – that 'neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord'.

These are the many-layered glimpses of the kingdom of heaven which Jesus left with his followers, and on which they meditated in the years that followed his ministry until they were written down. How do we feel, now that we have come to the end of our reading of them? Parables speak to us at a spiritual level. They are not sets of facts, or moral tales. It's all right to be puzzled by them, to admit we are not certain what they mean. Truth often comes to us in mystery. And we have to live with uncertainty - something these last months have reminded us in ways we would never have guessed a year ago. But the parables offer us that tantalising invitation to live in harmony with God's ways. What matters is

to keep our minds open to God's invitation, God's call on our lives, and for us each to respond as only we can do. The kingdom of heaven cannot be analysed or pinned down. It lies the interface between the human and the divine, and it is holy ground.

Perhaps the message of these parables may be summed up in the words of one commentator: 'God is here, and glimpses of heaven surround us, if only we will open our eyes and our hearts to receive the gift.'[1]

Amen.

[1] John D Rohrs, *Feasting on Matthew*, p. 403.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – 8th Sunday after Trinity – 2nd August 2020

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

The last time we saw Jacob he was on the run, going into exile after deceiving his father and his brother Esau. It was then that he encountered God in his dream of the ladder. Now he is back, and the day of reckoning has arrived, for the following day he is due to meet Esau and he doesn't yet know if he will be forgiven or killed. Just before our Old Testament passage Jacob says a prayer of humility: 'I am not worthy of all the steadfast love and faithfulness you have shown to your servant' (recognising what God has done for him in exile); 'deliver me, please, from the hand of my brother' (recognising his dependence on God); 'yet you have said, "I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea" (expressing his ultimate trust in God).

It is then that Jacob encounters the man with whom he wrestles all night and, in the morning, finds he is both wounded and blessed. We are not told whether his opponent had any wounds. But when Jacob meets his brother, 'Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him'. … Jacob said: 'Truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God – since you have received me with such favour.' Does that remind us of anything? To me, it speaks of the father of the prodigal, in the parable where Jesus offers us a glimpse of the reconciliation which God longs for each one of us.

What Jacob discovers is that, in our encounters with God, we are accepted for who we are, *and* we are changed. We are humbled but we are healed. As one commentator puts it: 'The blessing that Jacob receives is the blessing of integrity. Mysterious though it is, it is our wounds that make us whole.'[1]

Jacob/Israel is called by God to be a blessing to all the nations. The notion of the wounded healer dates back to antiquity. In Greek mythology Chiron, the centaur from whose name we get *chirurgie* in French and surgery in English, was wounded by an arrow and suffered pain for the rest of his days, but became a legendary healer. Plato maintained that the most skilful physicians are those who have suffered illness. And there is a statistic that some three quarters of people who enter the therapeutic professions identify as having had an experience of suffering which made them want to relieve suffering in others. It seems to be a pattern in the human condition. Broken, but blessed, and blessing in turn.

Turning to our Gospel reading, having spent some time reflecting on the parables of Jesus, for the next two Sundays the Lectionary invites us to reflect on two of the miracles. How are we to read the miracle stories? We saw with the parables the importance of not seeking to reduce them to single, restrictive meanings but to allow their indirectness to work in us, opening us up to the spiritual truths they contain, revealing new insights along our journey of faith. So it is with the miracles. One thing we mustn't do is spend our time worrying about 'what really happened' and whether we can believe in them literally. It's worth remembering that the Gospels were written some decades after Jesus's ministry, when the eye witnesses were beginning to die out and the need was

[1] Angela Tilby, *Reflections*, p 194.

understood to record the story of Jesus's life, death and resurrection and its significance for all humanity.

Like the parables, the miracles have different layers of meaning. In order to read them well, we must appreciate that whatever history lies behind them, the stories in their present form are what has been called 'a literary creation with a theological purpose'.[2] At least three of the Gospels were written by Jewish authors, who would have been familiar with the literary technique of *Haggadah* (which means 'narrative'). This was a creative type of theological writing that started with a text from Scripture and meditated on it freely, showing how a prophecy was being fulfilled, using symbolism and allegory to create a new story that applied to the present the truths, hopes, patterns and meanings of the scriptural past.

The Gospel writers want to tell us of Jesus's significance. In the feeding of the five thousand (the only miracle which appears in all four Gospels – an indicator that it was considered foundational to the faith), one theological purpose of the story is to show that Jesus was a new Moses. Like Moses, Jesus crosses water to get to 'a deserted place', sits the people down in companies and feeds them with miraculous bread from heaven in such abundance that baskets are left over. Jesus's actions also point to Elisha, in chapter 4 of the Second Book of Kings when Elisha takes an army of men into the desert and feeds them miraculously with a few loaves. If nothing else, this story is telling us that in recalling what Moses did Jesus is fulfilling the Law, and in recalling what Elisha did Jesus is fulfilling the Prophets. As at the Transfiguration, which we will celebrate on Thursday, when his closest followers see a vision of Moses and

[2] Jeffrey John, *The Meaning in the Miracles*, p 5.

Elijah with Jesus, this miracle is teaching us that Jesus is the one whom the Law and the Prophets foretold: the long-expected Messiah.

That's one layer of meaning, but there are more. There is a christological layer (we learn more about the nature and identity of Jesus), an eschatological layer (the story speaks of the 'end' time, presenting Jesus as the ultimate fulfilment for humanity and offering a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, the traditional image of paradise), there is a symbolic layer (bread was a common symbol for the word of God, and there is symbolism in the numbers – twelve baskets for the twelve tribes), and there is a sacramental layer: no early Christian hearing the story could have failed to spot the references to the eucharistic worship which was becoming the hallmark of their community. In the miracle Jesus takes bread, blesses it and breaks it - just like at the Last Supper; just like they were learning to do each week.

All these dimensions of meaning were important to the Gospel writers, and they are important to us as we travel our journey of faith. The stories of the miracles of feeding and healing help to open us up to the abundant, healing power of God. Overcoming our self-protecting fears, our crippling sense of self-enclosure, learning what it means to be open to the world, each other and to God, offering us fullness of life. Broken, blessed, and blessing in our turn. That's a good message to be reminded of in a time of pandemic.

We wondered earlier about the one who wrestled with Jacob, what his wounds might have been as a result of his encounter with awkward, rebellious, wounded humanity. The answer lies in the wounds of Christ. Our wounded healer. They are to be found on the Cross, that central symbol of our faith on which Christ

was stretched out once and for all time. In the suffering of this world at a time of pandemic. In refugee camps and drought starved landscapes across human history. As our anthem today puts it:

> 'Therefore he who shows us God
> Helpless hangs upon the tree;
> And the nails and crown of thorns
> Tell of what God's love must be.
>
> Here is God, no monarch he,
> Throned in easy state to reign;
> Here is God, whose arms of love,
> Aching, spent, the world sustain.'

Wounded healers. We are called to be both. For we are all wounded, yet we are all capable of bringing healing to others as we walk in Christ's footsteps here on earth. Broken, blessed, and (please God) blessing in our turn. In the name of the one who lived and died and rose again for us.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 9th Sunday after Trinity – 9th August 2020

Reflection

Jane Quarmby, Reader

Jealousy is not an attractive emotion. The green-eyed monster is a destructive force if not controlled, leading to marriage and family breakdowns. Envy is one of the things forbidden in the ten commandments. It's not just people – we see it with our puppy who pushes the older, gentle dogs away if they are being stroked. She gets told off but takes not a blind bit of notice.

It can take a more sinister turn though than our jealous puppy. For Joseph, the much-loved youngest son of Jacob and his favourite wife Rachel, it nearly led to his murder by his half-brothers. It makes me wonder about this business of parents having favourites - it causes problems in the closest of families. It's often the youngest who is the favourite, the one born to older parents, who have been strict with the older children but now over-indulge the youngest. Not unnaturally, the older children very often resent this. It can split families – and it doesn't help matters when the patriarch makes it plain by the gift of the beautiful robe that he isn't going to leave his inheritance fairly split between his children.

I can't help wondering what Jacob was thinking of, letting this young lad go and work for his half-brothers who seem to be a wild bunch, not averse to murder. Joseph dutifully trotted off to do as his father wanted but it does seem that Jacob should have had more sense. Our reading this morning misses out the dreams that Joseph had of reigning over his brothers, but I doubt very much if these endeared him to them. And so they plot to kill him. It isn't a pretty story, emphasizing how jealousy leads to hatred and to men being consumed by evil. Only Reuben, the eldest, redeems himself by saving the boy's life, planning secretly to come back and

rescue him. But the whole thing gets out of hand and Joseph ends up being sold as a slave.

Throughout this we see the contrast between Joseph, the dutiful son, the honest and faithful one, and his brothers, eaten up with anger and envy, leading them to commit grave crimes. We can see why they weren't chosen to be leaders by God. God doesn't choose leaders based on who can talk a good talk, or lead men into battle, or any of the things that men over the centuries have valued. God chooses people for his own reasons to be leaders of his people, his church. And very often God does not explain.

That's one of the most annoying things, I find - that we must trust in God and follow him without being told what the plan is beforehand. Just a hint would help sometimes!

But time and again we are reminded that God does have a plan, and it works. Joseph is sold into slavery in Egypt, and it all works out well in the end as he rises to power in this foreign country and saves his own people (and his brothers) when famine strikes. He remains faithful to God in all that happens to him, through the ups and downs. He is put in charge of all of Pharaoh's administration, then is falsely imprisoned but becomes the warden's favourite and is put in charge of the prison. His skill at interpreting dreams gets him out of prison and Pharaoh again puts him in charge of all Egypt. He is a wise administrator and puts by food to get the country through a long famine. When famine strikes, not only the Egyptians have cause to thank him, but people from all around Egypt come to buy grain from him. Including Joseph's elder brothers. They don't recognize Joseph, but he recognizes them. And far from being angry with them, he is happy to see them and helps them, eventually bringing them, their families, and his father to Egypt, where they settled and were prosperous. Joseph ends the long trail of brotherly envy and violence which began with Cain and Abel, and the brothers are reconciled. Joseph tells them right at the end of the book of Genesis "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so that I could save the lives of many people." Such faith! Such trust in God even in difficult times.

Faith is hard to grasp sometimes but we have another graphic picture of what faith can do in Matthew's account of Jesus walking on the water, which is amazing enough to convert anyone, but for me the sharpest picture is of Peter. He's

impulsive, enthusiastic, and so very human. I'm not sure what I'd have done seeing my friend walking over the waves to me, but I doubt if I'd have hopped over the side and tried walking towards him. But that's what Peter did – and his faith is overwhelmed when he sees the waves and the wind and so he starts to sink. I wonder if there was a streak of envy in Peter – if his friend could walk on water, why couldn't he? It's hard to have a friend who is better at everything than you, who can do marvelous things that you can't. He gets a mild rebuke, but Jesus reaches out and grabs him. It's so easy, when we too are overwhelmed by life's strong winds and waves, to lose faith in Jesus. We focus on the difficulties and try to solve them our way. Much easier to have a friend who can reach out and grab us, to stop us sinking. But when someone reaches out their hand to save us, we do need to accept it.

There's an old joke about a man who fell off a cliff, and on his way down, prayed hard to God to save him. He managed to grab hold of a rock and cling on for dear life, all the while praying to God to save him. Someone sees him fall, and throws him a rope, but the man refuses. His faith is strong, he will wait for God. The coastguard arrives in a boat underneath him, ready to fish him out of the sea if he would just let go and jump. He refuses, his faith is strong, he's waiting for God to rescue him. Finally, a helicopter arrives and winches down a man to rescue him. But again he refuses, still hanging on and waiting for God to rescue him. Eventually his strength gives out and he falls to his death. When he arrives in heaven, he's angry with God for not saving him. And God replies: My son, I sent a man with a rope, I sent the coastguard, and I sent the helicopter rescue. You refused them all. You didn't see my hand in anything I did for you.

God loves us all, his only son gave his life for us. Instead of looking around and seeing what others have, or can do, let's look at what God has done for us as individuals. We may not understand his plans, life may seem unfair, but we still need to trust that God is taking care of us and has it all worked out for us.

I began with Petra, our puppy. She gets very excited every time I get the car keys out because that means we are going out somewhere. Sometimes it ends in a long walk which she loves. Sometimes we only go to the bins. But either way, she's content just to be part of the trip. There's a lesson there for me.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – 10th Sunday after Trinity – 16th August 2020

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

People have puzzled over how to approach this Gospel reading, let alone how to preach it. To twenty-first century ears, hearing Jesus apparently refer to another ethnoreligious group as 'dogs' is, to say the least, uncomfortable. At worst, it seems to feed the objections of those who resist any sort of faith on the grounds that religious groups are basically at enmity with each other (and more often than not amongst themselves), that terrible things are said and done in the name of religion, and why should anyone want to have anything to do with it.

Yet, as with all biblical texts, context is important. So let us look for a moment at the context of this passage. At the beginning of this chapter of Matthew's Gospel, Pharisees and scribes come from Jerusalem to question Jesus. They ask why his disciples break the tradition of the elders by not washing their hands before they eat. Jesus doesn't answer their question but goes onto the attack, calling the Pharisees hypocrites for giving the appearance of following God's law but failing to honour its spirit, causing hurt in the process. After this run-in, Jesus explains to his disciples in more detail what makes a person clean or unclean. He says that the way in which our bodies process food has no moral implications, but the way we speak and act does. Our words and deeds, which can hurt other people, come from the heart, which is capable of evil intentions as well as good.

Jesus then moves to the district of Tyre and Sidon, and it is there that the Canaanite woman comes and asks him to heal her daughter. It is a pivotal encounter. Jesus has just been criticised by the religious authorities for not being 'pure' enough in his approach to the faith. Moreover, his own understanding of his vocation as Messiah is that he has been sent to 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel'. (He said this to his closest followers when sending them out on their first journey to spread the good news: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles … but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' - Matthew 10.5-60.) And yet the woman in front of him appeals to his compassion, as many others have done.

Throughout the healing miracles we see Jesus bringing in outsiders, including the excluded – many of the categories of those who were labelled unclean by the purity laws of his time: Samaritans, Gentiles, tax collectors, sex workers, people with diseases, people with disabilities, people who were bleeding, people who had died. And here once again is a suffering individual who was ritually unclean – a Canaanite woman. Yet she pleads with him: 'Lord, help me.' Jesus knows his critics would reject her and consider him unclean even for speaking to her. Perhaps it is their criticisms that are running through his head when he says 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs'. Her witty reply that even the dogs eat what the children don't want releases the tension, and Jesus is amused and gratified that such faith has been found in an outsider, when it has been so obviously lacking in the insiders he was arguing with earlier. He heals her daughter.

Jesus's words and actions bring wholeness and healing, even as he makes himself ritually unclean in the process. Time and again, in the presence of Christ we see God's acceptance of those on the outside. Jesus has been challenging the Pharisees for narrowing the scope of God's acceptance for members of their own community. Now this foreigner challenges him in a similar way. The scene marks an important step along the road to the realisation – which by the time the evangelists were writing had become a lived reality – that the Gospel which Jesus was proclaiming was not only for the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel' but also for the whole world.

