

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE  
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection – 9<sup>th</sup> January 2022**

**The Baptism of Christ**

*Reader Jane Quarmby*

Today we hear from Luke about John preaching about the Messiah and the baptism of Christ. As he says, everyone was expecting the Messiah to come soon, and were eager to know if John was the Messiah. But John was very clear that he wasn't, he was just the messenger. In fact he was God's last messenger, the last one sent to warn the people that they needed to come back to God and how he wanted them to live.

To emphasise the point of just how inferior John perceived himself to be in relation to the Messiah, he tells the crowds that he isn't worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals. That might seem a bit odd to us, nowadays, but at that time only slaves, the lowest of the low, would untie sandals. There were no lovely tarmac roads then, no road sweepers, no little trucks ambling up and down pavements hosing them down after market day as we have here. People wore sandals to pick their way through dust and dirt, to farm and to garden, and by the end of the day their feet would be filthy. So no-one would want to touch those feet – and so it was a slave, who had no choice, who had to undo the sandals and wash the feet of their owners. So John is making it a huge gulf between him and the Messiah, which must have added to the awe and expectation of the crowds. If this man who preached so well and did so many great things was just like a slave, how much greater and more amazing would the Messiah be?

John loses no time in giving them an example – I baptise you with water – he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The Old Testament prophets Joel, Ezekiel and Isaiah had all predicted that in the last days, God would pour out his

Spirit on his people. Fire is a powerful cleanser – we’ve seen so many times recently how fires can wipe out enormous areas of land, out of our control certainly. So this coming Messiah has great power. But fire is also an image of judgement, and this is something that we don’t really spend too much time on nowadays, the judgement of Christ. We focus more on his teaching, how to live good lives, forgiveness, all the comforting side of believing in him. But he and John were clear that he wasn’t just coming to heal and comfort, he was also coming to judge. Just as in the wheat harvest when the heads of corn are whacked to dislodge them from their stalks and then thrown up in the air to separate the useless outside bits which would blow away from the corn inside. Literally separating the wheat from the chaff; so the Messiah would throw humanity up in the air and separate out the good and useful from the bad and useless. The useless would then be burnt, disposed of. Which is a very sobering thought. We will be judged. What if today were to be the last day, the day when Christ returns to judge us? No more time to set to and clean up our act, to make up for the things we aren’t proud of?

A very long time ago, when I was at school, our eventual grades would depend upon our results in exams. So you could amble along for a couple of years without putting in too much effort, providing you could swot like mad for a few weeks before the exams and still get straight A’s, ready for university or a good job. Then the academic authorities brought in continual assessment and portfolios, which meant that students had to consistently perform at the higher level. Much harder to do – to consistently work hard and perform at a high level. Which is where we are at with God and his judgement by Christ. We are on continual assessment – there may not be time to swot up and improve our grades. Some of us of course will have led good and Christian lives and have nothing to worry about – but perhaps we need to be sure of that!

Then we have the baptism of Christ, marking the start of his ministry. On the surface, there is a stark contrast between the image being painted by John of the Messiah and how great he will be, and this 30 year old, apparently ordinary man, coming along with the rest of the crowds to be baptised by water. No roaring fires, no loud trumpets, no hordes of angels or anything at all out of the ordinary. No special treatment. Just one more man coming to John, to be dunked in the river. He humbly presents himself, and prays. All the way through the gospels, we are told of Jesus praying, praying hard and long. He prays constantly, talking to his

Father, asking for guidance, for help. It's certainly an object lesson to me, that if Christ himself, the Messiah, put so much effort into praying, shouldn't I be doing the same? It makes me think that rather than getting all bound up in my small everyday doings, perhaps I should be thinking about doing it alongside Christ, inviting him to be my companion along the way.

I do wonder what Jesus was praying for though? This is the start of his ministry. He's had 30 years of normal human life, living with his family, taking on the role of head of the family after Joseph died, caring for his mother and siblings, working, spending time with friends, all the usual things. And now he's being baptised and is going to enter the final lap of his earthly life. Does he know how it's going to progress? Where it's going to end? He's going to take a path which will take him away from his family and trade to a life of wandering around the region, preaching, healing, performing astonishing miracles, getting into trouble with the authorities. Does he know about that – is he praying for help with that, or guidance, or is he rather dreading it, nervous and needing support? Is he full of trepidation? Or is he looking forward to it? Is he like so many after him, feeling the call of God to serve Him, not at all sure it's the right thing for him but finding it an irresistible call?

We'll never know, we humans can only think how we would be feeling. But reassurance and confirmation come as the Holy Spirit in bodily form, descends upon him like a dove. I wonder about that image – does it mean the Holy Spirit looked like a dove, or does it mean it fluttered down and landed as gently as a bird lands on your hand? Either way, he is filled with the Holy Spirit. And then comes the voice from heaven, confirming Jesus as God's dearly loved Son, bringing Him great joy. So whatever doubts and dilemmas Jesus may have been facing, he is now identified as the Messiah, as God's Son and he knows that he is doing God's will and pleasing him. His life has changed forever.

And thanks to him, so have our lives, and all the millions who have believed in him and done their best to honour him and obey his commands over the centuries.

Amen.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE  
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection – 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Epiphany – 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2022**

*Reader Christine Portman*

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.* How often have you heard those words at the start of a sermon or a reflection? Taken from this morning's psalm, of course they're not just words for preachers! They're a potent reminder that God's Law should underpin our speech and thoughts so that everything we say and even think is acceptable in God's sight. His glory is revealed in so many ways and our lives should reflect what we have been shown.

Throughout Epiphany the readings have focussed on revelation and proclamation, the telling and re-telling of God's glory. Today we've heard about the prophet Ezra reading the scriptures at the Water Gate in such a way that the people listened *with understanding*. Then we saw Paul explaining to the Christians at Corinth how God is working his purpose out through the combined efforts of the very different people called into his church. In the gospel we see Jesus reading from Isaiah, declaring: *Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing* as he proclaims the start of his public ministry. And in today's psalm, the heavens themselves are *telling the glory of God*, the firmament proclaiming his handiwork. Each day we live *pours out its song to the next*, each night *unfolds knowledge to another*.

The Word is alive, at work everywhere, never confined to scripture, to worship in church or to private prayer. God is waiting to reveal himself at all times - if only we, like Ezra's people, are *attentive*, open to listen and to be moved. There's a symbolism surrounding the place that Ezra chose to read the Law. The Water Gate was the source of life-giving water for the newly re-occupied Jerusalem. It was also the place where justice was administered and oaths were taken. The people, returned from Exile, are thirsty for a fresh start. On the first day of the month they have asked Ezra to stand before them in a place where they find justice and refreshment. The entire community listens for hours, deeply moved to worship



and ready to act on his words. In the Book of Ezra, we're told that when the people re-built the city, they didn't start with the defensive walls. Their first act was to put back the altar on its original foundations, the next to reconstruct the Temple.

In his commentary on this reading, Hugo Bouter points out: *We may set up the Lord's Table, and gather to His name alone in the acknowledgement of His authority and of the liberty of the Holy Spirit. We may try to rebuild the house of God and the city of God, the temple of the living God, so that others see what the Church should be like. But will it be to our benefit, if at the same time, we do not have this intense desire to hear the Word of God and to act accordingly? For that is what characterizes a true spiritual awakening.*

The people are experiencing renewal, rebuilding their community with God's Word at its heart. Though they are moved to tears, Ezra tells them *do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength*. The psalmist likewise tells us that *The statutes of the Lord are right and rejoice the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure and gives light to the eyes*. This is the light of revelation.

Throughout these weeks of Epiphany we have heard of many different ways in which God has revealed his nature: the Christ-child drawing the Magi to him, the voice from the heavens and the Holy Spirit descending at his baptism, the transformation of water into wine causing the disciples to recognise who Jesus really is. Next week we'll hear about Simeon and Anna at the Temple – in their advanced age recognising God in the baby Jesus. Those of us who are getting on in years should take heart! And all of us should be aware that we may encounter God in many forms. We might meet him in an act of kindness, a sudden insight as we read scripture or poetry, in the beauty of music or the natural world. But to feel God with us we need to stay *attentive*. Recently, when I was in Kenya, someone made me smile when he asked me what *busy* meant. He said it stood for Burdened Under Satan's Yoke!