From this point of view, the positioning of the story in the Gospels may be significant. In both Matthew and Mark's accounts it comes between the two feeding miracles – soon after the feeding of the five thousand and shortly before the feeding of the four thousand. Some have seen in those numbers a symbolism suggesting that the 'bread' – the word of God, the message of salvation – was being extended first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles, as the Scriptures had predicted that it would. Five was a 'Jewish' number, after the five books of the Torah, the Law. Four and seven were associated with the Gentiles - the four corners of the earth, or the four 'beasts' in Daniel (which stood for the four Gentile empires that had overrun Israel), and seven for the traditional number of seventy Gentile nations. The healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter is placed between the two.

What does this passage say to us today? For one thing it reminds us that it is what goes on in our hearts that matters, and that this will affect our relationships and how we live out our faith. It also reminds us that wherever we encounter people being demeaned or despised we will find Christ there, loving

and healing and calling for justice. Lastly, it reminds us that it is not just the Pharisees and scribes who set up barriers, narrowing the scope of God's welcome and acceptance within a faith community. Christians are just as liable to do so if they are not careful. Anxiety over maintaining the 'purity' of a tradition can lead religious leaders of every time and place to exclude individuals or categories.

I well recall hearing Archbishop Desmond Tutu preach when he visited England some time after Nelson Mandela had become President of South Africa. It was a time of celebration, the long battle against discrimination won, and there was a sense of expectation and hope in the air. Tutu arrived to find the Church of England having one of its regular meltdowns about the place of women in leadership in the church, and the place of the LGBT community in the church at all. So he went on the attack, speaking passionately from the pulpit: 'Christ did not say "I come to draw *some* people to myself", but all, All, ALL.' It was a memorable sermon. Religious leaders in every time and place need to ask themselves: who are we excluding, and why? For God's love knows no boundaries, and in the end breaks down all barriers.

Isaiah, in our Old Testament reading, urged his hearers to understand this. The good news of salvation was not just for Israel but for all the nations. Those who had been outcasts were to be welcomed in. And the one who would come to fulfil the prophecy did end up breaking down the barriers that the religious leaders of his time had put across the temple entrance. For he came to the temple, as he comes now to our churches, with a scourge in his hand and these words on his lips: 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all'.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – 11th Sunday after Trinity – 23rd August 2020

The Revd John Smith

The Son of God

You have got to love Peter, don't you? I have always been a Peter-man rather than a Paul-man. I struggle to understand Paul - not so much his teachings, though I struggle a lot with those, but more who Paul was as a person. I feel that I know Peter and perhaps it is because he wears his heart on his sleeve. I am not impetuous or impulsive like Peter but I understand why he reacted the way he did. His instant response when Jesus called him with his brother to follow Him was "anybody want to buy a boat" and Peter was off. A couple of weeks ago it was Peter who leapt over the side of the boat and walked on water (the real miracle in that story). Last week it was Peter who asked for the parable to be explained. Next week it will be Peter trying to persuade Christ not to die. And shortly after that episode, it is Peter who offers to make booths for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus at the transfiguration. Later it was Peter who resisted Jesus washing his feet but was persuaded and said my favourite verse from Peter: "not just my feet but my head and my hands as well". It is the verse I say every time I come to receive communion. It was Peter who sliced off the ear of the servant in the Garden of Gethsemane and Peter who denied ever knowing Christ after Jesus was arrested. After the resurrection of Jesus, it was Peter who leapt over the side of the boat again when he recognised Jesus on the beach but this time the boat was near the beach and the water was shallower. Shortly after this incident the same Peter was reconciled with Jesus and on who Jesus chose to build his church, which Peter proceeded to do after the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Quite a lad!

In our gospel passage today, we have Jesus asking his disciples who do people say that He is. They answer with the names of people who have died, John the Baptist, Elijah or other prophets. Then Jesus gets more personal and asks 'but who do you say that I am?' And it is Peter, who else, who says "You are the

Messiah, the Son of the living God". And Jesus says well done Peter for getting the right answer but this can only have been revealed to you by God Himself.

So, who is Jesus and what do these titles mean? The Messiah means the anointed one, a title that would be redolent with meaning for the Jewish people as they lived in the belief, foretold by the pre-exilic prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, that God would create a regent (i.e. the Messiah) from the House of David to lead the Jewish people and the world and usher in an age of justice and peace when the God of Israel would be recognised as the only true God. After the post-exilic return to Jerusalem, these messianic ideas became more focused on the end-times when the dead would be resurrected and the Kingdom of Heaven would be established on earth. The messianic expectations also became increasingly focused on the figure of an individual saviour. The Messiah no longer symbolized the coming of the new age, but he was somehow supposed to bring it about. The Lord's anointed thus became the "saviour and redeemer". Interestingly, Jesus did not refer to Himself as the Messiah very often and that may be because at the time of Jesus the name Messiah had gained nationalistic and political overtones.

I also think that the Messiah the Jews were expecting was very different from the one that they got. Many Jews longed for a return to the glorious days of King David, when Israel was the greatest power in the Near East. They were at the time under Roman domination, had to pay oppressive taxes, and live within the pagan empire so it wasn't unreasonable for them to expect and hope for a conquering messiah particularly given what they read every day in the prophets and psalms. A rabbi from Galilee was not what they had in mind.

But it is what Peter added after he called Jesus the Messiah that is more meaningful for me. Peter called Jesus the son of the living God. The Messiah was expected to be a son of David and could have been called a son of man (the title Jesus typically used to describe Himself). But the son of God? That was quite a claim and it is an echo from a couple of weeks back to when Jesus walked on the sea and after Jesus climbed into the boat the disciples said 'truly you are the Son of God'.

This bring us to what for me is the tricky part of understanding the identity of Jesus, for, if we assume "like father like son", a common proverb meaning a son's character or behaviour can be expected to resemble that of his father, it brings our conception of God into play. Then we look for characteristics of God to be present in Jesus. I feel uncomfortable even raising the question as it is not as if

we are talking about this behind God's back. I am sure God is hearing, watching, waiting and probably smiling for we are attempting the impossible here.

I have talked about my love of the Trinity before. I feel I know the other two persons of the Trinity better than I know God. I know Jesus because He came to earth and became 100% human at the same time as being 100% divine. I know His being because of what He said and did whilst here on earth. I know the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit lives within me and is manifest and bearing fruit in my life on a daily basis. I need Jesus for my eternal life. I need the Holy Spirit for my daily life.

It is not that I need a physical image of God. I don't need that. I don't find the typical, bearded, white faced portrait of Jesus particularly helpful either. And I do know that the Old Testament is full of what God did and what God said but somehow Jesus feels more present, more immanent. It may be that part of my struggle is that the picture of God in the Old Testament is complex and multifaceted. God does acts of great mercy and kindness although He is not above brutal acts of punishment and wrath. He can change His mind or direction. Depending on your point of view, God could be seen as petty or unjust, vindictive or bloodthirsty, misogynistic or genocidal, judgemental and condemning. But what does not change is that God is unwaveringly and unreasonably forgiving even when His people commit the most egregious of sins. Like father, like son?

Given our difficulty in getting an accurate picture of God and deriving the identity of Jesus from that, it may be more helpful to think about the earthly Jesus, what He said and did, and especially His death on the cross and resurrection and allowing that to bring meaning to our understanding of both God and Jesus. Like son, like father.

The Jesus we see may be far from the vision of the expected messiah. He comes in humble beginnings. He comes to associate with and care for those on the periphery of society. He comes to challenge those who know the letter of the law but not the spirit of the law. He comes to serve not to be served. He is the messiah that weeps at the tomb of his friend and weeps over Jerusalem. And Jesus comes as the suffering servant. Dying a death of shame on the cross, the full glory of the Messiah is revealed in the suffering Jesus willingly endured as an expression of His immeasurable love for those He came to save and His triumph over the ultimate enemy death itself.

This man, who was and is God, laid aside the privileges of deity, faced loneliness and temptation. He hungered as a man yet fed four and five thousand. He thirsted as a man yet said whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst. He was weary as a man yet said come to me all you that are weary and I will give you rest. He weeps yet He wipes our tears. He pays his taxes yet He is a king. He prays yet He hears our prayers. He was sold for thirty pieces of silver yet He redeems the world. He was led like a sheep to the slaughter yet He is the good shepherd. He dies and by dying He gives us life.

There was never anyone quite like Jesus. But the question still remains: Who do you say that Jesus is? It is the single, most important question that we have to answer in our lives bar none.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 12th Sunday after Trinity – 30th August 2020

Reflection

Christine Portman, Reader

This week I had to update my Safeguarding training. The last time I did it was a couple of years ago when 12 of us from All Saints met up in Saint Raphaël with other church members from across Provence. Although the subject matter was tough, all agreed it had been worthwhile. This year, Covid restrictions have made face-to-face training impossible, so all sessions are being held online. Zoom, has its limitations, but we can see one another, and it was clear that some of the participants were moved by the testimony they heard. Although we can become de-sensitised to the plight of other people when protected by our TV screens, when distress is seen up close it's much harder to ignore.

I suppose that the stories we heard were all the more shocking because the victims of abuse had suffered harm in the very place where they might have expected to find a refuge - in the supposedly-safe space of the church. In preparation for the training we were asked to meditate on Psalm 91 - a set psalm for Compline. An assurance of God's protection, it begins:

You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."

We were asked to imagine what it might feel like for a child, a young person or indeed an adult, to have this trust destroyed. Given what we now know about widespread abuse, it's a question we should all contemplate. But, you might ask, what does any of that have to do with today's readings? Well, a great deal as it turns out: they all concern the problem of suffering, how we face it and how it affects our relationship with God. In the Old Testament lesson, Jeremiah is feeling quite sorry for himself. Life is so unfair: he does his best to spread God's word, and all he gets in return is pain. Yet taking a moral stand is rarely without

repercussions. He might expect to face criticism from those who don't like his message.

If we decide to go God's way, then there will be consequences – both good and painful. In the gospel reading, Jesus makes it plain: *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me*. The prize is enticing and it's worth taking up the challenge: *For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?* Following the Lord is the right choice, but we'd do well to heed St Paul's advice on how to cope with the challenges en route: *Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer*. These are not unattainable platitudes but sound, practical advice on how to face evil and suffering.

But that's not the path Jeremiah is choosing. Far from it! He has instead allowed himself to become infected by self-pity and bitterness. Feeling himself '*under the weight of (God's) hand*, he finds himself alone, set apart from the *merrymakers* who not only seem to be having all the fun, but also completely ignore what he has to say and persecute him for his beliefs. He is a holy man, dedicated to serving God, but the joy and delight he once experienced in his calling have gone. His experience gives us an example of pain which is in part self-inflicted. Not only is he now at odds with those he wants to reach, he feels separated from and abandoned by God himself. His pain is *unceasing,* his wound *uncurable, refusing to be healed.*

God's response is clear and instructive: *If you turn back, I will take you back …* Jeremiah's whole attitude has been quite wrong: he has been asking for retribution on his persecutors, but he fails to look at fundamental problems in his own relationship with God. *Truly you are to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail,* wails Jeremiah, but it's his own, self-centred attitude that has cut him off from God. Of course people no longer listen to what he has to say! God tells him to turn back from his self-imposed misery and isolation. Jeremiah has been full of his own ideas about how things should be. But if he will *turn back*, people will once again want to listen: *If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall serve as my mouth. It is they who will turn to you, not you who will turn to them.* Jeremiah has to drop the fixed ideas which prevent him from accepting God for who he is.

Peter's response to Jesus in the Gospel reading shows a similar inability to accept Jesus for who he is: *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you*. Jesus' rebuke is fierce: *Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things*. Peter's reaction is very human – we can sympathise with it. He loved Jesus. How could he possibly imagine that God would allow his Son, the Messiah, to suffer death at the hands of his enemies? What a shocking and unbelievable idea to a mere mortal like Peter who had very different notions of the Messiah's mission! Like Peter and Jeremiah, so often we set our minds *not on divine things but on human things,* but *"my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are* ***your ways my ways****," declares* ***the LORD***. (Isaiah 55:8). In the world that Peter, the disciples and ourselves have joined, *those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.*

God calls on Jeremiah to turn back – to find again his right place before him. In today's psalm the writer also believes that he's followed God's commandments and is a righteous person, but his starting point is very different: God will make his judgement, he will not judge God*. Test me, O Lord, and try me; examine my heart and my mind.* The psalmist accepts that God is in charge. He feels able to come into his presence**:**
I will wash my hands in innocence, O Lord, that I may go about your altar,
to feel thankful:
To make heard the voice of thanksgiving and tell of all your wonderful deeds.
and to love him:
Lord, I love the house of your habitation and the place where your glory abides.

Jesus never promised his disciples an easy life. He warned them that they would have to take up their cross if they wanted to follow him. In today's Gospel Jesus warns them that even the Son of Man will not be spared from suffering. But his death on the cross was not, and never would be be the end. St Paul was clear that those who follow Christ will have enemies, will be persecuted – but he gives the members of the Church sound advice: don't let those who harm you turn you into what they have become. Meet evil with goodness *hold fast to what is good.*

There is much in the world today that runs counter to the goodness of God. That has always been the case, and it will always be so. As John pointed out in his reflection on the parable of the wheat and tares several weeks ago, weeds always

come up alongside the good crop, but we have to be patient. The ultimate message of that parable and of today's readings is one of optimism: we may find ourselves surrounded by evil events and people of ill will, but ultimately the harvest will be good. Despite appearances, God's laws ultimately rule this universe.

In March a neo-Nazi gunman murdered 51 people in Christchurch and injured many more. Most were shot in the back whilst at prayer. One victim, a three year old boy, was shot twice at point blank range. On Thursday the gunman was sentenced to life imprisonment without possibility of parole, but before he was sentenced he had to listen to more than 80 statements from survivors. It must have taken great courage for those people to stand before him to tell him how his hatred had destroyed their families. But the final words from one young woman say it all. Sara Qasem, had lost her father, but she looked him in the eyes and told him, "In the end, love will always win."

Sure in the knowledge that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, our job is to *hold fast to what is good.* Yes, we may have to deny ourselves, yes, we may have crosses to bear: evil and suffering have always, and will always be a part of this world - but the prize of journeying with Christ is rich beyond our imagining: *those who lose their life for my sake will find it*

they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you
to save you and deliver you, says the Lord.

Amen

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 13th Sunday after Trinity – 6th September 2020

Reflection

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

Our Gospel reading today, which appears only in Matthew's account, offers what might look like a blueprint for how to resolve conflicts in the church. It starts with a private conversation between two people, moves on to a small meeting to try and resolve the position and ends up with one person being estranged from the community. Well, that's clear, then. Tidy. Ordered. Straightforward. Like a legal process in its clarity. Except that this is our Lord talking, so we need to think more deeply about what is being said.

The passage reminds us that there has never been a time when there weren't disputes in the church. Conflict in the church – like conflict in the home or the workplace - is always painful. When we fall out with those with whom we worship, those with whom we potentially share profound experiences of the presence of God, it quite simply hurts.

Although Matthew's description of how to resolve a conflict is told from the point of view of the person in the right, we should remind ourselves that there is always another side to the story. Let's look at it from the point of view of the person being

challenged. Perhaps they genuinely don't understand what others think they have done wrong and are convinced they are innocent. Might they not feel ganged up on when their complainant comes back with a group of friends in the church to support them? What if they could just as easily get their own group of friends to support them? You could quickly end up with a divided community.

Or what if it turned out differently at the second stage? What if the group of friends brought along to try and make the errant one see reason, ended up deciding that the errant one was actually right all along, or that things weren't so clear-cut and there was right and wrong on both sides? What if you, the complainant, were asked to change <u>your</u> thinking, so that now you were made to feel like an outsider when you thought this was about to happen to the other person?