We need to make space in our busy lives. Today's reading from Luke comes immediately after the Holy Spirit has led Jesus into the desert where he resists the temptations of the devil. Time and again he turns to the quietness of prayer to reconnect with the Father. Like Jesus, we too need to refuel – our spiritual life cannot run on empty! Notice how, after his ordeal, again it's the Holy Spirit who leads Jesus *filled with the power of the Spirit* back to his home town, back to his

roots in Nazareth where he will announce to an astonished synagogue that he is the *anointed* one through whom the prophecy of Isaiah will be fulfilled.

None of these wonderful revelations of God at work is an isolated incident from the history of our faith. All are signs of the Holy Spirit actively at work among us. In today's Collect we prayed: *Almighty God, whose Son revealed in signs and miracles the wonder of your saving presence: renew your people with your heavenly grace, and in all our weakness sustain us by your mighty power.* But where do we find that sustenance if we find ourselves in a lonely desert of discouragement or when we're faced with situations we know we should resist? How do we persevere when the going gets tough? We know we're called to use our God-given gifts to continue to be his hands at work in the world today, but we're not all apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers or healers and sometimes we can feel pretty inadequate!

But as St Paul reminds us, each one of us equally, despite our diversity, still has access to *the greater gifts*. In this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, his message about the Body of Christ is very timely! Next week Roxana may talk about those *greater gifts* and the *still more excellent way* that St Paul writes about so beautifully in 1 Corinthians 13. The way of Love is a road back to clear sightedness, a way that frees us from oppression, loosens the bonds that tie down our spirits.

Keeping our hearts and minds open to that Love is key. It's quite fashionable now to be seen to be always busy, but St Bernard of Clairvaux once warned: *Excessive busyness leads to spiritual suffering, loss of intelligence and the loss of grace.* Even God needed time to rest on the seventh day! Our current Archbishop took some time for a sabbatical last year and wisely commented in an interview: *I think I would want to say to clergy . . . and to laity: We can only do what God enables us to do, and the rest is his problem.* God needs our time – and space. Busy minds don't offer the Holy Spirit a place to stop and stay – nor do minds that are closed.

In the synagogue, all eyes are fixed on Jesus and there's a certain pride that this son of Joseph, one of their own, has become such a powerful preacher. But very soon, when they realise that they will have no special favours, and that like Elijah and Elisha his work is to be much wider, the citizens of Nazareth drive him out of town, furious that he's talked about a mission beyond his hometown and even beyond the Jewish people. Blinded by their expectations, they're receptive neither to his message nor his love. Let us pray to free ourselves from being too sure of

our view of the world to recognise where God is at work, or too BUSY to find time to see what he wants to reveal. And let us make a receptive space where the Spirit can find and use us.

Amen.



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

*30<sup>th</sup> January 2022*

*Presentation of Christ in the Temple  
Candlemas*

**Reflection**

If you do not live in France, you might miss some of the excitement of the Candlemas feast. Perhaps you see it only as the last festival related to the birth of Christ, bringing the Christmas celebration to a close. Christmas decorations should be put away, as well as the church's white and gold stoles and altar cloths.

Here in France, every child could explain, with twinkling eyes, that this is "la fête des crêpes", Pancake Day. After gorging ourselves on "kings' cakes" throughout the month of January, we embark on several weeks of pancake flipping "en famille". The shape and colour of the pancake evokes the sun's light returning, at last, after the long winter gloom, and the pancake tradition goes back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century, when the famished pilgrims who gathered in Rome to celebrate the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, with torch-lit processions, could feed on pancakes.

In Marseille, there is even more excitement: people gather at the Vieux Port at 5 o'clock before dawn to welcome the Gospel which is brought ashore on a boat, thus re-enacting the beginning of the evangelisation of Provence, with the legendary arrival of Lazarus and other disciples of Jesus. The Gospel and a wooden statue of Mary, holding the Christ child on her lap, which was discovered in the 13th century on the shore, are then taken in procession to the abbey of Saint Victor, where green candles are blessed and distributed, as well as biscuits in the shape of a boat, the "navettes".

Wherever we are, we can celebrate today a joyful and meaningful festival. The many names by which this day has been known throughout Christian history lay out its richness: the

Purification of the Virgin Mary, the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, Candlemas (with the blessing of candles), the Meeting of the Lord or the Great Encounter, as the Eastern churches call it. These names highlight some of the many themes that run through today's Gospel reading: purification, presentation, light, encounter.

Luke's story of the Christ Child being revealed in the Temple calls for thoughtful and patient reading, to allow it to unfold its many layers of meaning. In a very Jewish scene, of a family who faithfully fulfils the practices of their faith, the evangelist has woven many contrasts and interplays: law and grace, age and youth, celebration and judgement, keeping faith with the past and breaking new ground.

At the centre of all this is the Child. Substantial words are spoken about someone so tiny. A child born in poverty is brought to the place of God's dwelling and recognised to be the One who will embody God's consolation and salvation, recognised as the Light that will enlighten the Gentiles, and as the glorious Presence of God for his people. This Light will reveal the inner thoughts of many. The windows into the soul will be thrown wide open.

The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple is marked by the extraordinary witness of Simeon and Anna, who persevere in piety and in the service of the Lord, even as they are getting on in years (Lk 1.7).

Even if Luke makes no mention of Simeon's age, the tradition has provided a portrait which the poet T S Eliot is faithful to: Simeon is 'one who has eighty years and no tomorrow' (*A Song for Simeon*). As for Anna, her age is worth mentioning and remarkable for her days – even more extraordinary is that she has spent more than 60 years incessantly worshipping in the Temple.

Simeon is one of 'those who have clean hands and a pure heart, who have not lifted up their soul to an idol, nor sworn an oath to a lie'. He can, therefore, expect 'to receive a blessing from the Lord, a just reward from God', to quote today's Psalm. After a life of prayer, Simeon is inspired by the Spirit to grasp the moment and to do what his life, so far, has been leading to: to recognise the Messiah.

Anna is a woman of great hope and expectation, aware that there are things yet to be accomplished and fulfilled, aware of the need for the coming redemption. Seeing the Child, she turns to praise: God has come to bring about the return of his people from exile.

Anna and Simeon are not the only wonderful examples the Scriptures provide of people who responded to God's call in later life: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua – like Anna and Simeon, they all opened to a new vision of God's purpose for them. God has a special calling for those who, in later life, with a wealth of experience, learning and gifts, have fruitful years ahead. God summons anyone at any time to service.

Anna and Simeon have awaited all their lives, we are told, the intrusion of a faithful God. In our age of instant gratification, we cannot even imagine what it means to wait such a long time. They can now witness to the arrival of peace on earth. It was their long experience of constant and committed prayer and contemplation that enabled Simeon and Anna to recognise the Christ when he came to the Temple. Their faithfulness and trust are richly rewarded: they are granted to see the new beginning which God had long been preparing for Israel. The dawn of a new covenant is breaking. This Child, whom they behold, would bring light, not only to Israel, the chosen people, but to all the nations. The joy and peace of God, which had been announced at Christmas to the shepherds, is now confirmed by Simeon to be a gift to every human being.

Having seen the Christ and spoken the words of the Spirit, Simeon and Anna are liberated to “go in peace”.

I would like to challenge the tradition that sees Simeon as asking to be allowed to die in peace, the very moment after encountering the Saviour he has been so eagerly waiting to see.

Of course, many of you are familiar with Simeon’s Song, or the Nunc Dimittis, either from our Compline services on Wednesday night, as an expression of our confidence in God at the end of the day, or perhaps from funeral services, when it whispers our hopes of eternal life: “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word.”

You may not be familiar with the Lutheran tradition of reading or singing the Nunc Dimittis after the congregation has received communion. Today, we, too, will listen to it, for in the Eucharist, like Simeon, we see and touch God’s promise of eternal life.

I encourage you to read again the Song of Simeon, and I hope you will recognise its language of freedom, rather than a desire of liberating death. Simeon is describing his own experience as one of being released from bondage, an experience of profound liberation that happened when he realised that God could come to us devoid of all majesty and could allow himself to be held in our eager hands. It is an experience of liberation and purification. There is now place for the faithful God to bring to birth something new in Simeon’s life. When God touches our lives, we can be sure that the best is yet to come, wherever we are on our life journey. Like Simeon, we, too, can receive the freedom to fully live a life surrendered to God.

The Song of Simeon is an affirmation of life, that overcomes doubts, that cuts the ties the world keeps us enslaved with. It is a dismissal, as well: we are sent out into the world in peace, to live as those who are beginning to know God’s salvation; to kindle our candles from the light which Simeon has testified to; to be filled with the light of Christ’s love and let shine its truth in the world. We are sent on a journey within God’s time of light and peace.

God is the journey and the journey’s end.

Amen. *The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate*

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE  
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection – Second Sunday before Lent – 20<sup>th</sup> February 2022**

*Reader Jane Quarmby*

Our readings today all emphasise the power of God shown in creation. Genesis, whilst it might conflict with modern day understanding of the immense timescales inherent in how this beautiful planet of ours in all its diversity and balance, its miraculous symmetry and ability to regenerate despite our abuse of it, came into being, does have important points to make to us. We may think we are masters of the universe, but nature has her secrets and immense power which we don't fully understand. For example, research is now showing that trees have an underground communication and pastoral care system. They can alert neighbours to attacks from insects and birds, telling them to produce toxins, channel nutrients to sick trees, and work together for the good of the forest. Whales, the Bible's Leviathans, sing to each other across vast distances.

One of the lessons from Genesis is that God, having created a beautiful fertile Garden, in Eden, placed the man that he had made into the garden to tend and watch over it. As I know only too well, gardens don't stand still, they are constantly changing and need a lot of hard work to keep them looking good. And that was the job God gave the man. I have a little sign that a friend gave me saying "you are closer to God in a garden" and that works for me. To be outside in the fresh air, listening to the birds singing, nurturing plants so that they will reward us with colour, beauty and scent, or good things to eat, is a real pleasure. Even at this time of year, when it's all about cutting back dead growth and hauling wheelbarrows of manure to spread on my flower beds, I get an enormous amount of satisfaction seeing order come from the mess left over from last year; and from seeing the spring bulbs pushing through heralding the flowers soon to burst forth, catching the scent of the winter honeysuckle, and seeing seeds germinate in the glasshouse. It's also a good reminder to me that I am just the caretaker – I don't control the

weather, I can't make a seed germinate or a bulb put up new leaves and buds. And Adam, that first man, couldn't either.

But he did have a very close and personal relationship with God. God brought him the animals to name, giving him responsibility; the Garden was a holy sanctuary where God walked with Adam, he talked to him directly and was concerned that Adam had no helper that was just right for him. This God who had created all things, was worried. That is so like a parent, isn't it – to worry that your child is lonely and doesn't have a partner? So God not only created woman to be at Adam's side in his life and work, but also created the first marriage and binding covenant – he gives a bride to Adam, and Genesis explains that this is why when a man marries, he leaves his parents and becomes one with his wife.

So Adam and his wife are both custodians of the Garden for God.

The point which is made in Genesis about God the Creator is picked up again in our psalm today. It sings of how God made the mountains, quieted the raging oceans, and continues to take care of the earth, watering it, making it rich and fertile (I'm still waiting for that particular miracle in our garden), sending rain, and blessings of wonderful harvests and flocks of sheep. It's a real song of praise for God the Creator, and very respectful of the power inherent in all that God does. With God doing all the hard work, it then begs the question: what are we doing as his custodians?

Why are we polluting our world with toxic gases, heating it to the point of no return if we don't get a grip right now, doing so much damage that fires rage across hundreds of kilometres, chopping down or digging up the very plants which give us our oxygen and enable us to breathe? The Amazon was deforested more in January this year than any month previously. Storms batter every part of the world, fiercer and more frequent, glaciers and the Arctic are melting, extreme heat is being endured in Canada of all places. From my tranquil garden I can see a band of pollution if I look towards Marseille. What sort of gardeners are we? Is God happy with us? How will he judge us? How will our children and grandchildren judge our generation?

It's tempting to see our Gospel reading as telling us not to worry, God will make it all ok in the end. This short story about faith has an undercurrent of showing just how powerful God is. The disciples are in a boat on the Sea of Galilee which is



surrounded by high hills so when the wind gets up it can really whistle through creating dangerous storms. It wasn't a tiny rowing boat, but it was in danger of sinking. Some of the disciples on board were fishermen, sailors who knew these waters and for them to panic then they really were in trouble. Whilst they are dashing about bailing out and trying to save the boat and those in it, Jesus is curled up having a well-earned nap. He's been preaching and healing, and that takes a lot of energy, even for the Son of God. I would love to know what the disciples were hoping for when they woke him up. Was it as a last resort, or to make sure he was awake and could help in some way save the boat? Or for a final blessing before they all drowned? What they got wasn't what they expected – they received a telling off for not having faith in him. He calmly rebuked the waves and the wind, and the storm stopped. All was calm. Did he then go back to sleep as in all in a day's work? Leaving the disciples to work it out for themselves as to what had just happened. Did they pinch themselves to see if it hadn't all been a horrible nightmare? Or did they suddenly grasp that this was no ordinary man. This really was God in human form because no other explanation would fit. Only God could have done this, only God has such power over creation.

We humans can use the power of wind and waves, but we can't control it. Garry and I could only watch aghast as our newly installed and heavily weighted solar panels gracefully blew flat on their faces in the recent Mistral. Nothing we could do about it. A reminder of just how powerless we humans are in the face of the natural world.

But the disciples' reaction is only too common in the face of impending catastrophe. All too often we leave it too late to ask for God's help and intervention, we muddle along relying on ourselves – it doesn't occur to us that whilst we don't have the power to resolve a crisis, God does. Jesus told us just to ask in his name and it will be granted. But to do that means keeping him fully in mind and alongside us, not trusting in our own capabilities. If the ship is sinking then only God can prevent it, regardless of how much bailing out we do. Faith should be at the forefront of our minds, not a last resort.

But we also need to keep in mind that in the words of St Teresa of Avila "Christ has no hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which he looks with compassion on this world. Christ has no body on earth but yours." So we do all

need to do our bit in times of crisis – and to be good custodians of this wonderful, beautiful planet on which we live, with God’s help and direction.

Amen

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE  
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection – Sunday next before Lent – 27<sup>th</sup> February 2022**

*Canon David Pickering*

*Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem. Luke 9.30 &31.*

I feel these are very appropriate words for the Sunday before the beginning of Lent, which descends on us this coming Wednesday. I hope they will also help us in our reflections and prayers following the dreadful events in the Ukraine this week.

But, as seems to be a bit of a habit with me, may I first indulge in a moment of nostalgia!

As some may remember, the three Sundays before Ash Wednesday, had interesting and majestic names: Septuagesima, Sexagesima, and today, Quinquagesima. These names were introduced in Rome in the seventh century, and were retained by Cranmer in the Book of Common Prayer, which many of us probably grew up with. Sadly these intriguing titles have no place in Common Worship. They were probably introduced to encourage a long term view or focus on Easter. Unfortunately Septuagesima, and Sexagesima were wrong calculations, but today is accurately the fiftieth day before Easter. As a theological student, this was a comforting day, as it meant only fifty days to the end of term. But of course we needed to get through Lent first.

By contrast Common Worship names them the Sundays before Lent: the focus has been moved back from Easter to Lent. We need to remember that Lent is primarily a preparation for celebrating the resurrection. It helps us to explore the meaning of the resurrection in our living out the Christian life. It encourages us to rise to a new life.

So today, here on the Sunday before Lent, what are we looking forward to? We may no longer have the three majestic titles for the Sundays before Lent, but on this day, in all three years of our liturgical calendar, we have the grand event of the Transfiguration. What can be more majestic than the account of an experience of the glory of God?

Today's Old Testament reading tells of how Moses' countenance was so changed after his experience of the glory of God that he had to cover his face when in public view. Saint Paul takes this up in our New Testament reading, talking of a symbolic veil that prevented his fellow Jews from seeing the truth of Christ. *Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. (2 Corinthians 3.14).* Perhaps, in the same way we often need to unveil our thoughts, hearts and minds to see the ways of God, even to become aware of his glory.

Some may say, that in the light of this week's tragic events, 'Glory' is something that should be put on the back plate for the time being. But when we lose sight of the glory of God, we are in danger of losing all sight of hope. It's perhaps a fortuitous choice that as we move towards Easter, this year's Lent groups will be discussing Teresa White's *Hope and the Nearness of God*. We should note that at the very moment of Jesus' Transfiguration in this morning's gospel, Moses and Elijah foreshadow the forthcoming tragic events: *They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem. (vs 31).* From this point on the gospel story moves steadily forward to Good Friday.

The Gospel reading concluded with what seems to be an unrelated event; an encounter with a man and his highly-deranged son. The disciples can do nothing to help - this seems to be an absolutely hopeless situation. But into their darkness, Jesus brings a moment of glory. *Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astounded at the greatness of God. Luke 9. 42b & 43.* Here we can read the glory of God.