Confused? Yes. Life is messy, there is always more than one side to a dispute, and not everything is clear-cut. Perhaps the clue to this story actually lies in the sanction described by Matthew: 'If the offender refuses to listen even to the church [heaven forfend], let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector'. We are reminded that tax-collectors were despised because the taxes they were collecting were for the Roman Empire, the hated occupier in first century Palestine. Yet they were often the ones Jesus was found spending time with. He did not exclude them from the group who followed him in his ministry, the group who went on to found the church. On the contrary, they were welcomed in. We don't need to look far for an example: Matthew himself was understood to have been a tax collector. Zacchaeus was another. The religious authorities often challenged Jesus for associating with them. If he were a prophet, surely he would know not to give them the time of day?

In our Gospel passage, therefore, the sanction for the one in dispute with the church is not as simple as it sounds. For this Gospel speaks of a radical new way of living that is not ordered or tidy. Those whom we might think Matthew is almost encouraging us to ostracise are the very ones our Lord brought into the centre. When someone ends up outside the church following a dispute, our Lord is saying to us: show them the love and care that I did.

The problem with the Christian faith is that we are called to love our neighbours as ourselves. Including – perhaps especially – those we find it difficult to live with, to work or to worship with. Those whom we feel uncomfortable with, who press our buttons and make us say things we wish we hadn't. Some who themselves have been hurt and carry that hurt into their conversations with others, often without realising.

Confused? Yes, and we should be. For there is nothing tidy or ordered about Christian community. Yet we are called to love, in it and through it, even it takes us to the foot of the Cross, which is where we will always find God. Arms outstretched in costly reconciliation, with a love that (when we are able to face it honestly and clearly) makes us fall to our knees in shame, repentance and gratitude.

We cannot always be united. Sometimes it is right that we should hold out for what we believe to be the truth. But to counterbalance our tendency to argue, we are also given the vision of what our unity might achieve. 'If two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven'. Oh dear. Is that really all he Jesus we are capable of? Just two of us agreeing? It's not a very high bar, is it? Yet sometimes in the church it feels that even two people agreeing

about anything would be a small miracle. The same is true of workplaces, volunteer organisations and anywhere else that humans gather to attempt a joint endeavour.

Yet we are called to love, in spite of our differences, our certainties, our clarity that we are right and the other is wrong. We are called to go back to the drawing board and start again, painstakingly building relationship where there has been fracture, confidence where there has been mistrust, hope where there has been disappointment. Earlier in this Gospel, during the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus urges us: 'when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.' (Matthew 5.23-24) What wise and beautiful advice.

What we learn, time and again, from Jesus's life and ministry is that it is in loving that we will unlock the potential for good we carry inside us, and that when we do so we will find our Lord beside us, as he promised: 'Where two or three are gathered in my name...' It may not be easy, but when he was asked what mattered most, Jesus replied that there are only two commandments that matter. Let us do our best with the second, whatever it costs us.

And if we do manage to settle a dispute, in case we are tempted to think we have solved everything, we might also remember the words that follow immediately after this Gospel text, when Peter asks: 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' 'Jesus said to him: 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.' (Matthew 18.21-22)

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 14th Sunday after Trinity – 13th September 2020

Reflection

Jane Quarmby, Reader

Today's Gospel reading is about forgiveness, and Jesus giving an example of one man being forgiven a huge amount of debt, but in turn not forgiving someone else who owes him a lot less. In those days 10,000 talents was an unbelievably large sum of money, around 340 metric tons of silver - millions of euros akin to the whole tax revenue of Galilee and impossible to repay. So the king having pity on him and letting him off was merciful in the extreme.

Sadly, the man forgiven was not so merciful to someone else who owed him a few thousand and had him arrested. However, he didn't get away with it as his colleagues went to the king and snitched on him. He ended up being tortured until he had paid his debt in full. No nice ending to this story for once – Jesus is very clear that if we do not forgive those around us then we too will be tortured. Prison and torture here are a metaphor for hell.

So it's a big deal this forgiveness business – if we don't forgive others then we will suffer. Is that fair? Someone hurts us, and we must forgive them?

What exactly is forgiveness? I looked it up and most definitions agree that is it a conscious and deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment, hatred or vengeance towards a person or group who has hurt you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness. It's not for us to judge, remember – that's God's job.

Judith Altman, whose family were murdered by the Nazis in the Second World War, put it like this: "I certainly have all the reasons in the world to hate, but hate destroys you, not them. Use your energy for good things and better things."

Farid Ahmed, who lost his wife in the shooting at the mosque in Christchurch not that long ago, said afterwards, "I don't want a heavy heart boiling like a volcano with anger, fury and rage – it burns itself and its surroundings. I want a heart full of love, care, and mercy. This heart does not want any more lives to be lost, any other humans to go through the pain I have gone through. That's why I am choosing peace and I have forgiven."

It takes conscious effort to forgive someone who has harmed you – whether it be on a scale like Mr. Ahmed's hurt and loss, or on a more everyday level when someone is rude to you, or steals something from you, or makes a fool of you. Is it really worth all the bad temper and upset caused by someone stealing your car parking space that you have to get out and hit them as I've seen too often on the news bulletins? Surely better to be free of that corrosive burning anger and have peace of mind, to let go of those negative feelings and move on with your life and embrace healing for yourself.

Anger and rage, that desire to get even, can split friendships and families, lead to violence and yet more violence. We see it in every country of the world – tempers flaring, people taking sides, violent clashes with each other, police trying to keep some order and people getting hurt and being killed. We see it in America now, a nation heading towards division. It isn't healthy and it isn't good. It's dangerous, which is why Jesus was clear that if we cannot find it in our hearts to forgive, then we will be punished.

And we will be punished sooner than we think. To live with that kind of attitude to others harms us as much as it does them. It makes us into people that aren't good to know, cuts us off from others, harms our health and cuts us off from God. It makes us bitter and angry.

It's important, however, to realise what forgiveness is not. It is not glossing over something, or ignoring things that hurt you, it isn't about forgetting what has been done to you or downgrading the seriousness of it. It is not about making excuses or condoning something or ignoring it. No one can really forgive and forget as though nothing has happened. And it's no good running away from confrontation

either – we must face up to bad behaviour and tackle it. But as and when we are involved in a confrontation, then we need to be open and honest, not come to it from the point of view of having to win, or getting one's own back, but of seeing one another's point of view. There's an old saying about marriages when they fail – "the fault was half a dozen on one side and six on the other side."

Tom Wright explains it like this "Forgiveness isn't like a Christmas present that a kindly grandfather can go ahead and give to a sulky grandchild even if the grandchild hasn't bought a single gift for anyone else. It isn't like the meal that will be waiting for you back home even if you failed to buy a cheese sandwich and a cup of tea for a tramp on the street. It's a different thing altogether. Forgiveness is more like the air in your lungs. There's only room for you to inhale the next lungful when you've just breathed out the last one. If you insist on withholding it, refusing to give someone else the kiss of life they so desperately need, you won't be able to take in any more in yourself……. If (we) are open, able and willing to forgive others, (we) will also be open to receive God's love and forgiveness."

There are those who say that there can be no forgiveness without repentance. If someone can't see how much they have hurt someone else, or feel bad about it, how can they be forgiven? Why is it hard to say "sorry"? It is a lot easier to forgive someone when they are genuinely sorry, and when they really want our forgiveness. It's much harder when someone couldn't care less about what they have done to us, or just doesn't see what harm they have done to us. The very act of forgiving someone can be hard to do, as many worthwhile things are. That doesn't mean we don't forgive because if we want God to forgive us for all the things we have done, then we must learn to do likewise to those around us. As we pray in the Lord's prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Jesus knew we would find this forgiveness business hard to do and so gave us the words to ask God to help us with it. If we want to be forgiven, then we must be prepared to forgive too.

Peter thought he was being generous, forgiving 7 times, but is teased by Jesus – no, 70 times 7! If you are counting how many times you forgive, then you aren't really forgiving at all – just postponing revenge.

God's forgiveness is endless – and so must ours be.

Amen

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 15th Sunday after Trinity – 20th September 2020

Reflection

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

One of the knock-on effects of the health restrictions announced last week in the chaplaincy area was the cancellation of the *Foire Internationale de Marseille*, the annual exhibition and trade fair usually attended by some 300,000 people. The city authorities were understandably keen that it should go ahead, since the *Foire* is a significant source of income each year, but it was not to be.

Trade fairs, and the consumer industry in general, are about making people want things that they don't already have. The French writer and thinker René Girard, who died a few years ago, believed that desire (one of the deepest human motivators) is mimetic – in other words, our desires are borrowed from other people. 'I want one like theirs.' It is why fashion houses hire beautiful people to model their clothes – we want to look like the models, the models wear the clothes, so we buy the clothes.

What does this have to do with today's Gospel? Well, Girard had something important to say about the cry known to every parent of young children: 'It's not *fair*.' Children have a strong sense of what is fair and what is not. The cry 'it's not fair' is equally well known to human resources managers and politicians when those children - that's us – have grown into adults, still with our sense of

outrage that another person has more than we have. It runs deep in human behaviour.

I suspect I am not alone in finding the parable of the workers in the vineyard slightly uncomfortable. It's the same sort of discomfort that I feel at the end of the parable of the prodigal son, when the one who has stayed at home being conscientious watches as the wayward one is not only forgiven but given a party. There is a bit in me that identifies too easily with the workers who have toiled all day and think they should get something more as a result. The human resources managers I mentioned earlier are adept at harnessing our human perceptions of what is 'fair' in the name of those twin gods of the market economy: productivity and performance.

What Girard maintained about the cry 'it's not *fair*' was that all conflict originates in mimetic desire, because it turns to mimetic rivalry – 'I want one like theirs' becomes 'I want the one they've got' – and that such rivalry, unless it is stemmed, becomes a source of violence in our world. In our readings from Genesis over the summer we noted the number of sibling rivalries which it contains, and how corrosive they can become. Much human misery does come from mimetic rivalry: individuals, families, communities, countries are all susceptible to it. Someone, somewhere will always have more, and someone, somewhere will always have less than we do. And yet we compare, endlessly, what other people have. Girard argued that ultimately Christianity is the best antidote to the violence that comes from mimetic rivalry. Let's explore a bit why.

Mimetic rivalry is a close cousin of the love of power. The love of power was why the religious and political authorities of Jesus's day concluded that he had to be put to death. He was a threat to their power, with his talk of the upside-

down world of the Kingdom of Heaven. The parable of the workers in the vineyard is a classic example of such talk. The parable tells of what we begin by assuming is a straightforward human economy. A landowner goes out at different times of the day to hire people to work for him. Some are asked to work all day, others for different lengths of time, and some only for the last hour. And the ones who think they have worked harder complain because they think they should have got more for it.

There are perhaps two messages for us in the parable. One lies in the nature of the workforce. They are of the most vulnerable kind - daily workers who won't get paid unless they find work that day, and probably won't eat if they don't. One thing the landowner was doing was ensuring that the ones whom no one else had hired did get to eat that night. If we tend to identify too readily with the complainers, we need to ask ourselves if we are ultimately saying: 'I don't care if others don't eat'.

The other message of this parable is about God's grace. By choosing a story about a situation we think we know well – after all, we *know* what is fair in the world of work, don't we? – the story shows up how different the economy of the Kingdom of Heaven is. God loves us with an excessive, overwhelming love that puts our mean-spiritedness to shame. The story shows up our tendency to mimetic rivalry – the complainers complain 'you have made *them* equal to *us*' – we, the righteous ones. But we *should* feel uncomfortable when we catch ourselves thinking like that. Thinking like the Pharisees whom Jesus confronted in the Gospel. How do we really feel about God's generosity towards the people whom, if we will admit it, we feel justified in despising?

The passage from the story of Jonah touches on the same theme of God's grace and our response to seeing it given to others. Jonah is shown as being all too

like us. God asks him to go to Nineveh, the hated capital of the adjoining superpower which had brought suffering to the people of Israel. Jonah is to go to Nineveh to warn the people that, unless they repent, God will destroy their city. But he doesn't want to go, so he tries to get away from God by boarding a ship. When a storm threatens the safety of all on board, he admits that he is probably the cause of it and allows himself to be thrown overboard to save the others. He is in turn saved by being swallowed by a large fish for three days. By then he has understood that there is no getting away from God, so he consents to go to Nineveh. There he preaches a pretty rudimentary sermon about the need to repent, at which point all the people of Nineveh immediately do repent and God forgives them. Jonah's response is to go into a serious strop. He didn't want God to forgive the people of Nineveh. He reckoned they had destruction coming to them. And if God was going to forgive them anyway, wouldn't he be made to look a fool? But God gently teases Jonah, as a parent does a child, encouraging him not to be angry about the forgiveness which others have received and showing to him the same generosity he has shown to them, nudging him back towards the light of love and forgiveness.

So, in the story of the workers in the vineyard, we thought we knew about the economy that was being described, but we find that we don't. What we do find, as Jonah did, is that in the economy of God's grace, mimetic rivalry loses its thrall because it ceases to matter. Why be envious of others because God is generous? Do we want to stay grumbling in the shadows, like the elder son in the parable of the prodigal? Fundamentally, we don't. Like children, we need to be led back into the light and given a hug. Our experience of God's freely given grace frees us to be generous ourselves. Not to compare ourselves endlessly with others but to rejoice in our common humanity, enjoying one another for the people they are.

One of the best bits of advice I have ever been given was by my tutor at theological college, just as we were leaving. She said: 'May I ask of you one thing? Don't compare yourselves. It's not what it's about.' When I heard those words, I wondered why no one had ever said them so clearly before.

It is what Jesus is saying here. 'God's economy is different from human economy. You are all equal in God's sight - all equally loved.' All the human characteristics by which we differentiate ourselves are unimportant to God. For God is bigger than us, yet we are all, equally, infinitely, precious to him.

'Don't compare yourselves. It's not what it's about.' Instead, love one another and see where that leads. I once saw a clue to where it might lead, on a notice board in a tube station in London, the day after someone had planted a bomb on a train. The bombing itself spoke of where Girard's mimetic rivalry can lead if it goes unchecked. But, written by a transport official in a neat hand, the notice said this: 'When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace.' No one seems sure who said this originally. It has been attributed to people as diverse as William Gladstone and Jimi Hendrix. But what a beautiful thing to read on a day like that. And how profoundly true. It occurred to me that it might have been written by our Lord himself.

The world will know peace 'when the power of love overcomes the love of power'. As followers of Christ, we can believe and trust that, ultimately, it will.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – 16th Sunday after Trinity – 27th September 2020

Canon David Pickering

Matthew 21.11

'Which of the two did the will of his father?' They said, 'The first.'

Two sons received the call from their father to help out in the family business.

The first said, 'No thanks,' but changed his mind. The second replied, 'Yes,' but then failed to turn up.

This morning we celebrate how two other people have responded, in a very positive manner, to God's call to serve in an important ministry in his Church. Today, Jamie, our Chaplain, on the authority of the Bishop will renew the licences of our two chaplaincy Readers, Jane and Christine.

As we reflect on today's gospel, and our other readings, we can see that they are all concerned with a sense of calling.