When he went up the mountain to pray, Jesus took with him his three closest disciples, Peter, John and James. And, just like Moses, *while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed. Luke 9.29.* Prayer is the starting point where we can begin to experience and understand the glory of God. Lent gives us the focus we need to spend more time in prayer, so that when, on Easter morning, we sing

that wonderful hymn, *Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son, endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won*, we have a fuller understanding of the glory of God present in the Risen Lord in our own lives.

The current dire situation very much needs this. Without confidence in the glory of God there can be no hope, and hope is not only essential in the present crisis, but also in the many other critical situations ruining so many lives throughout the world today: the hungry and homeless, the poor, refugees and those deprived of their human rights and dignity. All need our prayers, all need the hope of God's glory. Today in our liturgical and private prayers we especially hold the present calamity before God, but we do so in the knowledge that his glory will prevail in the end. Unless we believe this there can be no hope. In this or any other perilous situation we may not even see our way through, but our faith calls us to put our trust in God. We must pray that he will guide us and all involved to find the way forward to his ultimate glory.

*Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son, endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.*

Amen.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**  
**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**  
**Reflection – 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent – 20<sup>th</sup> March 2022**

*Jane Quarmby, Reader*

When we moved into our house here in Provence, one of the things that came with us was a small fig tree, an offshoot of a venerable old tree planted on top of a wall in a courtyard in England. We duly planted it against another wall here and left it to its own devices. It's now a respectable size and gives us baskets of fruit every year. Others have sowed themselves where they wished to and with no intervention from us are busy growing and giving us lovely black sweet figs every year. So, when I read the gospel reading for today with my gardener's hat on, I found it rather odd that a lovingly tended fig tree wasn't giving fruit. Was it because it had no other fig trees nearby to pollinate the fruit? No, because figs self-pollinate - they don't need others to bear fruit. Was it lack of water? I doubt it – we don't water ours – they have long roots so they can find water. Was the soil too poor? Well, fig trees will only fruit if the growing conditions are tough – too much good soil and all you'll get are leaves, no fruit.

So why, I wondered, still with my literal and gardeners' hat on, would a gardener who presumably knew his stuff, want to water, and manure a tree not bearing fruit? Better by far to leave it alone surely.

Or was it that the gardener was fond of the old tree and couldn't bear to see it chopped down, so he pleaded for one last chance, regardless of whether it gave fruit or not? Perhaps he ate his lunch under its shade, perhaps he had grown it from seed, or he just liked the shape. Or it is it, because this is one of Jesus's teaching parables, that the fig tree is in fact Israel. He is saying that unless the nation of Israel produced the fruit of repentance, then it will face judgement and destruction. It will be chopped down and destroyed. All through the Bible, Israel is often referred to as a vineyard or a fig tree that God will judge and find lacking.

To see the stump of a tree is I think very sad – it symbolises destruction, and to see a bare hillside which has been felled and cleared is horrible. I know that in time the seeds buried in the ground by birds and other animals will sprout and new trees will grow, but the very act of felling a tree is a deeply upsetting sight, as it crashes to the floor, branches breaking off and leaving a huge gap in the forest.

Jesus loves Israel and knows that although he is doing all he can to turn things around, to bring the people back to God; if they don't understand and act on his words, then they too will be felled, come crashing down and leave nothing but a bare stump. As of course does happen when some decades later, Rome finally loses all patience, turns on Israel and inflicts mass destruction and death. Israel and its leaders stubbornly keep going in the wrong direction, looking for war against the Romans rather than taking note of the new commandments that Jesus has brought – love God and love one another. Don't focus on the fruit of today, on consuming and buying "stuff", on amassing money, on ignoring the problems and hardship of your neighbour, on continuing on your own self-centred way, on taking the route of violence.

Just before Jesus tells the parable of the fig tree, he's told about Pilate ordering the murder of some pilgrims from Galilee as they were offering sacrifices in the temple. This was so shocking – as though the local prefecture had murdered one of our congregations in one of our worship centres on a Sunday. At the time, it was commonly believed that bad things happened to bad people, so the pilgrims must have been bad people and deserved what happened to them. Jesus firmly debunks that idea, along with the example of a tower falling on 18 people in Siloam and killing them. They weren't the worst sinners, that's not why they suffered, they weren't punished by God in these ways at all. In his view, everyone needs to repent, to turn away from evil and back to God, otherwise they'll all perish.

This dire warning is echoed by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians, reminding us of the things that happened on the way out of Egypt in the Exodus. Whilst the people believed in God and kept to his Commandments, all was well. God made the Egyptians set them free, parted the waters of the Red Sea, gave them food and drink in the wilderness. But left to their own devices, the people relapsed, grumbling and worshipping statues they'd made themselves, having wild parties and were destroyed for their sins. God can take away as well as give. Paul says

“these things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us...” And so, it goes on, reminding us that God cares for his people but will judge those who rebel against him, who don’t believe in him. It’s common theme throughout the Bible, one long plea for humanity to follow God, to practise good, not evil. Only then will we all find heaven, the kingdom of God, here on earth.

Going back to the story of the fig tree – does Jesus mean that he is the gardener, or is he the vineyard owner? Whether he means he is the gardener, sent by God to sort out the vineyard and is pleading for one last chance before the fig tree is cut down, or whether he is the owner, looking for signs of health and fruit, it doesn’t really make a difference. Either way, he knows at this point that the people he wants to save, to turn around to live better lives, to save themselves from destruction, aren’t really listening to him. He has some who follow him, but they don’t really understand what he is or what he’s about. How must he have felt? Perhaps it’s telling that in his story the gardener says finally that he’ll give it one last try and if it doesn’t work, then the tree can be cut down.

It’s the case in any good productive garden that a plant that doesn’t perform is weeded out. God’s garden is no different. The message hasn’t changed over the centuries since Jesus’s time. People haven’t changed. On the one hand we have war in so many countries, including in Europe now, hatred spilling out into violence, more powerful people abusing the weak, hunger, homelessness, refugees, poverty, squalor and hardship are still with us, caused by the choices made by those with power to put things right. As a species we are close to wiping ourselves out through the damage we are doing to the planet on which we live. On the other hand we have people working hard to bring help to those who need it most – working on the ground to dig wells, find better ways of growing food, cleaning up the oceans of plastic, giving refugees homes, sending convoys of aid to war zones, risking their lives to bring out women and children from Ukraine, developing new ways to heat and power our homes, battling against infection and disease on a daily basis. Small acts of kindness every day. It’s easy to focus on the bad because that makes headlines, but there’s a balance to be had.

It’s up to us whether we want to be a weed or a cherished plant in God’s garden.

I certainly don’t want to end up on the bonfire in the autumn!

Amen.



**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE  
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection – Fourth Sunday of Lent – 27<sup>th</sup> March 2022**

*Christine Portman, Reader*

When we put together the service sheets for a Sunday service, I usually prefer the older Collect, but not today. Of the two alternatives given, the one in more modern and direct language seemed best to hit the mark:

Merciful Lord, you know our struggle to serve you: when sin spoils our lives and overshadows our hearts, come to our aid and turn us back to you again; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

I know we are living in uncertain times, but the last thing I want to do today is to give a reflection that's full of doom and gloom – we are in Lent and looking forward with hope to Easter. Our reading for the Lent course this year has been *Hope and the Nearness of God*. What an inspired choice that turned out to be, Jamie! Yet unfortunately, there are people who don't like Lent. It can smack of personal privation, lack of flowers in church, an awkward time when we're encouraged to focus on deeper self-examination. The word many don't like at all is sin – but like so many of the Lent readings, again today's invite us to think about where we fail to follow God's way, and what it means to acknowledge that we are all sinners.

Now I'm sure the vast majority of people are essentially good-hearted. Most of us want the best for our friends, our families, our neighbours and our world. Usually we humans don't set out to make life hard for others. But just because we might not actively commit many sinful *deeds*, that doesn't mean to say that our *words* never cause harm. And our *thoughts*? Hmmm, those uncharitable judgements we pass on people who don't behave or think as we believe they should? I'll leave you to think about which of those three ways of sinning is the most likely!

Today's Collect gets to the heart of what every one of the readings has to say about our capacity for making life complicated. Despite all his advantages, what a total mess the Prodigal Son made of his! Although Jesus has told us that his *burden is*

*easy and his yoke is light*, many of us seem to have no difficulty in making burdens and yokes for ourselves. As the Collect says, we can struggle to serve God, and *when sin spoils our lives it overshadows our hearts*.