Our Gospel passage begins with the chief priests and elders, the supposed guardians of religious authority, asking Jesus about the source of his calling. '*By what authority are you doing these things, (presumably for cleansing the Temple) and who gave you this authority?*'

We, of course, know the answer - and will think about it later. But Jesus exposes their mockery, when, in true rabbinic fashion, he asked about the calling of John the Baptist. Was it earthly or divine? Again, we know the answer.

Then in the second part of today's Gospel passage, Jesus tells how a father called both his sons, one after another, to help him in his vineyard. Here Jesus emphasises how we can only answer a call by fulfilling what we are asked to do. He tells how so-called public sinners have heard the call to repent and now have

a priority place in God's Kingdom. '*Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and prostitutes are going in the kingdom of God before you*.'

Today's New Testament reading gives us a wonderful description of Jesus' divine calling:-

Who, though in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness,
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of
death -
even death on a cross.

Many scholars believe that in this poetic passage, St Paul is quoting from an early Christian hymn, and so it may be the oldest summary of the Christian faith in existence. And it is introduced by a summary of our own calling: *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. It concludes: and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

As Christine and Jane have their licenses renewed this morning, we give thanks for the call they answered when they were first authorised as Readers by their bishops: Jane ten years ago in Peterborough Cathedral and Christine in Derby Cathedral in 2002. But we not only give thanks for the ministry of Jane and Christine, we also celebrate the role of Readers in the life of the Church today. At a personal level I remember, as a four year old, being taken to Sunday School by Colin Keeber, the Reader at Narborough, and in my final English parish, I had the help of no less than three, Christine being one of them.

As we value Reader ministry today, we need to recognise their place in the history of the Church. It seems they may have even had a role in the worship of the synagogue in Jesus' time. They would have needed sufficient education to be able to translate Hebrew into the vernacular Aramaic. Was Jesus himself perhaps a Reader when he read from and expounded the passage from Isaiah 61 (Luke 4.16-21)?

The ministry of Readers is mentioned by a number of the Fathers of the Early Church, among them, Justin, Eusebius and Cyprian. By the fourth century they were being ordained as one of the minor orders of the Church. This continued in the Church in England until all minor orders were abolished at the Reformation. By the time of Elizabeth the First, there seemed to be Readers with a very limited role, just reading services, without preaching. When they were re-introduced in 1866, there had been no recorded reference to a Reader for over a century. During and after the First World War they became well established, but with limitations. They could officiate at Morning and Evening Prayer, omitting the prayer of absolution. They could preach, but not at Holy Communion. From the 1960s onwards their sphere of service has grown to what we value and appreciate today - now so extended, that in some circles they're referred to as Licensed Lay Ministers. The Reader magazine has even changed its name to Transforming Ministry!

So this morning we rejoice and give thanks for the service of Jane and Christine, and all Readers, especially those we have known and valued in places where we may have worshipped in the past.

But as we celebrate Christine and Jane in their particular calling, we should remember that we are all called by God. Wherever we may be in life, we should see our circumstances and what they bring to us as a part of our calling. *Let the same mind be in you that was in Jesus Christ.* We are to follow his way in every aspect of our lives.

The final verse of our reading from Ezekiel, ends with these resounding words: *For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God. Turn then and live.*

Turn, then and live - a reminder that our Christian faith tells us to 'get a life.' Each precious moment we are given should be grasped and celebrated as a part of our calling from God.

We thank Christine and Jane today, so let us be encouraged in our own personal callings as they inspire us to 'GET A LIFE!'

Amen.

Chaplaincy of All Saints' Marseille
with Aix-en-Provence
and the Luberon

4th October 2020
17th Sunday after Trinity

Reflection

Today's gospel is the second consecutive parable Jesus told rebuking the Jewish religious leaders. Most of the parables that Jesus told made one main point but this one is a little more complex. This parable exposed the planned attempt on the life of Jesus and God's judgement on the planners but even more important for me, this parable reveals that as a consequence of the disobedience of the Jewish people and their leaders, the nation of Israel is no longer the kingdom of God and as stewards entrusted with the leadership of God's kingdom the religious leaders will be replaced. But before you relax to hear how Jesus lambasted the religious leaders of his day, as with all of the parables that Jesus told, there are lessons here for us today. Jesus' message was not only for the religious leaders of that day and other Jews who shared the same views as their religious leaders, but also for the religious leaders of today and not only the religious leaders but all who are members of God's kingdom today.

So, fasten your seat belts as we look at this parable which appears in each of the first three gospels, albeit with slight variations. At the outset, I have to say that I love these vineyard parables for, being surrounded by vineyards as we are here in the Luberon, we have absolutely no excuse for not understanding what is going on.

The parable fits the situation in Jewish Galilee in the first century. Large estates owned by absentee landowners were put in the hands of local peasants who cultivated the land as tenant farmers. In accordance with a kind of sharecropping agreement, a fixed amount was due to the landowner. At the proper time the landowner would expect to receive his share. The same arrangement as we have today. We learn that a landowner built a vineyard. His name could have been Ridley Scott who is busy planting vines and building a winery not one kilometre away from where I am speaking. The winepress and vat in the parable Jesus told were constructed such that the grape juice would flow to the lowest point. Walls were often built around vineyards to keep out animals and thieves. A watch tower served as a lookout to guard against fire and thieves especially as the grapes ripened. During the first century, the landowners were most often Roman, which did not sit well with Galilean Jews; another similarity between Ridley Scott and the locals here. The landowner went away and after the harvest he sent his servants to collect what was owed to him. The tenants were none too happy to see the owner's servants. They beat one, stoned one and killed another. The landowner was not deterred and sent a second group of servants who were treated the same way as the first group. As a last resort, the landowner sent his son believing that the tenants would have some respect for him and give his son what he was entitled to. This was not a good move as the tenants saw an opportunity to not only keep that year's harvest but inherit the vineyard as Jewish law provided that a piece of property, unclaimed by an heir, would be declared "ownerless" and could be claimed by anyone. Jesus then asked His listeners what they thought the landowner's response might be. The listeners answered swiftly and emphatically saying, "the landowner will go and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others who will pay him his due". At this point Jesus quotes from Psalm 118, a psalm very familiar to the listeners as we believe it was sung at Passover both in the temple when the sacrificial lambs were offered, and later at home over the Passover meal. The religious leaders and other listeners get the full meaning of the parable. It is about them, what they will do to Jesus and the consequences.

If you have not understood already, I need to identify who is who and what is what in this parable. The vineyard is the metaphorical element standing for the kingdom of God, the landowner is God, the tenants are Jewish religious leaders, the servants are the prophets and the landowner's son is Jesus himself.

Let us start with the vineyard. The vine is mentioned more than any other plant in the Bible. The grape vine was important culturally and economically in biblical times just as it is with us here in this region today. Because of its centrality to everyday life, it is often used symbolically in Scripture. We have heard two OT examples today in the classic verses from Isaiah and today's Psalm. In the passage from Isaiah, the prophet uses the allegory of Yahweh's vineyard which he reveals as none other than the house of Israel, the people of Judah. This reference of Israel as a vine was a comparison that was readily accepted by the Israelites who knew the blessings of the beauty, shade, fruit, and the wine the grapevine provided. A fruitful vine was a symbol of obedient Israel, while wild grapes or an empty vine spoke of Israel's disobedience. Unfortunately, the comparison was often negative because Israel did not always demonstrate the good qualities of the vine. For Ezekiel, too, because of Israel's sin, the image of the vine was seen as an illustration of Israel's uselessness. The wood of the vine is useless for building and it makes poor firewood. Ezekiel implies that Israel is hardly worth throwing into the fire. Because of these references in scripture, the Jewish audience Jesus was addressing would have immediately made the allegorical connection. Thus, when the landowner destroyed the wicked tenants and gave the vineyard to others, the Jews recognized this as their nation being given over to another. This prompted their response in Luke's version of this parable, "may it never be!" It was not until this parable, when Jesus uses the image of a protected and productive vineyard to represent the image of the kingdom of God, that the Jews discover, contrary to their belief, that Jesus did not equate the nation of Israel with the kingdom of God.

The parable portrays the religious leaders ill-treating and murdering God's prophets and the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day even acknowledged themselves to be sons of those who shed the blood of prophets (Matthew 23 v 31). The parable also talks about the ill treatment and murder of the landowner's son. And here Jesus quotes from Psalm 118, one of the OT verses most quoted in the NT, "*the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief capstone (corner stone)*". For several months Jesus had been telling His disciples that the Jewish religious leaders will kill Him and, through this parable, Jesus is now telling the religious leaders themselves what they will do to Him.

In the construction of ancient stone structures, the cornerstone was the first and most important stone laid down. Also known as the foundation stone or capstone, it served as the reference point for the layout of all corners of the building and its entire structure. To qualify as the cornerstone, the stone had to be large, cut a certain way and have a flawless quality in look and substance. It was the stone most carefully scrutinized by the stone cutter, mason and architect, and a construction project may be delayed until the right cornerstone was found. Jesus, from lowly Nazareth, did not fit the Jewish religious leaders' expectation of the Messiah. He was not the military leader that would overthrow Roman rule and restore the greatness of the nation. Jesus did not meet the qualifications for the cornerstone that the Jewish builders sought but in recalling Psalm 118, not only does Jesus claim to be the Messiah, but He is the rejected cornerstone of the kingdom of God who will be vindicated and exalted.

So, what is the message for today's church leaders and for us who are members of Christ's church? I am not being disloyal when I say I am disappointed by the leadership of the Church of England. In my lifetime, there have been so many instances where strong leadership of the country as well as the church has been required and the church leadership has not been visible let alone prominent. I have spoken before about the golden opportunity that the pandemic has presented us as a church but we have left it to the politicians and the scientists to define how we should deal with the pandemic as well as lead our lives. The response to abuse in the church by church leaders themselves has been embarrassingly sad and now we are living under a regime that has nurtured a whole industry of safe-guarders and procedures that are diverting resources and draining the life out of the church.

It seems to me that several things are coming together to provide the greatest opportunity in my lifetime for us to rethink the structure and the practices of the Church of England. We must read the signs of the times. We have technological developments occurring at a rate that we cannot keep up with. There is a rising consciousness about climate change and the inequalities in society through such movements as black lives matter and the inequalities that Covid has brought to the fore. And we have the health, psychological, educational, social and economic fallout from Covid which we haven't seen the

half of yet. To say there has been a dislocation in our being church is an understatement but what an opportunity it presents. Stephen Cottrell, the new Archbishop of York, has been charged with leading a Vision and Strategy group to examine the future of the Church of England. The work of the group is said to be concerned with spiritual renewal, evangelism and discipleship. I just hope it is not financially driven. We'll see.

We may get the leaders that we deserve and we may feel powerless to influence the decisions that they make that affect our lives directly, but that does not excuse us from taking responsibility for our own lives and being church together. In His parable, Christ whilst criticising the religious leaders directly, was also criticising the Jewish people indirectly. We are reminded that the Jewish people went into exile because their prayers had been insincere, their worship empty, their devotion lacking, and their sins weighty. How are we doing against these metrics? These actions are directed towards God but we can also look at our actions towards others where we continue to give little or nothing to the hungry, give no drink to the thirsty, haven't taken in the stranger, haven't clothed the naked nor visited the sick and those in prison. (Matthew 25 42-43). We may have a lot to regret about the religious leaders of today but before we are too critical, we might want to begin by examining and amending our own attitudes, opinions and behaviour.

Amen.

The Revd John Smith

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Harvest Thanksgiving – 11th October 2020

Reflection

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

It feels somewhat easier preaching about Harvest Thanksgiving here in the Luberon, where the fruits of the earth are visible all around us, than in my previous urban setting. The church itself was in the middle of a four-lane one way system in the centre of London. People understandably asked me what sense it made to talk there about Harvest Thanksgiving.

The celebration of Harvest Festival in the Church of England was a nineteenth century revival of an earlier tradition – Lammastide (the so-called Loaf Mass), when the first wheat of the harvest was offered to the parish church to make into Communion bread. By the mid nineteenth century the impact of the industrial revolution was being felt across the country, and the church was keen to reconnect with an earlier agricultural way of life, where the source of daily bread was closely linked to the land. It was also intended to reassure a changing society that the God who had cared for generations past would continue to care for a current generation undergoing great change.

This year we have learned a lot about change, more than any of us would have wished. It is easy to think of the ways in which the pandemic has affected us all

personally. All the weddings we would have celebrated in the chaplaincy this year have had to be postponed, along with most of the travel, much of the meeting of family and friends, let alone the devastating effects on businesses, employment and every kind of human interaction that we have taken for granted throughout our lives. Yet we are called to remain steadfast, trusting (like our forebears) that the God who has cared for generations past will continue to hold our own generation in his care as we come to terms with great change.

If we look at the Psalms, we find echoes of our sense of dislocation writ large. Many of them date from the time when the remnant of Israel (some five hundred people out of a whole nation) were exiled in Babylon, by whose waters they sat down and wept. Taunted by their captors to sing one of their songs, they cried out: 'How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?' (Psalm 137). How do we celebrate what should be a joyful Harvest Thanksgiving in the middle of a pandemic? What the psalmists discovered was that, by retelling the story of God's past faithfulness, they would find comfort in their troubles, a resource for trust in the present and hope for the future.

The origin of Harvest Festival is in fact much older than the Loaf Mass. In the Book of Deuteronomy, from which our Old Testament reading came today, Moses instructed the people of Israel to offer to God the first fruits of the harvest, setting a basket down before the altar in gratitude for their release from slavery into a land flowing with milk and honey. It's why, traditionally, people brought produce to the Harvest service. Nowadays that often translates into gifts of food for those in need, and it is poignant to see them placed before the altar of God more than two and a half thousand years after Moses made his request.

What both the Book of Deuteronomy and the notion of Harvest Festival emphasise is the importance of living thankfully before God. That's why we call it a Harvest Thanksgiving. If we can focus more on what we do have rather than on what we don't, it helps us live less anxious lives. That's also the message of the second part of our Gospel reading this morning, when Jesus urges his followers to consider the lilies, the birds of the air. One thing the pandemic has taught us - those of us who have not been working on the front line of the crisis but have had the luxury of time on our hands - is how to stop and contemplate, to slow down, to calm our restless movement. And it has been beneficial, for us as humans and for the planet. It is even being described as a Jubilee for the Earth – an unexpected reprieve in our relentless over-exploitation of its resources.

Living thankfully, like keeping Harvest Festival, reminds us of the vital balance that lies both at the heart of creation and in human belonging. If we could become more aware of our responsibility to those who lack the basics for survival, if we could begin to treat food security as the urgent problem that it is becoming worldwide, if we could learn how to care properly for the planet entrusted to us, then we would learn again the truth that we are interdependent, and at the same time ultimately dependent on God, the creator of all. And then we could begin to live our lives accordingly. That's a timely reminder when we are engaged in a battle against a virus in company with the whole of humanity, in the context of our care for the Earth.

By contrast, the first part of our Gospel today tells a different story. Jesus's parable of the rich man is full of irony. We are told that the man is rich before the story begins, so he doesn't actually need the bumper harvest. It is the land which

produces abundantly, so he arguably doesn't deserve it either. He has a conversation about what to do, but he has it with himself because there appears to be no one else in his life. He finds a logistical solution – building bigger barns – and that insulates him further from others and from God. He anticipates having a party, but there is no one to have it with. It is a parody of heaven – there is no God, no companions, and no eternity – but it is presented as a party. Then the last scene is a reverse of the first. The first scene is about plenty, the last about isolation. The rich man dies, and is buried with the key to his barns. He has tried to insulate himself from death, but has actually insulated himself from life.

On one level it is a moral tale, a reminder not to hoard our harvests but to be generous towards others by being 'rich towards God'. On another level, the point of the parable is that it tells us what God is like and who God is. God is rich, but God is also generous. God does not invest in bigger barns, but in the precariousness of relationship. Whereas the rich man thought he had the security of barns, God takes the huge risk of investing in us, and we are called to follow. The question we are left with is: what are we going to do with the abundance we have been given? Hoard it away, or share it as abundantly as God does? Which brings us back to Deuteronomy: 'Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth." But remember the Lord your God.'

Well, a chaplain *would* quote that, wouldn't he, on the day members of the Luberon congregation are being invited to renew their stewardship! And (silently thanking the compilers of the Lectionary) he would go on to quote from the Epistle, in which Paul says to the church in Corinth: 'The point is this: the one who sows sparingly

will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.'

Sharing God's abundance. That's what we are called to do, in every aspect of our lives – in our caring for others, in our giving to those in need, in our attitude to our friendships and our loved ones, in every encounter of our daily lives. Winston Churchill once said that human beings might make a living by what they earn, but that they make a life by what they give. It is one of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God that the things that matter most – love, relationship, connection, trust, wisdom – increase as they are shared. The more you give of these, the more you have. The gift of our harvest collections seems so small. But so were the five loaves and two fish, and look what happened to them.

So if someone asks you what you were doing this morning, celebrating Harvest Thanksgiving in the middle of a pandemic, you could tell them you were reaffirming our interdependence as humans and our ultimate dependence on God. In fact, doing what Jesus asked us to do: to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflexion – 19th Sunday after Trinity – 18th October 2020

Service at All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

Today the church keeps the Feast of St Luke, the friend of the apostle Paul who described him as 'our beloved Luke, the physician' (*Colossians 4.14*). In our Epistle today he is mentioned as being Paul's only companion in prison (*2 Timothy 4.11*). Luke is believed to be the author of two books of the New Testament – the Gospel which bears his name and the Acts of the Apostles, parts of which are written in the first person. He is thought to have been a Greek, unlike the other three Evangelists who were from the Jewish tradition. Throughout his writings Luke emphasises that the good news of salvation is for all, regardless of religious affiliation, nationality, social position or gender. Tradition has it that he was one of the seventy disciples sent out by Jesus, as described in our Gospel reading today.

Luke is the patron saint of physicians and surgeons, which is why the focus of our service today is on wholeness and healing. All who work in our healthcare services, from the most senior to the most junior, have been on our hearts this year. We should applaud them not just once a week or once a day, for it is a vocation that demands sacrifice, the contours of which become more visible in a pandemic.

Wholeness, healing, salvation: hallmarks of the good news of which Jesus taught and, through his actions, revealed. 'Wholeness' is a word we rarely find outside the New Testament, yet in the older translations it is often found on his lips: 'Your faith has made you whole.' (The modern translations say 'your faith has made you well'.) Luke, the physician, records the stories of healing by Jesus - and, in the Acts of the Apostles, by Peter, Paul and others - with a combination of awe and a sense that these events were bringing people close to the heart of the divine. There is something about 'wholeness' that stands counter to all that may afflict us as humans, in particular the sense of disintegration we feel when what matters most to us is felt to be in danger: our health or the health of those we love, our mental wellbeing, our sense of identity or purpose, the things we devote our lives to. It is good to pray for wholeness, and to search for it through Christ amid what the Collect calls 'the changes and chances of this fleeting world'.

Later we will pray for those known to members of our congregations who are in need of healing at this time. What does it mean to pray for someone's healing? I once attended a talk by Mark Vernon, the English writer on spirituality and former Anglican priest who describes himself as an 'agnostic Christian'. At the end of the talk, someone asked him what he did when he was asked to pray for people. Mark Vernon replied that he did pray for them, though without being entirely sure of the good that it would do. I asked him whether, if he himself were ill, he would wish to be prayed for. The answer was an immediate and unqualified 'yes'.

What does it mean when we say we will pray for someone who is ill? At its simplest, prayer means 'giving loving attention'. But what are we praying *for*? It has been

said that there are three types of prayer in this context. First, asking God for a miracle. When someone is seriously ill, even if the evidence is that they are unlikely to survive, we often find ourselves praying for recovery – hope against hope - through the skill of medical professionals, the availability of a rare treatment, or a combination of factors which no one may fully understand. It's an impulse, whether or not we call ourselves believers, to will God into bringing life from death. It's a prayer of resurrection.

Then there is a prayer for strength in suffering, as we ask that the person we love will find acceptance of what is happening to them, courage and patience to last them through the time of distress and, for those of faith, the sense that God in Christ will be alongside them in their suffering. It's a prayer of incarnation.

Then there is a third kind. If we cannot find it in us to ask for a miracle, but we want to pray for more than acceptance, there is a prayer that, if this has to be, let it somehow be not only a time of pain and sorrow but also of grace and gift. A prayer that this may be a time when the person we care for finds a depth of love, companionship and truth they have never known before; that as they stare down the approach of death they may have a richer sense of the wonder of living, a thankfulness for all they have seen and known, an ability to bless others as they face challenges themselves, and a piercing insight into the heart of God. We pray that they may discover their real nature and destiny and see a glimpse of heaven beyond. It's a prayer of transfiguration.

In my final year at school the news came through that a gifted pupil who had left a couple of years earlier had died of cancer at the age of 19. The head master preached a sermon about it which I have never forgotten. He read out a letter from the boy's mother in which she described how, when all treatment options had been exhausted, her son had gone to spend a few weeks in a monastery in the foothills of the Himalayas, from which he had returned at peace, reconciled with what was happening to him, loving to those around him and facing his approaching death with courage. She concluded: 'I don't feel sorrow or anger any more, but just a little pride.' The sermon ended with the words: 'He may not have been cured, but he was whole.' It was only later that I discovered that the head master had himself lost a daughter to cancer at the age of six, a child whose doctors said of her that she was teaching them. Human stories that speak of transfiguration.

Our Gospel today describes Jesus's commission to the seventy disciples on their first missionary journey. They are to go out 'like lambs into the midst of wolves', with no money, no protection against the elements, just each other for company. It seems an apt reading for our times. There is a sense at the moment that we all face what lies ahead unprotected. Yet all of us - whether or not we call ourselves believers - are called to bring comfort, reassurance, companionship and support to those we know and love in the months ahead. There may be fear, suffering and death. But let us pray that there may also be grace and gift, albeit in ways we do not understand. That somehow, through God's grace, there may be transfiguration.

Why? Because of the faith, hope and love to which we are called. In an article entitled '*Is love more real when grounded in faith?*', Mark Vernon put it like this: 'The life of faith detects that there is a divine love that is there waiting. It holds all because it is the source of the love that flows through all. Fear and uncertainty do not cease. Human love always feels a bit like that. But faith is the felt sense that love can be trusted because love is, in truth, the ground of reality.' That seems to me a pretty clear insight into the heart of God, even if it calls itself 'agnostic Christianity'.

Last week our service ended with the words: 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.' This week we have heard the words which follow next in Luke's Gospel: 'Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.' I would like to suggest that it is the words at the end of Jesus's commission to his disciples that we should take with us into the months ahead, whatever they bring: 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' For, in Christ, it has and does.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – Last Sunday after Trinity – Bible Sunday – 25th October 2020

Canon David Pickering

Matthew 22.40

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Today we come to the conclusion of the Sundays after Trinity. Perhaps a relief for some! Next week, following All Saints Day, we move into the Kingdom season, and then on into the new liturgical year with Advent. In our modern Church Calendar, today is also observed as Bible Sunday with its wonderful collect:

Blessed Lord,
who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning:
help us to hear them,
to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them
that, through patience, and the comfort of your holy word,
we may embrace and for ever hold fast
the hope of everlasting life,
which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

For me this is one of the most profound and beautiful prayers in our liturgical worship. Always worth repeating, it's a most appropriate prayer to use every time we open our bibles to read and reflect on the scriptures.

The original version appeared in the Prayer Book of 1552. Written by Thomas Cranmer for the Second Sunday of Advent, it reflects the opening words of the Epistle for that day: *Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for*

our learning; that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope. (Romans 15.4)

This treasure of an Anglican prayer remained in its place in Advent in the Book of Common Prayer, but was perhaps overshadowed by other seasonal themes. At the beginning of this century it was moved to the conclusion of the Trinity season, as a summing up of all the scriptures read throughout the liturgical year. It prompts us to reflect. What does the Bible mean to us? Where does it fit into our lives? How much of it have we read?

In my early days as an assistant curate, I think I may still have been a deacon at the time, I met a parishioner who had been a held captive by the Japanese in the Second World War. He proudly told me that while a prisoner, he'd 'taught himself the Bible'. What he meant, in fact, was that he'd learned to roll off the names of the books which he'd proudly do every time I visited him. He'd then challenge me to do the same, which I just about managed - with his promptings. One day I asked him if he'd read the whole of the Bible. He admitted he'd started, but was freed from captivity before he got beyond Genesis, and never got round to it when he got home.

He then, of course, challenged me with the same question. I had to admit that I'd never read it from cover to cover, which is still the case. However, in the recitation of the daily office of Morning and Evening Prayer, and our readings at the Eucharist, over the years I've probably covered most of it by following the various lectionaries authorised over the past five or six decades.

Before we move on, may I share other personal experiences? Here's my first bible, a Christmas present in 1949, when I was eight. Can you remember when you were given your first copy of the Bible? When you opened it? How much you read? I think I managed to read the first eight chapters - perhaps pleased to read that Noah had come safely through the flood! That was enough for an eight year old. I did, however, once read the whole of the New Testament. I was just beginning my ordination training when its New English Bible translation came out in 1961. We were encouraged to read it as a whole as our book for Lent. The full version of the NEB had to wait until 1970.

I suppose over the years I have found it something of a frustration, not finding the time or perhaps the enthusiasm to sit down and read the Bible as a whole. I've

waded through Tolstoy's War and Peace and have just completed Hilary Mantel's Thomas Cromwell trilogy, but the Bible as bedtime reading has never seemed to be my scene.

But I am pleased to announce, that in our gospel passage for today, Jesus gives us the whole of the Bible and its core message in three short verses: '*He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: " You shall love your neighbour as yourself." ' (Matthew 22. 37 – 39)*

A most appropriate reading for Bible Sunday, and Jesus attests to this himself, in the words of our text. *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

For Jesus and his Jewish contemporaries, there was a vast array of detailed commandments to be followed, covering every aspect and circumstance of daily life. One of the Pharisees, a lawyer, thought he could catch Jesus out, with a question about which law was the most important. Jesus gives the response that the love of God and our neighbour is all that is required. This is what the whole of scripture is all about.

The whole Bible Story is one long tale of God calling us to be part of his divine loving nature. Our being, made in the image of God as described in Genesis 1.26, is to be made in his love. And God is love. *Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. . . . . .God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. (1 John 4. 8 & 16b.)*

The entire Bible Story centres around God's call to humanity: the call to learn to love God with their whole being and to love those around them, near and far, as themselves. The Bible tells us of people learning and failing in their love of God and neighbourhoods, and God in his love coming to the rescue in the person, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We could say the Bible is the greatest love story ever told, as summed up in these three verses from today's gospel.

Jesus is of course quoting two well known verses from the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 6.5: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.* To these he adds words from Leviticus 19. 18, the final verse of our first reading this morning: *You shall not take vengeance or*

bear a grudge against any of your people, but <u>you shall love your neighbour as yourself:</u> I am the Lord.

Before the story of the Good Samaritan, the lawyer quotes the Summary of the Law, and then asks who is his neighbour. Jesus replies with the parable and his meaning is clear: our neighbours are not limited to the people we may know next door.

We need to understand that Jesus draws together these two simple, but profound commandments to love, because they complement each other. We cannot love God without loving our neighbour, for by loving our neighbour we love God in a practical and tangible manner. Our love for him cannot be expressed solely in an individual, private and personal spirituality. It needs physical expression in the activities and encounters of our daily lives.

Like the lawyer, we need clarity about who is our neighbour. It's certainly the people who live and work around us every day. But in our world of modern communication it's also those we encounter over the airwaves. Yes, even those who we find difficult, objectionable and hard to cope with. We're called to *love* our neighbours, even though we may not necessarily like them. I'm sure God often dislikes the things I do or say, but it does not stop him loving me. A parent may say to an errant child, " I don't like what you are doing, but I still love you." Both Matthew *(16.23)* and Mark *(8.33)* record how Jesus severely reprimanded Peter. Did "Get behind me, Satan" mark the end of his love?

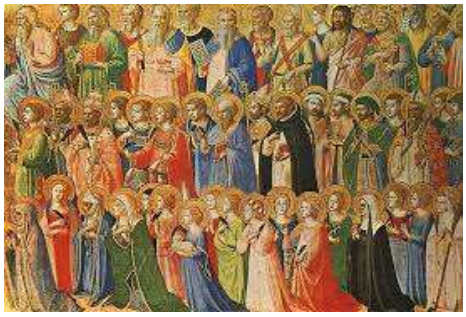
In Deuteronomy we are called to love God with our whole being, heart, soul, mind and might. The parable of the Good Samaritan goes further, adding 'strength' and 'our neighbours as ourselves'. Yes, love *ourselves*! For if God loves us why shouldn't we also love ourselves? And in fact, how are we going to love others if we cannot love ourselves? This has nothing to do with the self-regarding love which leads to the exclusion of others, but an acceptance of oneself, knowing oneself accepted and loved by God.

Divine love, the image of God in us, is absolute inclusiveness. In God, no one is excluded, by either race, colour or ethnicity, nor by religious faith or none. Personal orientation, political belief, cultural or social background: all are irrelevant, for all people are loved by God. And we are to answer in the same way the call to love God and our neighbour as ourselves.

The Bible is the book of Love. The word love appears from 514 to 810 times depending on the various translations. Today, on Bible Sunday, we give thanks to God for the wonderful treasure of the holy scriptures. But we need to remember some words of the scholarly and saintly Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, *"The central fact of Christianity is not a Book but Person - Jesus Christ, himself described as the Word of God." (The Authority of the Bible, Peak's Commentary on the Bible. 1963)*

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: help us to hear them, to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them.

Amen.



Chaplaincy of All Saints' Marseille with Aix-en-Provence and the Luberon

1st November 2020
All Saints' Day

Reflection

It is somehow symbolic of this year that our Patronal Festival should fall on the first Sunday after lockdown. We would normally be in church, with representatives of our three congregations and guests, a shared lunch, conviviality and celebration. But once again we are separated, unable to meet for an indefinite time, while the Covid-19 pandemic rages across Europe with the all too familiar sight of hospitals full to capacity and beyond. And yesterday's murderous attack of two worshippers and a sacristan in the Basilique of Notre-Dame de l'Assomption in Nice seems to threaten even the simple practice of a faith in these times. What a backdrop to All Saints' Day.

Would the saints themselves be surprised? There is sometimes a disconnect between the joyful triumphalism of the hymns we sing on this day and the lives of the saints themselves. There is also sometimes a disconnect between the church's emphasis on the holiness of the saints and their actual circumstances. (A former clergy colleague sent me a text on Friday to commiserate about the attack in Nice and ended with the words: 'All the best for your sermon on the saints - some of them were anything but!')