Yet many people nowadays are extremely uncomfortable with, and actually deny the concept of sin. Satan, sin and wickedness we're told are notions that belong to a past age. We're supposed to have moved on from such medieval ideas. These days one has *issues* that grow from one's upbringing and culture. Now I'd never want to minimise the effect that our past has upon our behaviour: modern psychiatry has given us excellent insights into how our minds work. But so does ancient scripture. We read in the Old Testament the Lord *will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.*' Our ancestors knew as well as us that unless resolved, violence and abuse inside the family and in the wider world can persist for generations.

Sin does exist – and it's not only out there in a world plagued by violence and selfishness. We possess that potential too and unless we grow in consciousness of the wrongs we have done and continue to do, we can't *turn back* to God. We have to acknowledge that in chasing our own desires we often miss the mark. Sometimes, as with the Prodigal Son, we have to hit really hard times before we're ready to admit that we were on the wrong path. But once we do (and this is the good news we find in all today's readings) God is always there, ever-generous, to welcome us back with open arms. Turning back to walk with God, repentance, recognising that we do err and stray, clears the way to hear God's voice again. Sin may keep us away from that abundant *loving kindness* of God but Lent invites us to find the time and space to draw closer to him and to discern his will for us. Like the loving father in today's Gospel reading, God is always waiting with open arms to welcome us back.

Throughout the Old Testament we hear how the Israelites struggle as they turn away from him. In today's reading from Joshua, at last they seem to have left *the disgrace of Egypt* behind them. God no longer needs to feed them *manna*. From then on *they ate the produce of the land*. For with God there is always hope – the hope of *thy kingdom come*, if only we'd let his *will be done*, if only we'd let him guide us there. The psalmist rightly says that we're often *like horse and mule which have no understanding*, but God never abandons us, he preserves us from trouble

and says: *I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go.* Do we want to take the guidance? If we do, we need to be listening out for his voice.

In these weeks of Lent he offers us an opportunity. We can make a conscious decision to take that up, in quiet, in prayer, in looking again at difficult scripture where we may find it hard to grasp the meaning. The simple, heartfelt prayer of St Richard of Chichester may help to focus our minds:

May I know you more clearly,  
Love you more dearly,  
Follow you more nearly,  
Day by day.

We are always invited to knock on the door. It will always be opened for us. As St Paul says, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! This must be one of the most hopeful verses in the Bible!

But Jesus gives a good warning in today's gospel too. I suppose most of us think that the Prodigal Son is the dissolute young man who throws away his father's inheritance on drink and loose women. The one who disregards all the rules in the book. The one with whom we don't identify? But what if the real Prodigal turns out to be the older brother, the good son who had always done his father's bidding? Lent calls us to examine ourselves with a critical eye – which is precisely what the older brother was unable to do. He's furious at the lavish welcome given by his father. What had he got for all his hard work? Absolutely nothing! He's angry and jealous, judgemental, unloving and unwelcoming. And he hates not only his brother, but his father too – simply for their goodness. Doing his father's will has, it seems, taught him nothing. Blinded by self-righteousness, he fails to see the truth of his situation: by staying with his father all the time he has always had everything he needs. We can read these gifts as the riches of God's grace towards us, but in his jealousy, the older brother is unable to value what he already has.

God save us all from self-righteousness!

Amen.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflections on the Cross**

**Good Friday - 15<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

**All Saints' Marseille**

*The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain*

**Address 1 – Crown of thorns**

The context in which we gather this year needs no introduction. It is just over seven weeks since we woke to the news that Russia had invaded Ukraine, after days of denial that this was its intention. Grim sights not seen on this continent for more than seventy-five years have reminded an older generation, and taught a new one, of the suffering and the horror and the futility of war. When the suburb of Bucha was liberated a few weeks ago, a protestant pastor wearing army fatigues was interviewed as he walked through its streets, strewn with unburied bodies, contemplating the destruction of an entire community. He turned to the camera and said: 'How could this be happening in Europe in the twenty-first century?'

How indeed? How did we forget, allow the hard won peace of the last 75 years to slip through our fingers? When I drive past the entrance to the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery on the outskirts of Marseille, with its rows of gravestones commemorating those who died in two World Wars, the majority of them aged 19, 20, 21, sometimes as old as 35, it is as if a cry goes up echoing the words from the Book of Lamentations: 'Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?' We held within our grasp a peaceable post War order in Europe based on mutual cooperation, shared values and respect for human rights and freedoms, yet we watch as populist politicians across the continent speak the language of hatred, xenophobia and scapegoating as if the lessons of history had simply been forgotten. Treating 'the Other' as an 'it' and not a 'you', dismissing our common humanity.

'Is it nothing to you?', ask the people of Ukraine. As we gather here in safety to contemplate the Cross on which Jesus died, is there anything we could possibly have to say to them, huddled in basements, weeping beside roadside graves, crying out in pain?

One thing about contemplating the Cross is that it assures us God is with us in our places of deepest pain. Some of you may know the artist Matthias Grunewald's late medieval masterpiece now kept in the Unterlinden Museum at Colmar in Alsace. Known as the Isenheim Altarpiece, it originally stood in the Monastery of St Anthony at Isenheim, in a hospital ward where people came to be treated for a painful disease known as St Anthony's Fire. The disease was caused by contaminated rye grain and resulted in a wasting of the body and gangrene of the hands and feet. In its central *Crucifixion* panel, Jesus hangs on the Cross, which bends under the weight of his suffering, his body depicted as racked by the disease which the patients in the ward would have been battling. It's a powerful statement that we have to do with a God who knows our pain, who bears it with us, and who does so out of love for us, until the end of time.

As we watch at the foot of the Cross, we hear Jesus cry out in agony: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' We are offered the mystery of a God whose knowledge of the human condition is so deep that he has known even the sense of the absence of God.

If nothing else, that is the message we would want to assure those in agony, in Ukraine, Yemen, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and all places where humans struggle under what feels an impossible load. We can't be there with them, but we can be here, praying for them, willing them on. And our faith is that God is with them too, every second of their agony, and will never let them go.

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 the concentration camp at 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. Wiesel wrote:

'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.'

## **Address 2 – Father, forgive**

On Friday, 8<sup>th</sup> April the railway station at Kramadorsk, a town in the east of Ukraine, was filled with civilians following instructions they had been given to leave the city, because it was understood it would soon come under Russian attack. Without warning, rockets landed on the building causing multiple deaths

and injuries. When the smoke and the dust had cleared, amid the cries of the injured and bereaved, the remains of a rocket were found on which the words had been painted, apparently by a member of the Russian military: 'for our children'.

Those who know my preaching will know that I preach a lot about Auschwitz. The reason is that, seventy-seven years since its liberation, it still seems to me to represent some kind of benchmark for human depravity. A testament to the almost unthinkable depths to which humanity is capable of sinking. And yet it happened. And the litany of names where violence has been unleashed in the decades since Auschwitz goes on, and on, and on - Rwanda, Srebrenica, Darfur, Aleppo, Sa'dah, Boucha, Mariupol, Kramadorsk. So I make no apology for preaching about these places. Each generation can and must learn from the tragedies of the past, to avoid repeating them in the future. And one place where we confront all of it is the Cross. It is the place where, year after year, we are brought face to face with the cost of human depravity. Are there lessons we can learn here that will help us understand what goes on in our world and within ourselves? Our relationships, our responses to violence? Does this story still have power to change us?

The writing on the rocket found at Kramadorsk was a reminder of how the impact of war passes through generations, in a seemingly endless cycle of violence, retaliation and retribution. 'They did it to my family, so I will do it back to them.' How can that cycle of violence be broken?

The way Jesus broke it was with two words: 'Father, forgive.' He met betrayal, injustice and violence with love. On the night of 14<sup>th</sup> November 1940, the medieval cathedral of Coventry in England was bombed by Hitler's Luftwaffe. Shortly after the destruction, the cathedral stonemason, Jock Forbes, noticed that two of the charred roof timbers had fallen in the shape of a cross. He set them up in the ruins where they were later placed on an altar of rubble with the words 'Father Forgive' inscribed on the Sanctuary wall. They became symbolic with Coventry's renowned ministry of reconciliation in the decades that have passed since that night.

Forgiveness is central to the Gospel story. It features prominently in some of Jesus's best known sayings – the parable of the prodigal son, the story of the woman taken in adultery, the exhortation to forgive not just our friends but also our enemies as being the only way to redeem the past and think creatively about the future. And the words of the prayer that he taught his disciples include the request to forgive us our sins as we forgive others for theirs. Not to add poison to the system by harbouring resentments, but to break the cycle of violence.