In keeping All Saints' Day, we are celebrating the heroes and heroines of our faith, some well-known, some almost unknown. We give thanks for what they did and we reflect on how it impacts our own lives. Yet perhaps we are too apt to focus on the vision of heavenly rest and thereby lose sight of the grim reality underneath. I would like to suggest that, in these times, it's the grim reality of what happened, and how they dealt with it, that can be of most help to us.

That's the message of the Beatitudes, the improbable recipe for blessedness set out by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, which we heard in our Gospel reading this morning. It's hard reading, but it speaks deep truth. 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. … Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' How will that be heard and felt in Nice this morning?

It can be instructive for us to think of the saints of the modern era, whose circumstances are closer to our own than those of their medieval forerunners, and to reflect on how they responded to the times they found themselves living through. Some are commemorated in the church's calendar. For example, on 12th October we remembered Edith Cavell, the British nurse in German-occupied Belgium during the First World War. Her Christian faith inspired her to save the lives of soldiers from both sides of the conflict without discrimination. She was arrested for helping Allied soldiers escape, tried by court-martial and shot by a firing squad. The night before her execution she said: 'Patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone.'

In our own time we think of the healthcare staff going to work each day at present, knowing they might become infected by Covid-19. Some of them will literally be laying down their lives for others. That's humbling.

Perhaps the person who has most often been thought of as a living saint in recent decades was Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who devoted her life to serving the poorest of the poor with what looked from the outside like a joyful simplicity of heart and an unshakeable faith in God. Wrong. When her notebooks were published after the death, it emerged that much of the time she had been racked with doubt and a sense of the absence of God. Some commentators suggested that the authorities in the Roman Catholic Church, who were in the process of having her recognised as a saint, should stop the process on the grounds that her faith had been so uncertain. The authorities simply nodded, knowing that doubt and despair are not a negation of faith but at times a necessary part of it.

In the hymn we will hear for our anthem today, 'Give us the wings of faith', there's a verse which hasn't made it into the particular setting we will be listening to, but which says of the saints: 'Once they were mourning here below, / and wet their couch with tears; / they wrestled hard, as we do now, / with sins and doubts and fears.' (I don't know about you, but I find that very comforting.) When we reflect on the saints, we should never be tempted to think they found it easy to do what they did, or that they found faith itself easy. Often they lost their lives in the course of a struggle of which they would not see the end. Yet they found courage in the midst of hardship, trust in God despite times when God seemed absent. When Jesus recited Psalm 22 from the cross – 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?' – he knew that from within. As followers of Christ, we draw our inspiration from a God who has known the absence of God.

I would like to tell you about one person who I think would meet any test of what a saint is, though her story is relatively unknown. She was called Etty Hillesum, a young Dutchwoman who died at Auschwitz at the age of 29. Her diary and letters, written in 1941-43, were only published in English in 2002 with the title *An Interrupted Life*. Etty Hillesum was everything you might think a saint is not. She grew up in a dysfunctional home where her parents were unhappily married and fought frequently. Both her brothers had severe mental health problems and she was afraid she might develop them too. Her biographer writes: 'The early pages of [her] diary reveal an insecure, emotionally disturbed and sexually chaotic young woman struggling with a turbulent inner life which she cannot understand and which from time to time pitches her into deep depression.' Yet her diary and letters 'tell the story of a life, which, in just two and a half years, was entirely transformed.'[1]

With the help of Dr Julius Spier, a therapist who had been a pupil of Carl Jung, Etty began to explore her inner life, and before long this led her to explore the deeper truths to which her gradual recovery of an inner stillness brought her. Encouraged by Spier to read the Bible and St Augustine, though without any formal religious instruction, she reached a profound understanding of the nature of God and of how suffering can be redemptive rather than destructive, all against the backdrop of the ever-increasing threat to the Jewish population of which her family were members. Her engagement with the suffering around her caused her to apply to help at Westerbork, a transit camp for Dutch Jews being deported to concentration camps in the east. Her diary chronicles the horror of the conditions at Westerbork, yet from its pages beats her persistent sense of the goodness and beauty of life as she sought to make life more bearable for those in the camp. She wrote in one of her letters: 'Despite everything, life is full of beauty and meaning.'

From an insecure youth she discovered a more integrated self, and began to write more and more of her sense of God and to pray. Her spiritual life increasingly sustained her as the persecution around her intensified. Her relationship with her parents, never easy, was transformed by the time they arrived at the camp in Westerbork, where she cared for them lovingly and attentively until they were all made to board a train to Auschwitz, from which they never returned.

One of the remarkable things about Etty Hillesum was her refusal to hate, a conviction that she held to the end: 'Each of us must turn inward and destroy in themselves all that they think they ought to destroy in others.' In that sense she stands alongside Edith Cavell, from another generation and another war. Through Etty's writing we see her battle to continue living with hope and integrity as the world around her collapsed. As the death which she knew was inevitable approached, she held courageously to the faith which by now meant everything to her – albeit that she was not a religious person in the conventional sense, with no affiliation to either Jewish or Christian practice. Her route to God was individual, direct and clear-sighted. As Patrick Woodhouse, her biographer, puts it: 'Etty speaks across the

[1] Patrick Woodhouse, *Etty Hillesum – A Life Transformed* (2009).

boundaries of religions, pointing to a way of being human that transcends such divisions and overcomes the evils of violence and hatred. Her story rekindles confidence that the way of faith is not, as many sceptical voices would suggest today, an absurd and misguided delusion.'

I came across this quotation from her: 'Living and dying, sorrow and joy, the blisters on my feet and the jasmine behind the house, the persecution, the unspeakable horrors: it is all as one in me, and I accept it all as one mighty whole and begin to grasp it better if only for myself, without being able to explain to anyone else how it all hangs together. I wish I could live for a long time so that one day I may know how to explain it, and if I am not granted that wish, well, then somebody else will perhaps do it, carry on from where my life has been cut short. And that is why I must try to live a good and faithful life to my last breath: so that those who come after me do not have to start all over again, need not face the same difficulties. Isn't that doing something for future generations?'

It is indeed. It's what the saints have always done, which is why we celebrate them today.

The last piece of writing we have from Etty Hillesum is a postcard to a friend, which she threw from the train on her way to Auschwitz. It said this: 'Opening the Bible at random I find this: 'The Lord is my high tower.' I am sitting on my rucksack in the middle of a full freight car. Father, Mother and [my brother] Mischa are a few cars away. In the end, the departure came without warning. On sudden special orders from The Hague. We left the camp singing. … Thank you for all your kindness and care. … Goodbye for now.'

Contemplating that sort of sainthood can only end in prayer. The one that comes to mind is the prayer of the Order of St Michael and St George:

> Grant us, O Lord, the royalty of inward happiness and the serenity which comes of living close to thee. Daily renew in us the sense of joy and let thy eternal Spirit dwell in our souls and bodies, filling every corner of our hearts with light and gladness: so that, bearing about us the infection of a good courage, we may be diffusers of life, and meet all that comes, of good or ill, even death itself with gallant and high-hearted happiness: giving thee thanks always for all things.

May she rest in peace and rise in glory.

Amen.

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – 3rd Sunday before Advent – Remembrance Sunday

8th November 2020

Jane Quarmby, Reader

Two years ago I was contacted by an organisation which was working to put a bouquet of silk flowers on the grave of every Czech serviceman who had lost their lives in the Second World War. They sent me the flowers and the name of a young flying officer who is buried in the war cemetery in Marseille. So one hot Sunday, after church, we set off to find the grave. Mazargues war cemetery is about six kilometres from the city centre and is part of a large cemetery enclosed by high walls. Once you thread your way through the grounds, you come to another wall with a small door, behind which is the section set apart for the war dead. Immaculately kept, it's more like a park, with rills of water, trees and shrubs – apart from the rows and rows of headstones, of men from many nationalities, who died on active service in two World Wars. It was quiet and peaceful in that walled garden, but so sad. I wandered up and down looking for the name I had been sent, and eventually found him, laid my wreath, and said a prayer for him.

Last year we visited Thailand, and took a trip out from Bangkok to Myanmar, to the site of the infamous Death Railway and the Bridge over the River Kwai. On the way we stopped at another war cemetery, equally immaculately kept, lush green grass and tropical flowers. And again, rows and rows of headstones of people from many nationalities, all young, all of whom died building the railway for the enemy they had travelled many miles to fight. There were over 7000 graves in that one park, one of four in that area. We wandered up and down, reading the names, units they had belonged to, and their ages. But what we didn't see were the graves of the local civilian population, who also died building that railway –four times as many civilians died as captured servicemen, men, women, and children.

A third cemetery, much smaller with just sixteen memorials, in a village in New Zealand, was just as poignant. Sixteen men left to fight in both World Wars, half a world away, and never came back. Along with their names were pictures of each one, with what they did and where they lived. They were mostly sheep farmers, gardeners, mechanics, and apple growers.

To visit a war cemetery is a sobering experience, one that brings a tear to the eye and a lump to the throat for someone like me who has been fortunate enough never to experience, at first hand, a war. For me, it brings thoughts of a waste of young lives, of wondering how they must have felt, of whether they went willingly to war, excited at the thought of glory and fighting for a cause, or if they went reluctantly, wrenched from their families and homes to fight a war they didn't really care about? And the horrors that the civilian populations suffered too – deaths and injuries, loss of homes and possessions, loss of loved ones, loss of freedom when your country is invaded and foreigners take over.

It makes you wonder why mankind never learns. Why have there been wars since the beginnings of our race? I was reading an article recently which said that homo sapiens waged war against the Neanderthal race, which shared 99.7% of their DNA, to the point of extinction. That was 400,000 years ago. War isn't a modern invention: we just have more lethal weapons now than sticks and stones and spears. Our oldest writings are filled with war stories – just look at the Old Testament. It's one battle after another. Humans seem to be hard-wired to fight one another, to kill for territory, food, water, gold. And left unchecked, to do dreadful things to one other and try to wipe each other out. We have only to remember Jamie's reflection last week about the young woman sent to the death camp. And wars continue to rage around the globe. We saw, only last week in Nice and this week in Vienna, deaths caused by ideology.

It's something that Jesus wrestled with too – his people thought he had come to lead them into battle, to fight against the Romans and set them free. His message of peace, of living lives caring for one another and looking after one another, didn't sit well with many. It doesn't today – and it's so easy to forget that violence begets violence. The opposite is true too – the chances are if you smile at someone, they will smile back. Do someone a good turn and they'll remember – and do you a good turn in return. But that's not really very glamorous is it? Not like wearing a uniform and having the power of life and death. I used to work with the armed services in Britain, and when youngsters were selected and did their thirteen weeks basic training, they loved the running around with guns and doing assault courses and

generally having a lot of fun. Then they would be streamed into their specialist corps and start learning their trade. At which point many dropped out because it was boring learning how to cook, or use a computer, or fix a truck. Real life was boring!

But real life is where we all are. In our reading today from Matthew, Jesus stresses that we need to be ready in this life, with all its mundaneness, for his return. We don't know when that will be, it could be in the next five minutes and if it is, are we ready to meet him? Really ready to look him in the face and account for what we have done with our lives? Could we prove to him that we have followed his commandments of loving God and one another? Have we, like the five wise virgins, thought about what we are doing and what we need to equip ourselves with, or are we more like the other five who tripped along, enjoying the ride and looking forward to the party but without thinking that we might actually need to pack enough oil for our lamps otherwise we'll get lost in the dark, or miss the moment altogether and get left behind? If Jesus came back to the world today, would he find one where people live harmoniously with one another, caring for the poor, the sick, the orphaned, the prisoners, the hungry? Or would he find that we are still muddling along, and making mistakes, still killing one another.

It's easy to forget the horrors of war and of violence. We in Europe have had decades of peace and I pray that that will continue, and for most of us, war is something we see on the TV. But our armed services haven't had that luxury – they have been deployed around the globe. Most of them are volunteers, not conscripts, and go willingly, look upon it as a career. But as we've seen in Afghanistan, in the Falklands, in so many places, they still give their lives.

Jesus himself said in John 15.30 "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." He followed through on that saying, laying his own life down for all of us. It would be poor recompense to waste our lives, so dearly bought by him, and by the countless others who have over the centuries given their lives to save others.

Today is marked as Remembrance Sunday, when we pause to remember those who gave their lives for our freedom and safety. It's hard during a pandemic to do this together, we can't gather for the laying of poppy wreaths at war memorials, and have civic ceremonies, when we are so restricted in our movements. The annual ceremony at Mazargues is not going ahead, but the laying of wreaths at the Cenotaph in London will do so, although without the public being present. We will

be able to watch on TV, and during this service, remember those who have died or been injured. We will all mark this solemn occasion in our own ways.

But the best memorial of all is to live our lives to the full. To enjoy and respect the freedoms we have now, of travel (in more normal times), of self-expression, of moaning about our governments, but most of all to love and care for one another, to spend our lives following as nearly as we can to Christ's example and his commands, thinking about what we can do for others, not ourselves, being generous to those who have less than us, to live simply that others may simply live. To be wise and think ahead, rather than run out of oil and get left behind and forgotten.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – 2nd Sunday before Advent

15th November 2020

The Revd John Smith

Sometimes with the readings in our lectionary there are obvious connections. I am not sure the linkages are that obvious in today's readings and I hope I am not trying to force fit them just because I want to talk about the day of the Lord or the end times.

Beginning with our psalm we learn of the infinite nature of God and the finite nature of us humans. In our OT reading we learn about the coming day of the Lord when God will exercise judgement on his chosen people and having found them wanting, will cleanse the earth of them. In our epistle, Paul talks about another day of the Lord but this is the day of the return of Jesus to this earth when He too will come with both judgement and redemption. Both our epistle and gospel readings tell believing Christians what we should be doing in anticipation and preparation for the return of Jesus. In the epistle we are told to walk in faith, hope and love and to encourage each other. In our gospel we are told to use the talents we have been given for the growth of God's kingdom here on earth.

So, let us look in more detail at each of our readings. Psalm 90 lays our base foundation. We have a God; one God and He is eternal; from everlasting to everlasting. In contrast we are like new grass in the morning that fades away by the evening. From dust we came and to dust we return. We may live 70 or 80 years in between. But instead of being depressed by this disparity, we can be encouraged from the outset as we are reminded that God is our eternal home. As Isaac Watts wrote in the hymn that we sang last week and which is based on Psalm 90: O God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy blast and our eternal home. By the way, Isaac Watts called the first part of his hymn, "man frail, God eternal".

From here we can go to Zephaniah who mentions 'the day of the Lord' more than any other prophet. In the OT the day of the Lord is the day when God renders His ultimate judgment bringing final deliverance or doom. In the New Testament the day of the Lord is the triumphant day of Christ's return to earth in glory but more of that later. Zephaniah is referring to God's impending

judgment on the nation of Judah. The people of Judah had long since turned their backs on God, not only in their personal lives but also in their worship. The depth of their sin indicated the need for God's people to be purged on their path to restoration. Though the judgement Zephaniah prophesies is brutal, he makes clear that God will bring this justice because He is passionate about protecting and rescuing His world from evil. God loves His creation so much that He seeks to purify rather than destroy us. Only then can He bring restoration and create a new Jerusalem for His faithful remnant. I don't think you need my help to recognise what is true of so much that we read in the OT that has relevance and application far beyond the world and times that the prophets lived in right up to the world we live in in the 21st. century. We have been warned.