That's what forgiveness does. Jesus's first words in his final hours remind us that at the heart of love, which is the heart of God, there is forgiveness, that this is the very nature of the God in whose likeness we are made, and that when we choose any other path we are distorting that likeness.

Some of you will have read the book or seen the film of *The Railway Man* by Eric Lomax, about an Englishman who was a prisoner of war in Japan during the Second World War. The book tells of how, many years later, he met the guard who had tortured him and they became friends. There is also the story of Corrie Ten Boom, a Dutch Christian woman interned at Ravensbruck concentration camp because her family had been helping Jewish refugees, and who after the War was invited to take part in reconciliation work in Germany. Suddenly she came face to face with one of the camp guards who had caused her great suffering. He held out his hand to her, thanking her for the talk she had just given about reconciliation, unaware that they had met before in the camp. She wrote this:

'I tried to smile. I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so ... I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.

As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.'

We need to ask for forgiveness too. As we contemplate Christ's betrayal, suffering and death, we see more clearly the dangers that exist in the world around us and, if we are honest with ourselves, in our own hearts. It is only if we can see them clearly, as we do on Good Friday at the foot of the cross, that we are able to face them as Christ did and learn to do things differently.

### **Address 3 – It is finished**

The 1980 film entitled *Elephant Man* tells the story of John Merrick, a man living in late 19<sup>th</sup> century London who suffered from a severe deformity and spent much of his life in a travelling circus, on display as a freak of nature known as 'the elephant man'. A feature of his condition was that he could not sleep lying down, as it would asphyxiate him. He was rescued from the circus by a doctor, Frederick Treves, played by Anthony Hopkins in the film. Treves discovers that John Merrick is intelligent, cultured and deeply lonely. Treves spends time with him, talking and watching Merrick build a model of a cathedral which he can see

from his hospital window. Despite Treves's care, Merrick continues to be mercilessly exploited by a variety of people, either wanting to make money out of his condition or indulging in a form of sadistic scapegoating. Each time he is rescued by Treves, until at the end of the film a much weakened Merrick returns to the hospital, close to death. He thanks Treves for all he has done and completes his model of the cathedral with the words: 'it is finished'. For the first time he lies down to go to sleep, and dies.

Those words indicate that the so-called Elephant Man is to be understood as a Christ-like figure, who dies because of the sinfulness of others. There is something unbearably sad about this gentle soul who consistently responds to the cruelty around him with grace and inner strength, all the while becoming weaker. 'It is finished' is not just about the model Merrick is building, but also about the ending of pain, the release from suffering, the resolution of hurt and the reconciliation of a life of sorrow interspersed with moments of joy. How does this connect with our contemplation of the Cross?

It has been said that 'The crucified Jesus is the only accurate picture of God the world has ever seen.' We see on the Cross a God who shares the dirt and the pain, the weakness and the loneliness, the very death that we experience ourselves. As the German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, imprisoned by the Nazi regime for taking part in the resistance against Hitler, and executed only weeks before the War ended, wrote from his prison cell: 'Only a suffering God can help.'

Yet the Greek meaning of Jesus's cry is not 'it is over' but 'it is accomplished'. It is a cry not of defeat but of victory. There is paradox here. The one who seemed powerless is actually revealed in strength. He chose to come to Jerusalem, he chose to accept the costly suffering. He has suffered with words of forgiveness on his lips. He has shown what it means to be fully human, and at the same time he has revealed the true nature of God.

For there is a cosmic dimension (if you prefer, a profound spiritual truth) being revealed here too. The contemporary theologian Sam Wells describes it by reference to an event that took place on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1987, when a cross-channel sea ferry carrying 500 people sank in the Belgian port of Zeebrugge, 90 seconds after leaving harbour, because its bow doors had not been closed before sailing. Later inquiries revealed culpability and complacency at almost every level of management within the ferry company - an avoidable human disaster costing 200 lives.



And yet assistant bank manager Andrew Parker, a passenger on the ferry that night, did an extraordinary thing. He saw two metal barriers, and, below, in the gap between them, he saw onrushing water. Behind him were dozens of people. So he held on to one barrier with his fists and the other with his ankles, and made his own body into a human bridge by stretching between the two barriers. Some 20 terrified people, including his own wife and daughter, climbed over him to safety. How he found the courage and strength, how he still was rescued after laying down his life for so many, no one could say. But there was no doubt that in that disaster the world could see both the depths of human failure and the heights of human aspiration. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13, KJV)

Wells writes of this story:

When you come into the presence of God, do you assume God is just like us – liable to terrible and merciless wrath, but also capable of amazing grace? That's not what the passion of Christ tells us. We're a mixture of good and bad, but God is good all the way down, all the time, all the way beyond forever and back. Holy Week is the story of what happens when our mixed-up lives come in touching distance of a goodness that goes beyond forever, and what happens to that goodness, and what happens to us.

The passion of Christ shows us that Jesus is stretched out between heaven and earth, between the limitless possibilities of human goodness and the fathomless horror of human depravity. Jesus' body is stretched out like Andrew Parker's body, between the barrier of human folly and the barrier of God's grace. Jesus' body is stretched out like a violin string between the two. And the name we give that agonising stretching-out is the cross. If we were all good, it wouldn't be so poignant. If we were all bad, it wouldn't be so painful. We're still God's creation, we're still God's beloved, so we're worth saving; but we're still cowardly, cruel and crooked, so the saving costs God everything. Jesus is the violin string stretched out between heaven and earth. And the music played on that string is what we call the gospel.'

We find a similar image in the reflections of Michael Mayne, the late Dean of Westminster, who suggests that in Jesus's costly, self-giving love revealed supremely on the Cross, he has rebuilt the bridge between God and humanity. The loving, forgiving, compassionate, affirming, foot-washing, self-sacrificing Christ reveals all we need to know of God in the only terms we can understand

– that of a human being, speaking our language, part of our world. Now he offers his life back to his Father. The work of redemption for humanity is complete. The way Jesus meets his death, with trust (Lord, into your hands I commend my spirit) and with forgiveness on his lips, is his final act of self-giving love, and that is the very glory of the being of God.

You could spend a lifetime contemplating that mystery. Fortunately, that is exactly how long we have.

#### **Address 4 – Truly this man**

One member of an occupying army, who saw the truth of what was happening in front of him. None of the Sanhedrin, none of the disciples, none of the passers-by who mocked and taunted as this man suffered the kind of death reserved for traitors and slaves.

One person. Think of the people you have seen or met who stood out alone, against injustice, against the mentality of the mob, who confronted evil with good, regardless of the cost to themselves. The image that often comes to mind when we think of that is of ‘tank man’, the unidentified Chinese man who on 5 June 1989 stood in front of a column of tanks from the People’s Liberation Army in Beijing, the day after the government had launched a crackdown against student protests that led to hundreds of deaths as they cleared protestors from Tiananmen Square.

Standing alone against injustice. The 2002 film known as *The Pianist* is based on the life of the Polish pianist Wladyslaw Szpilman, a survivor of the Holocaust. In the final stages of World War 2 amid the ruins of Warsaw, he encountered a German army officer, Wilm Hosenfeld, who showed him kindness, prompted by their shared love of music. Hosenfeld enabled him to continue in hiding and thereby to survive the War.

One member of an opposing army. Yet it can be enough to make the difference, enough to re-establish our common humanity. It is what Eric Lomax and Corrie ten Boom discovered and modelled in the aftermath of that same conflict. Please God may it be so one day also in Ukraine.

The army to which the centurion belonged continued to persecute the earliest followers of Christ. But some three hundred years later, the recognition shown by that one man on this day was adopted by Roman Emperor himself, who declared Christianity the official faith of the Empire. The rest, you could say, is history.

Our task, having shared the insight of the centurion, is to go out and live this Gospel. We need to be alert, always, to the evil in the world around us and in our own hearts, as we have seen. The desire to dominate, the behaviour that arises when people adopt an obsessive mindset of scarcity, concentrating on what they lack rather than what they have and might share, becoming intent on securing what the other has and dominating those around them. The practice of scapegoating, which we can see going on in society all around us, and which we catch in our own hearts when we think of someone as 'the Other', an 'it' and not a 'you'. All the things that were going on in first century Palestine. All the things that are going on now in Ukraine, and so many other places of conflict across our world.

And, having looked honestly at it all, what goes on around us and in our own hearts, we need then to fix our eyes on Jesus, his teaching, his way of living and his way of dying, his rising and the giving to each one of us of the gift of his Spirit. For ultimately, when this day is over, the question the Cross asks of us is: What are we going to do about it?

The Cross is (as my colleague John Smith remarked the other day) where our sinfulness meets God's love. And that is what defines our Christian faith. For against all the odds, all the horror, all the apparent failure, the message of Good Friday is this: love wins.

In Christ we find the assurance, which no human agency is able to offer so convincingly, that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8.39), and that, in the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu:

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 loved us.

Amen.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE  
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection – Easter Vigil and Service of Light – 16<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

*Jane Quarmby, Reader*

Burial in Jesus' time was a two stage event. Caves would be carved out of the rock, big enough for two people to walk in, and ledges carved into the walls. Bodies would be carefully wrapped with perfumed spices and left on the ledge, the bones to be collected when nature had done its work, and put into a special box. Other bodies would also be placed on the ledges as time went on – hence the perfumed spices to make it possible to enter. So each cave could contain several bodies. But the one into which the body of Jesus was placed was brand new. He was the only occupant. The cave belonged to one of the members of the high council who could vouch for that and he was one of the men who put the body of Christ into it with all due reverence. There could be no mistake, there was no chance of mixing up other bodies which may not have been dead for this final astonishing miracle. Made all the more astonishing as it was the women who were first to witness and be comforted – the women who in that time were of no account, but who had bravely stayed with Jesus throughout his final horrific journey.

I was wondering how those women, who were the first to see the empty tomb and the two angels, and to know that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, must have felt. The I came across this meditation from Nick Fawcett's book "No ordinary man" and I think he puts it rather well. He writes from Mary Magdalene's point of view:

"I'll never be able to say what it meant to me, after the horror and heartache, the darkness and despair, to hear that wonderful, astonishing news – Jesus, alive! I'd lived in a daze until then, unable to take in the horror of what I'd seen, the anguish and the agony which he'd borne with such quiet dignity and awesome courage. He'd warned us to expect the worst, and I suppose in our hearts we'd known what was coming but we'd refused to accept it, hoping against hope there might be some other way, a path less costly, less awful for us all.

But as we walked that morning to the tomb, all such thoughts were gone, buried along with our Lord, life dark, cold, empty, bereft of meaning. We were blind to everything in our grief, scarcely aware of... light flooding around us, but when we reached the stone, rolled away from the tomb, we saw that all right, and for a moment we just stood there gazing in confusion, not knowing where to turn or what to say.

That's when it came, the news that took our breath away: "He is not here, but has risen."

We scarcely dared look at first, afraid it might all be a dream, but finally we found the courage, and it was true, he was gone! – just the grave clothes left to show he'd been there.

You can imagine how we felt, our hearts pounding with excitement; but there was yet more to come, things yet more wonderful.....

He had risen, just as we'd been told, death unable to hold him!

Only it wasn't just Jesus who rose that day, it was all of us: for there in the garden life began again, life which we thought had died in us for ever – hope reborn, faith renewed, love rekindled, joy restored – and we knew now these could never be destroyed – the proof was there before us!"

In the prayer that follows this meditation, Nick Fawcett writes:

"Gracious God, through the resurrection of your Son you not only raised him to life; you brought also renewal and restoration to his broken disciples. From the depths of misery you brought jubilation; from the pit of despair you brought hope; from the trough of despair you brought faith. Life which had seemed without meaning suddenly pulsated with purpose again, the future rich with promise as never before. It is a miracle which has been re-enacted in countless lives across the centuries and which continues to be repeated today; for you are at work still in the world and in our own lives, reaching out wherever there is need, wherever people are broken, wherever hope has died, bringing afresh your gift of life. Gracious God, work within us now, refresh our hearts and revive our spirits, and make us a new creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Amen

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE  
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection – Second Sunday of Easter – 24<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

*Christine Portman, Reader*

Perhaps it's a strange question to start with, but why do you believe in Jesus? Millions don't – and it's scarcely fashionable in either England or France. What keeps drawing you back to Sunday services or Complines? Why do you believe? Why do you pray? The answers can only be found by questioning our deepest selves. Jesus knows us for who we are, just as he knew his disciples. He was aware that the one forever stuck with the name Doubting Thomas had refused to believe in the Resurrection. Thomas wasn't there the first time Jesus appeared to the others, so he's very sceptical: *'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'*

I don't know about you, but I sympathise with him. We have the advantage of the New Testament and thousands of years of Christian witness, but before the Gospels were even dreamed of, would you have taken their word *as gospel* – or gossip? Jesus doesn't condemn Thomas for having doubts. He tells him to do exactly what he'd wanted: *'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side.'* He gently invites this person with the questioning mind to test his faith. Understanding his needs, Jesus calls him to trust: *'Do not doubt but believe.'*

Now re-visit the scene and notice that Thomas doesn't take up Jesus' invitation. Instead, he's quite overcome. No need for further proof! He exclaims: *'My Lord and my God!'*. *'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe'*, replies Jesus. And yes, we are truly blessed. Through the Holy Spirit, we know Jesus' living presence in our lives. For believers, this is a far deeper reality than that of the material world in which we now live. The question that raises is what difference does it make? The final verses of chapter 20 were probably its conclusion: *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe*

*that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that **through believing you may have life in his name.*** How might having *life in his name* differ from simply being alive?

Today's gospel began: *When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews....* These were frightened people, their minds disturbed by Jesus' death, in fear for their own lives. But Jesus brings a great gift: *'Peace be with you'.* *After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.* He repeats: *'Peace be with you',* and says, *'As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'* As he gives his peace, he brings joy and hope, and with that comes a commission: to share that peace with the world.

One day, as I talked with a friend about injustice, he said to me: *'But it's impossible to deny that humankind has come on in leaps and bounds'.* In one sense he was right – progress in science has been incredible. Discoveries have had life-changing impacts on millions worldwide. In many societies we see better care for those who struggle in life. Some cultures show more tolerance towards those who are different. Yes, the general report card in many societies would read: *Progress has been made.* But might it not add *Could do better?*

How have you reacted to the scenes coming out of Ukraine? I know my initial response has been deep shock and anger. Feeling righteous anger against the evil being done there is just. But however reluctantly, when I see the lives of innocent people smashed to pieces, I also recognise deep within me a visceral desire for retaliation – a wish to hurt and destroy in return. *We civilised people* haven't lost the capacity or desire to hurt and harm. The weapons we possess now have the power to obliterate this world. Have we made so much progress in the area that really matters: how we relate to God and our fellow men and women?

Three times in today's gospel Jesus repeats the words *'Peace be with you'.* Despite all the advances made, we still have a long way to go to establish that *peace on earth as it is in heaven.* Misuse of Earth's resources is an urgent issue we can't afford to ignore. We spend billions on the production of ever more deadly weapons. Living under the protection of military alliances, we fail to invest in life. Is this really the deep peace that Christ wishes for us? We may personally be cushioned from reality by living relatively comfortable lives, but ours is a fallen world where violence, war and exploitation mar so many lives.

So what are we being called to do as Christians in this unjust world? Peter and the apostles show us the way in today's Acts reading: *We must obey God rather than any human authority* they say. What they were doing was undoubtedly really dangerous. The priests had already given them *strict orders not to teach in this name*. But their time with Jesus, the post-Resurrection encounters and then the coming of the Holy Spirit have filled them with a passion to share the risen life of Christ. Hiding away in a house where the doors were *locked for fear of the Jews*, those previously fearful disciples have now received his peace and are filled with the sure hope of the Resurrection. Jesus has been revealed in his true nature: as The Book of Revelation says: *the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth*. Jesus, the Christ, is with and in God: *the Alpha and the Omega' ..... who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty*.

Sometimes, when I read accounts of the early Church I wonder where so much of that fizzing dynamism has gone, and perhaps even more importantly, that fundamental hope and trust that God, rather than our own efforts, will see us through. They had their difficulties: St Paul's letters show us that! But they were fired up by the message of the Resurrection and filled with the Holy Spirit - unencumbered as yet by churches with leaking roofs and collapsing floors. Don't get me wrong – I've sung in cathedral choirs and been transported by services that give due glory to God. And yet .... Surely our faith should be spilling out way beyond the walls of our churches.