From there we step into the NT with Paul's epistle to the Thessalonians and Matthew's gospel. Both readings come with the certainty of the Lord's return. It isn't a question of whether Jesus will return to this earth. Both readings take that for granted and focus more on what we should be doing in preparation for Christ's return.

As an aside, I must say that I am like Paul in one regard, (probably one regard only), and that is in his desire to be with the Lord. (Philippians 1:23) I look forward to the day that Christ will return and cleanse this world from the sin and evil that sometimes feels so overwhelming; to the time that God's will will be done on a renewed earth as it is in heaven. I look forward to the transformed bodies that we shall have; physical bodies with different properties, incorruptible bodies that will be animated by God's spirit unlike our current bodies which are animated by the normal soul (Quoting Tom Wright).

But back to Paul who starts this passage saying don't even bother trying to guess when Jesus will return. His coming will be as unexpected as that of a thief in the night. However, we Christians should not be surprised. We should be prepared for Christ's return as Jane reminded us last week.
Here Paul says we should be alert and self-controlled not drunk and incapable. Paul goes on to say we should equip ourselves with three things: faith, love and hope. Paul says wear them like armour for they will indeed protect us at all times. We can also think about them as a uniform, like the jersey of a sport's team that identifies whose team we are on – serving the God of Jesus Christ. This triad of faith, love and hope is referred to often in the NT. You know well that faith is 'the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen' (Hebrews 11:1) Faith is not only belief but it includes trust, living trust that says we are prepared to act on what we believe. I don't need to define love, the

greatest of these three. Which leaves hope. Hope is not unfounded, wishful thinking but firm confidence in our Lord Jesus Christ and his return. It is the true sense of the anticipation of certainty so that we can live in the present with that anticipation. It is not chance or probability but the certain expectation that God's promises will be fulfilled. Amen.

And Paul concludes this passage with the words 'therefore encourage one another and build each other up' – just as you are doing now by your very presence in this service and coming to worship together virtually when we cannot do so in person.

And so, to our gospel reading which places another requirement on us in this time between Christ's resurrection and His return. Like all the parables in these two chapters of Matthew, it exemplifies the certainty of the Lord's coming. There are problems aplenty in interpreting the metaphors in this parable, not least identifying God with the master, but setting this and other problems aside, this parable suggests that readiness for Christ's return involves active service on the believer's part. Christians, who because of laziness or lack of conviction, refuse to use the gifts God has given us for His work will encounter a judging Christ when He returns. As believers, we are challenged to emulate our Master by using all that God has given us for the sake of the kingdom.

In this parable the owner of a large estate went on a journey for an unspecified period. He called three servants to him and gave them, disproportionately, the management of his property. Although the first servant received five times as much as the last, each received a significant sum of money. Jesus might have been using some hyperbole in the amounts He mentioned as the first servant received an astronomical amount. Even the last servant received an amount equivalent to twenty years' wages.

The return of the master is certain, but the timing is unknown. He returns eventually and enquires what each servant has done with his property. The first two servants have used what they have been given wisely but the third servant sat on what he was given and did nothing with it. The first two servants were judged faithful having done what the master required of them. The master commends them for being good and faithful, gives them more authority, and invites them to enter his "joy".

The third servant is not so fortunate. He knows his master wants to expand his estate and that his master does whatever he can to make his wealth grow. His

master reprimands the servant for doing nothing with what he was given saying that he could at least have invested the money with the bankers so that he might have gained some interest at least – a practice which is forbidden in scripture by the way. 'If you could not do anything with what you have been given at least give it to somebody who could do at least a little with it' seems to be the message.

The master is furious. He had entrusted this servant with a portion of his property in order that the servant would use his abilities – abilities that had helped the master in the past. Perhaps the servant, was too afraid to take a risk – even though risky behaviour was part of the master's business. Are you starting to get the message?

In the end the servant's unfaithfulness to carry on the master's work cost him severely. The master expected his servants to continue his business, to take risks, and to emulate his behaviour.

In Matthew's gospel faithfulness is depicted as emulating the ministry of Jesus. Jesus announced the arrival of God's kingdom here on earth by feeding the hungry, curing the sick, blessing the meek, and serving the least. All who would follow Jesus are to tell others the good news of the kingdom and do the work that the master has called us to do. This work includes visiting the sick and imprisoned, clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger, and feeding the hungry. Those who are found faithful may hear their Master when He returns say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

So, in summary, we are not to worry about when Christ's return will happen because we do not know when that will be. We are not to worry about how it will happen or what will happen as we are told little and understand less about these things. We do know why Christ will return and we should reflect on that but our attention, resources, time and talents would be better spent making sure we are prepared for His return. And here is the closing challenge: have you identified what talent God has given you for the building of His kingdom here on earth and if so, are you using it fully? We all have been given talents of some description and I caution you should you think that you have not a talent or the talent you have is very small, for remember, it was the servant who was given the least that was ….. you can finish the sentence.

Amen.

Chaplaincy of All Saints' Marseille
with Aix-en-Provence
and the Luberon

22nd November 2020
Christ the King

Reflection

Next week will be Advent Sunday, but today we're closing the liturgical year with a relatively modern feast, Christ the King. Introduced by Pope Pius XI in 1925, John Muddiman tells us it was originally intended as *a counterblast against the rise of neo-paganism and fascism.* Perhaps it's as well that we still celebrate it today!

But how effective is it to represent Christ as a king? Won't it vary according to a person's views about monarchy? Our British Queen has many admirers: Jacky, who's joining us from the East Riding this morning, told me last week how special it feels for her that she'll be serving as High Sheriff during the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Year. There's enormous goodwill and affection for Elizabeth II, and whether republican or royalist, few people would be so ungracious as to fail to acknowledge her dedication and service over the years.

Like all British monarchs since Elizabeth I, she also holds the title of Supreme Governor of our church, but unlike some of her predecessors she is obviously sustained by a deep personal faith. Her namesake, Elizabeth I, had the wisdom to change the title of "Supreme Head" that her father had awarded himself. It was not just a sensible political move, given the opposition within the Church. Elizabeth, raised as a Protestant, would have been very aware of what the Bible tells us: Christ alone is the Head of the Church.

Henry VIII joins the ranks of many other kings and queens across history who have hardly reigned "happy and glorious", so when we think of Christ as our King, earthly kingship should

surely not be our starting point. On Palm Sunday the crowds went wild for their king as he rode into Jerusalem, but Jesus was not the Messiah they wanted. Five days later he would make this clear to Pontius Pilate: "*My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to this world, my servants would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But for now my kingdom is not from here*." (John 18.36).
Yet it's natural that artists often turn to images of earthly kingship to picture Christ in his majesty. At the top of today's service sheet you can see the Christ the King who hangs behind the high altar at SS Augustine, Chesterfield. With magnificent robes and golden crown, his welcoming arms outstretched, he's an imposing figure. Some of you have met David's daughter, Helen – she has joined us online for services from Kenya. This was the image of Christ she knew from childhood, but when she was in her teens we moved to a new church, St Bartholomew's, Old Whittington. You may be shocked when I tell you her reaction when she first walked down that aisle. Seeing the image of Christ on the Cross in the stained glass of the east window she said, "Ugh! There's no wonder people are put off!". I'm sure her views have changed over the years, but such negative reactions are very common today. Like me, you've probably heard people pronounce with great confidence that far from being life-giving and full of hope, Christianity is a strange religion obsessed by sin, guilt and death.

So perhaps today is a good time to look at the images we commonly use in church. An empty cross, as we see at All Saints' Marseille, may look less majestic than an image of Christ the King, but it might offer a more hopeful expression of faith. It points beyond the crucifixion to the risen Christ. Three representations: the suffering servant, Christ without a face or Christ in glory. All three are equally valid.

We recognise Christ as our risen King but we cannot ignore the wounded images we'd perhaps rather not see. It isn't possible to divorce our faith from the reality of Christ's suffering: he is the Suffering Servant: there are no short cuts to Easter Day. To understand the Resurrection we have to live through his Passion and Crucifixion, and then his Ascension into majesty. Nor can we ignore Christ's physical absence among us: today we meet him and each other in the *spiritual* Communion of the Eucharist. Whether the medium is the physical consecrated bread and wine or the internet and our computers, we ultimately encounter Jesus in the depths of our being. This isn't an external, physical process – spiritual communion happens within us.

The relationship into which Jesus invites us is not a worldly bond between a king and his subject: *I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.* (John 15.15). Jesus invites us to a very different way of being with him. In today's reading, St Paul talks about the power of the risen Christ: *God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.* (Ephesians 1.20-23).

In what may seem ironic for us, this great power did not come through the usual ways of exercising dominance. The selfish ego normally drives the human will, but this is not the way of Christ. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes: *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus: who existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross.* (Philippians 5. 2-8)

Had we had the good fortune to meet Jesus of Nazareth, would we have seen an "empty" man devoid of personality – a bland, characterless being? Far from it! The more the selfish self disappears, the more space opens up for God. Making space, letting the mind of Christ come into us, requires a step back from our usual human ways of thinking and being.

Preaching at St John's Cathedral, Hong Kong last year, Tom Wright observed: "Instead of following the "time" of the world, following the values that divide and damage, we live in God's time, the time of the kingdom, in God's moment. This ultimately means living the values of the Kingdom of God in our world." In what is for many of us the prayer we know best, we ask that "Thy Kingdom come". Living that kingdom life, willing God's kingdom here, 'on earth as it is in heaven', means that in all that we do, we work for that kingdom. Discussing the Parable of the Talents, John reminded us last week that we must never underrate the gifts that we have been given to use in his service.

If you look at the photo at the end of your service sheet, you can see a second image of the same Christ the King. If the weather's good, sometimes the sun shines in from the rose window at the west end. Its rays fall directly on the figure of Christ. His features disappear, dazzled by the brilliance of the sun. He becomes transfigured, transformed - Christ the King, in his glory. At the end of today's service we'll pray the well-known Collect for what some of us still call "Stir-up Sunday":

> Stir up, O Lord,
> the wills of your faithful people;
> that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works,
> may by you be plenteously rewarded.

Let us pray to be stirred up, transformed *so that, with the eyes of our hearts enlightened, we may know what is the hope to which he has called us, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints.* Stirred up so that in Tom Wright's words, *instead of following the "time" of the world, following the values that divide and damage, we live in God's time, the time of the kingdom, in God's moment*.

Amen

Christine Portman, Reader

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – 2nd Sunday of Advent – 6th December 2020

Jane Quarmby, Reader

Today we celebrate John the Baptist, at first glance rather a strange character when viewed with 21st century eyes. Born to old parents, dressed in camel skins which must surely have been a tad whiffy in the heat, eating locusts and wild honey, drinking only water and living in the wilderness, shouting about the need to live better lives because a new superhero was on the way who would save the world. If he was around today he'd probably be sectioned and treated for mental health issues.

But as always there are many layers to the accounts of John the Baptist. Right from the start, he is a special baby, born to Elizabeth, a relative of Mary. He was only six months older than Jesus, and we read in other gospel stories that before he was born he "leapt in the womb" when Mary, newly pregnant with Jesus, arrived to see Elizabeth. He dresses like Elijah, one of the greatest of all the prophets, equal to Moses, who performed great miracles and spoke out against the Israelites worshipping false gods. The Israelites believed that Elijah would return just before God re-appears to them. It's been 400 years since the Israelites had a prophet and now they had one – one who could well be Elijah. He only eats locusts and wild honey, which also places him in amongst the prophets like Daniel.

John lived in the wilderness, but drew thousands to see him and hear him as he preached repentance and urged the people to turn to God, to change their lives before it was too late. People flocked out of the towns and cities to see him and hear him. Why? It wasn't as though that would have been an easy trip – they had no cars or trains or buses, they would have had to go by horse or donkey or by foot, taking food and water with them. And why did he live in the wilderness, where people had to go to considerable trouble to get to him, instead of going round the towns and villages himself, to reach as many people as possible? Well, the

wilderness had special meaning to the Jewish people – it was to the freedom of the wilderness that God led them from their slavery in Egypt, where they became a nation. But also the wilderness has a special attraction to people in towns – they dream of the countryside as peaceful, beautiful, with a slower pace of life and safer that the cities. People still go to the city, especially youngsters, in search of money and excitement, but as they get older they hanker after the more rural pace of life, slower, with more time to get to know your neighbours. We saw it recently when the second confinement was announced – over 700 kilometres of traffic jams as people left Paris to head for the countryside.

So people go to hear John, and he has a following of disciples, and everyone is stunned by his prophetic power. His message is the last of the wake-up calls, for people to turn their lives around and be ready when God comes. It's urgent, it's about to happen, there is very little time left. Repentance is about turning your life around, about leaving behind the old life submerged in needing more money, more things, and doing harm to others whether intentionally or not. And John baptizes the people in the river Jordan, as a symbol of leaving behind their old and sinful lives and moving into a new life following God. It's a new Exodus, leaving behind the slavery of sin, into a new life.

John, like all the prophets, is not afraid to speak out about where the people have gone wrong. Their priests and leaders too come in for his criticism, and later on we see that his fearless condemnation of the relationship between Herod and his wife Herodias, leads to his death. He wasn't afraid (or perhaps he was but felt compelled anyway by God) to speak out against evil, and wrongdoing. We don't hear much these days about evil, we call it all sorts of other things. The mass killing of people who happen to be of a different racial group is called genocide, or ethnic cleansing. Attacking people and injuring them is called assault, or abuse. People in authority stealing from the very people they are elected or appointed by are called corrupt. Politicians inciting people to riot or do violence are called rabble rousers. The list goes on – but in plain English, these people are murderers, thieves, and are doing evil things. Evil isn't something we talk about, and last week after the service some of us had an interesting discussion about whether evil exists. We concluded that you only have to look around you to see that it does, but few people call it out. I read on the news that a brave official in America has stood up and said that President Trump is inciting violence and it has to stop. He'll probably lose his

job for that, as have other officials recently. But he had the courage to speak out about what he sees is wrong.

Greta Thunberg, David Attenborough, Prince Charles, are all modern-day prophets, speaking out about how we are killing the very planet on which we live. It's not comfortable hearing, and you might say it's not evil – but we are busy eradicating all life in the pursuit of what? More stuff to possess, when half the world has nothing? Just to read the news is to see that evil does exist in our world, in all manner of forms. The pandemic isn't just infecting people, it's also shining a spotlight on other evil – deliberate infecting of people, a sharp rise in domestic violence in the home, more poverty and hardship as people cannot pay their bills , feed their children or heat their houses, losing their jobs as recession bites whilst others live in the lap of luxury with private yachts.

And what would John the Baptist have to say about the world we live in now? Would he be pleased to see that not only the Jewish people but all people have taken his call to repentance seriously, to stop doing evil and to follow God, and are now all on the right path? Or would he see the same old mess and muddle, with evil still happily seated at our dinner table?

Evil does exist in this world and if we really are Christians, it's up to us to take a stand, like John and all the other prophets. Christ came to take away the sin of the world. He didn't come as a great General, to fight and kill, but as a new born baby, born into an ordinary family. He came to show us once and for all how to live our lives in love and peace, how the only way to defeat evil is by doing good, not only to the people we love, but the people we really rather dislike at times. It's not an easy path that we take when we follow him, sometimes it's frightening, but we know the difference between good and evil deep down, we know the difference between right and wrong. We don't need to live in the woods, wearing itchy camel skins and eating bugs, but we do need to remember that John the Baptist left us the gift of baptism. When we are baptized we turn from evil. That doesn't mean we turn our backs on it, or ignore it when we see it, but that we take it on and defeat it, speak out against it and show through our lives that God's way is the better way. Let the baby born in a stable 2000 years ago whom we worship and whose birthday we celebrate soon, be our guide. Jesus Christ, our Messiah, brother and friend, who is with us every step of the way.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – 3rd Sunday of Advent – 13th December 2020

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

A few years ago, I spent three days at a Bishops' Advisory Panel – the final step in the selection process in the Church of England. This is where candidates participate in a quick succession of interviews, presentations, discussions, and a personal inventory, at the end of which they are recommended (or not) for ministry training. I remember only one question in the personal inventory: What epitaph do you want to have engraved on your tombstone? One really wanted to say something meaningful or at least clever, as answers were meant to provide some material for discussion with the advisors, who were there to ask, again and again: "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

I couldn't offer them much: my name will suffice, I answered. There is no tradition of elaborate epitaphs in Romania. Most graves only have a plain wood cross.

What would John have offered, given the chance to choose his epitaph? 'I am not the Messiah. Neither am I Elijah. Nor the prophet.' The Jerusalem high priests' advisory panel would have found the answer rather unsatisfactory. John does not bring proof of his calling, he keeps pointing to Another. "Among you stands One whom you do not know."

And who are we? What do we say about ourselves? How would we define our identity as a church? What drives us to act as a community? What is our calling? Are we always aware of the One who stands among us?

Perhaps this Sunday's readings can provide a little help to discern our calling. This is one of the few instances when the readings are not only related, but they dialogue, they even seem to be in a polyphony: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord", says Isaiah. "Our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with shouts of joy", says the psalmist. "Rejoice always", writes the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians. This is Gaudete Sunday. Time to rejoice!

Is John the Baptist's voice dissonant, do you think? One can hardly imagine a dishevelled prophet, coming out of the wilderness only to cry: 'Repent!', as wanting to encourage people to rejoice. Reputedly, a prophet is a killjoy. That is, anyway, what king Herod and his wife Herodias thought about John the Baptist and, consequently, had him put in prison and executed.

But no, John's voice is in tune with the other voices we heard this morning. He sings of renewal, of joy that comes through the light which enlightens everyone.

Isaiah addressed people on their return from exile, who wanted to rebuild all that had been destroyed. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, who had suffered loss and were about to lose the hope to see the Parousia, that is, the Son of Man coming in his kingdom, with their own eyes. John gave testimony before officials who had been sent to ask him to prove his credentials as a potential Messiah candidate. One can sense the expectancy, the hope, the dreams …

What do we hope for, by the way, what are our dreams, as a church?

You might have recognized the first verses from the prophet Isaiah as the scripture passage that Jesus reads at the beginning of his public ministry: on a Sabbath, at the synagogue in Nazareth, his hometown, opening the scroll, he finds the place where it was written: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.' Then he began to say to them: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."[1]

Who are the poor, the captives, the blind, the oppressed? Is this about restoration and reversal for those who are economically deprived and socially oppressed? Yes, it is. At the same time, it speaks to our lives as well.

Yes, we are captive. Yes, we may know the captivity of guilt, of anger, of addiction, of betrayals, of dysfunctional relationships, of consumerism. We might be in the prison of boredom, of uncertainty, of fear for the future, of fear of death. The darkness that needs to be dispelled can be in you and me.

It is you and I who are the poor. I am impoverished, not on account of my unfulfilled wishes, but in my vulnerability, in my lack of tolerance, compassion, willingness to forgive …

I am often blind to the gift of life and to the blessings so abundantly given to me; and also to the suffering of those near and far, and to God's work in their lives.

As Jesus says, the scripture is fulfilled in our hearing only when we receive it, by recognizing our truth, who we really are. Some need to encounter Christ in an experience of God's forgiveness and healing; some will know Him in an experience of God's comfort and care, through our providing for those in need.

[1] Luke 4.14-21

Can we truly and deeply rejoice on this Gaudete Sunday of the year 2020? A year when mouths have been full not of laughter, but of sorrow. A year that has dimmed the lives of so many.

Winter's dark and cold have taken possession of our days. Likewise, fears and an utter sense of loss encroach on us. We have pretty much exhausted our resources. We have been exiled to a strange and hostile land and we long to return to a place where struggle and oppression are no more. We yearn for something new.

We are Advent people, we are an Advent church, 'still waiting for the One to come in revealed splendour of absolute divinity along with the eternal kingdom'.[2] In a few moments, we will all unite our voices to express our longing: "He shall come again in glory" and "Thy kingdom come".

Just like the church in Thessalonica, we still have to learn how to live in a time of expectancy. Paul makes it clear that waiting is not something passive, it is a time of preparation, of continual conversion, continual change of heart. This waiting is a time for growing in faith, and a time for celebrating God's goodness. A time for "rejoicing, praying without ceasing, giving thanks in all circumstances". A time to acknowledge God's longing to heal the broken human condition – not only by accepting to be recipients of His reconciling love that leads to Jesus Christ's birth, but also to be bearers of that love in our time and place.

How are we pointing to the Light that dispels every darkness? What are we saying and doing that helps to raise up the downtrodden? How are we working with God to bring about justice, peace and healing? To set prisoners free ? However imperfect I may be, whatever my unfaithfulness to God, my mistakes, my sins, I am invited to testify to the Light with joy.

Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day. It comes from the knowledge that God is faithful to us. Among us stands One we do not know. One who understands and shares our silence and tears, our darkness and struggle. Do we hear Him calling us from hopelessness into hope, from joylessness into joy? Calling us to be the change we seek in the world, to embody the dream we've been waiting for? There is still so much in us that is not ready to receive Him.

Ours is a God of restoration, reversal and renewal. Therefore, rejoice, pray, give thanks. We must be children, women and men of joy and of hope, in this time and this place, as imperfect and frustrating as this time and this place may be.

The One who calls us is faithful.

[2] Karl Rahner, The Mystical Way in Everyday Life

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – Fourth Sunday of Advent – 20th December 2020

Canon David Pickering

'*Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be according to your word.'*

This morning, we had a choice: either to read the set psalm or to use a Canticle Psalm - the Magnificat. So today we heard the wonderful Stanford setting in G, sung by a girl soloist from the choir of Salisbury Cathedral. His use of the clear young voice, rising above the rest of the singers, is so effective because this is, after all, the Song of Mary. So today we have a timely opportunity to reflect on her moving and symbolic words. They don't actually form part of our Gospel reading for today: to hear the words of the Magnificat from Luke we'll have to wait until the Sunday before Christmas next year in our three-year cycle of readings.

But Mary does have some important and moving words in our Gospel passage today and in many ways what she has to say to the angel is quite different in tone to the words we find in the Magnificat. The canticle has many parallels with the song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2.1-10, when she brings the young Samuel to the priest Eli at the temple. These two texts have a number of similar phrases and both use a poetic format. But in today's gospel passage we have a down-to-earth dialogue. As Mary responds to the angel her words seem to flow directly from her heart. The passage creates a wonderful story and, I hope, offers a message for all of us.

Mary is "perplexed" and perhaps not a little afraid at the appearance and greeting of the angel. Who wouldn't be? Then things grow even more puzzling for her. She is to have a baby, a totally unexpected child. From this encounter with the angel comes the idea of the virgin birth of Jesus, yet what is perhaps more important for us to focus upon here is that Mary is being asked to play an essential part in something thought by human minds to be impossible. Yet through the power of the Holy Spirit, all things *are* possible with God. From this 'impossible' birth will come one who, *"will be great....Son of the Most High.....on the throne of David ....reign over the house of Jacob...his kingdom will have no end."* He will be the 'Special One.'

So how does Mary respond.? The answer lies in the final verse of our gospel reading - the text I chose to open this reflection: *Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be according to your*

word. Mary responds with humble faith and obedience. With faith: *Here am I, the servant of the Lord*, and with obedience: *let it be according to your word.*

In today's New Testament reading, St Paul closes his farewell doxology in his letter to the Romans with the words, *to bring about <u>obedience</u> of <u>faith</u>.* In many ways obedience and faith are as good as dead if they try to stand alone. They are inextricably intertwined.

By her faith, Mary confessed that she was the *the servant of the Lord*, and in obedience, she would *let it be according to (God's) word,* so accepting what she was called to do and be. True faith needs obedience. Without it, faith is empty, even vain - a hollow profession of beliefs offering little more than lip service to a creed. In fact, obedience that is not born of true faith can be a burden and a struggle, for faith calls us to obedient action in our lives, even among what may seem to be the impossible demands of our contemporary world.

If we believe God will bring us through the present Covid pandemic, we can't simply sit back and wait for it to be sorted out by others. Our faith calls us to obediently act, with responsibility and in a caring manner. If we believe we can overcome the challenges of climate change, then we must, in obedience, take the appropriate actions in the way we live our lives and use the finite resources of the planet. If we believe the hungry of our world should be fed, that everyone should be adequately housed and employed, then we need to work for a more equitable way of re-ordering the economic systems of this present world. If we believe there can be an end to the violence that overshadows so many people's lives, then we are called to work for real justice in our world at all levels.

As we ponder in our own hearts what God may be calling us to do, we might reflect on some of Mary's words in the Magnificat:

He has brought down the powerful
from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with
good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – Sunday, 27th December 2020

The Revd John Smith

It is so good to be able to worship with you today. I have often wondered why it is in the Anglican church when Jesus shows up the priests disappear. It happens in the time after Christ's arrival at Christmas and after Christ's resurrection at Easter. In fact, this year I received an email from the bishop of my home diocese telling me and all the priests in the diocese to take this Sunday off. I am glad to say this is not the case in the Marseille chaplaincy. And I would like to say how blessed I feel to minister with colleagues who ensure that the gospel is preached every Sunday in this chaplaincy. We are so blessed with the leadership Jamie has brought to our worship together and with not one but two wonderful lay readers Christine and Jane who always, always have thoughtful encouragement and challenge to give us. And now added blessings with Roxana curating with us. David, Patrick and I sort of fill in the small holes left.

I am sorry for those churches that do not have services today and are missing this wonderful reading from Luke, for it includes one of my very favourite passages - the song of Simeon, otherwise known as the Nunc Dimittis. The Nunc Dimittis means a lot to me. As a teenager, I used to go to my parents' non-denominational Sunday School in the morning, to my father's services in Methodist chapels on the North Yorkshire circuit in the afternoon and I got to sing in the church of England choir only for the service of evensong.

Hearing the words of the Nunc Dimittis we are left with a real sense of completion. Simeon, to whom it had been revealed that he would see the Messiah before he died, not only got to see the Messiah but to cradle the salvation of the world in his arms. Imagine that. How powerfully the Holy Spirit, which had led Simeon into the temple at this time, must have rested on Simeon. It must have been the Holy Spirit that gave Simeon the visionary words when holding the babe in his arms, "a light for the revelation to the Gentiles". The salvation of Jesus began with Israel but it was always God's intention to extend his salvation beyond Israel to the rest of the world.

The other thing I love about this passage is this walk on part for the remarkable woman Anna. As a widow, Anna knew pain and loss but she had not become bitter. As an elderly woman she had not lost hope but served God day and night with fasting and prayer. Anna was probably the first evangelist speaking about the Messiah to all who were seeking. It is interesting to me given the church's history, how God chose a woman to be his first witness to him as Messiah and chose women to be his first witnesses to his resurrection.

If you don't mind, I am going to set this wonderful passage aside to raise an issue that has been on my heart for the last few weeks. It may not help that I am coming to the end of my year-long, bible reading plan. With the Old Testament ending in the minor prophets and the New Testament ending in Revelation I am in an apocalyptic frame of mind.

The issue that is bothering me is something that Jamie mentioned a couple or more weeks ago. He said that he knew or had heard of a previously believing couple who had decided that they could no longer believe in God because of the pandemic. They could not comprehend how a loving God could allow such death and devastation on a global scale as has happened in 2020.

Let me say at the outset that I do not believe that the pandemic is God's punishment for our sinfulness though it could be and I believe it would be justified if it were. My first reaction was why should the world expect God's mercy when the vast majority of the world and especially the developed world, has turned its back on God and is doing so increasingly? Idolatry, materialism, greed, lust, avarice, immorality etc. etc. thrive whilst we turn our back on God and progressively trust in our own self-sufficiency. Rather than turning away from God we should be coming to God to confess our ingratitude and wickedness and to plead for his forgiveness and cleansing.

Why God allows suffering in the world is one of the big questions that we Christians wrestle with. For me it is on a par with why does God allow Satan and man to rebel and go our own way? We do our best to understand these questions but, for me, they are mysteries that have not been revealed to us. In Biblical vocabulary, a mystery isn't something no one knows. A mystery is something no one could know unless it was revealed to them. If you could know it by intuition or personal investigation, it isn't a mystery, because mysteries must be revealed. As an example, something like the pandemic can be known but its cause and purpose in God's terms can still be a mystery in the Biblical sense.

It is surprising how many things that we take for granted are called mysteries in the Bible. God's purpose for the church is called a mystery (Ephesians 3:3-11), the bringing in of the fullness of the Gentiles that Simeon saw is called a mystery (Romans 11:25), the very living presence of Jesus in the believer is called the mystery of God and the gospel itself is called the mystery of Christ (Colossians1:27-2:3). Life today is full of mysteries; but it will not always be so. A day will come when all questions of this age will be answered. What we can be sure of is that all unanswered mysteries are coming to an end under the rule of Jesus. God is beginning the end, the resolution of all things, the gathering together (resolution, summing up) of all things in Jesus.

Habakkuk, one of the prophets I read last week, saw the loss of all agricultural produce equivalent to massive and total economic ruin in Judah. He also foresaw the impending deportation of the people of Judah to Babylon. But in the midst of desperate circumstances, rather than turning away from God, Habakkuk finds joy and strength in God. He is mature enough in his faith to allow adversity to strengthen his trust and dependence on Yahweh. To quote George Adam Smith, a Scottish theologian, "Not in spite of misfortune, but because of it, should we exult in 'the god of our salvation'". When Habakkuk's worst fears become a reality, he himself becomes an illustration of living faith.

I have allowed myself a quiet smile when I have seen the churches getting ready to reopen this year. All the precautions we have put in place and how carefully we have sanitised everything. I was wondering if Jesus came through the door whether he would say "Woe to you, Anglicans, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside you are full of greed and self-indulgence. First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may become clean". Or maybe "Woe to you, Anglicans, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside you are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. So, you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of lawlessness".

Is the sterility that we have sought to achieve in our physical facilities a metaphor for the sterility that we have in our worship and personal discipleship? Have we sought to fight the virus that is in the air whilst ignoring the virus within us individually and collectively? Is our interminable washing and sanitising of our hands to be compared with Pontius Pilate?

Coming into a new year and a new world in many respects, we have the opportunity to rethink how we act as church and how we live out our faith. The pandemic like nothing else has highlighted and in some ways accentuated the plight of the poor and the marginalised. John Wesley insisted that “the gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness”. Christ calls the church to be a social alternative to a pagan society. For the Christian, life is a process of seeking justice, mercy and peace whilst serving the destitute and the needy, the prisoner and the refugee, the homeless and the orphan, the hungry, the broken and the loveless. Whatever our church and personal lives are reshaped to be in the coming months and years, let these people together with Jesus Christ, always be our focus.