Today, as we read the psalm we said: *I shall not die, but live and declare the works of the Lord*. God has been calling his people throughout the ages not only to acknowledge him personally as creator and Lord, but to pass on that peace. Peter and the apostles lived and breathed the resurrection life; they were truly alive as they shared the Good News. *Through believing they had life in his name*. Our encounters with the risen Christ: in prayer, in everyday life, in his presence in other people, should be equally transformative as it was for Thomas when he exclaimed: *My Lord and my God!* Jesus tells the disciples: *As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*' We're his lights in the world today. In what we do and say, let them shine way beyond the boundaries of church walls.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.



**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**  
**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**  
**Reflection – 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter – 1<sup>st</sup> May 2022**

*Jane Quarmby, Reader*

Looking at John's gospel reading for today, I was taken back to holidays in my childhood, always spent fishing in Scotland. The family was woken up at an unearthly hour, rods, dog, and family piled into the car and deposited on the bank of the loch, smelling of gorse and that unique reedy, peaty tang as the mist over the water cleared and the sun rose. If we were lucky, we'd have fresh trout cooked over the campfire for breakfast. So for me this account of Jesus appearing for the third time to his disciples felt familiar. Although at the age of 7, I had nothing else to do but play all day – not for me at that time anything deeper!

Unlike the apostles and particularly Peter. John in his gospel, written with the benefit of a long period of time afterwards, has given it much thought and applied the wisdom of hindsight: and so we find many loose ends tied up, and echoes of previous events.

Peter, not sure what's going to happen next, gets tired of hanging about and basically says, "Right, let's get back to work" and so they go back to their fishing. Religious leaders in those days had a full time job as well as their preaching and studying, and it was time for Peter and the others to earn some income. But despite going out in their boat and despite their lifelong experience of fishing and knowledge of the lake it seems an odd thing to do, they caught nothing all night. Bread and fish were the staple diet so this was a real worry.

Then the mysterious stranger on the shore, who has found both bread and fish, quietly cooking on the fire, calls to them, and following his advice they cast out their nets again and catch a record number of fish. An echo of a previous miracle of Jesus involving bread and fish when he fed the five thousand. It's only the disciple Jesus loved who realises at once who it is, but it's the ever impetuous Peter

who leaps over the side and heads to shore. He can't wait for the boat to get to shore to see his Lord. Interestingly, he gets dressed first. Is this a sign of his respect for Jesus, his Lord? It's certainly an echo of Adam in Genesis, needing to cover his nakedness before God.

The disciples, relying on their own knowledge and work, have caught nothing, it's only when Jesus gets involved that they catch more than they ever thought their nets could hold. But it's also important to realise from this account that whilst our efforts without Jesus are nothing to write home about, he is perfectly capable of achieving miracles without us. It's a sobering thought! Many of us who did the Lent course took from it a heightened awareness of the need for us as Christians to take action, to really be the hands and feet of Christ, to be the "doers" here on earth, tackling the evils and the problems in the world today. But what this scene by the lake shows us is that in fact it isn't all down to us – we need the direction and support of Christ to do any good at all. Otherwise we end up like Peter, jumping in without thought, getting soaked, and having to go back and do it properly. Jesus didn't need them to provide him with the fish and bread, he already had them, grilling nicely. He doesn't need us to provide for him, but we need him to provide for us. It's a humbling thought. Made even more humbling by the fact that Jesus served his apostles their breakfast – once again, the servant king.

Having served breakfast, Jesus then turns to Peter and in an echo of the events in the courtyard before the death of Jesus that must still be giving Peter nightmares – the fire around which they are all sitting, the dawn breaking and no doubt every cockerel within hearing distance crowing, we get three questions. Not this time, "aren't you a follower of Jesus" to which Peter had to his everlasting shame replied "no", but "do you love me?". Jesus gives him, not punishment for denying him, but one of the most beautiful examples of rehabilitation that has ever been recorded. The opportunity to cancel his threefold denial with a threefold affirmation of his love. Peter (as ever) doesn't quite get it and is hurt by being asked so often; but Jesus is asking him to examine himself, to be sure of what he is being asked to take on, because he is about to give him the care of his flock, huge responsibility fraught with danger and ultimately suffering and self-sacrifice.

I know on an infinitesimally tiny scale, the difficulties we face in finding someone to look after our menagerie of sheep, cows, birds, dogs and cat just to go on holiday.

We need someone to be kind, reliable, know when and how much to feed, water, exercise, protect from harm and wolves, give medication when required, get the vet if needed, make sure everyone is safe and happy, look after the sappy old dog who pines, the lambs with no regard for health and safety sliding down the walls, etc etc. It's a rare individual who can cover all these options with energy and good sense. Would Peter have been a contender for me? My issues pale into insignificance compared with being entrusted with the fledgling Christian movement with all its problems to face and the sheer scale of reaching the whole world with the gospel.

Jesus always referred to himself as the Good Shepherd, and he did lay down his life for his sheep. Now he is putting Peter into his shoes as the shepherd of his much loved flock. Peter, with all his impetuosity, mistakes, and huge heart, is to take over. He is to feed the sheep and to care for them. To his credit, Peter doesn't hesitate now or refuse. The care of Christ's flock is handed over. Christ's forgiveness of Peter's betrayal is publicly shown for all to see. Peter is empowered to do this daunting work – Jesus has confidence in him.

Jesus has taken a fisherman, a man used to working with his hands, not a highly educated rabbi or wealthy individual with power, to be his shepherd. It's a striking example again of how God uses the least expected people to do the most extraordinary things. Peter might not have been everyone's first choice, but he loyally rose to the challenge and faithfully cared for the flock, learning all the time, making mistakes, but with the Holy Spirit guiding him, cemented the foundations of the Christian faith. He used the power given to him wisely, generously, kindly and without holding back, and his faith showed the way for millions after him. His exuberance and strength became pluses, not minuses.

God picking the most unlikely people to do his work is also shown in the conversion of Paul, depicted in our reading from Acts. This young man was on a personal crusade to stamp out the fledgling Christian movement and was well trained for it – he had all the learning of the scriptures, all the zeal of a fanatic as he sought out the members of Christ's flock to destroy them and it. He brought fear, persecution and death with him and had boundless energy on his self-appointed mission. He showed no mercy. Yet it was him that Jesus chose to be the apostle to the Gentiles, to take the gospel to foreigners and to do it well. It took a direct approach from

Jesus on the way to Damascus but once done, Paul's training, education and experience enabled him to play a unique role in taking the gospel to the wider world. He was turned completely around, and now it was the very same qualities which had made him such a ruthless opponent that made him such a powerful apostle and preacher. He was such a compelling speaker that he blazed a trail for Christianity throughout the known world.

It just goes to show that nothing is impossible for God. No-one is beyond the power of God to reach, to redeem and to use for his own purposes. That goes for all of us – with God's help we can do more than we ever dreamed possible or likely.

Amen.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**  
**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**  
**Reflection – Fifth Sunday of Easter – 15<sup>th</sup> May 2022**

*Canon David Pickering*

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*

*John 13.34 & 35*

For me these two verses, from the conclusion of this morning's Gospel reading, sum up what the Christian Resurrection life is all about.

In these Sundays of the Easter season, we not only have gospel readings of Jesus' resurrection appearances, but also clear indications of what the resurrection should mean for us. Last Sunday we heard how the Good Shepherd gives eternal life to his sheep. ***My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.*** John 10. 27 & 28. And this resurrection eternal life was pointed to in the Acts reading with Peter raising Dorcas back to life. The resurrection of Jesus is a sign and promise of eternal life for everyone.

This week's Gospel reading takes us back to the Last Supper in John's gospel. Judas has just left the room, so events are inevitably set. In his final conversations with the remaining eleven, Jesus speaks of his coming death in terms of glory: ***Now the Son of Man has been glorified.*** John 13.31 This will be fulfilled through his imminent departure from them: ***Little children, I am with you only a little longer.*** John 13.33. So before he leaves, Jesus gives them a ***new commandment*** John 13.34 on how they are to live: ***that you love one another. Just as I have loved you.*** John 13.34b For us today, hearing these words after Jesus' death and resurrection, we

recognise them as a call to all who follow him. To live the new risen life, to be known as his disciples, our lives must show **love for one another**.

But how is this a new commandment? To love others is nothing new. There are plenty of references in the Old Testament calling for love of others as being part of being faithful to God. In Leviticus the Lord says through Moses: **You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself : I am the Lord. Leviticus 19.18.** The final four words stamp this command with a kind of divine imprimatur or divine injunction.

We, of course, are familiar with the dialogue between Jesus and the lawyer that introduces the parable of the Good Samaritan. To test Jesus, the lawyer asks him, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Probably sensing that the lawyer is trying to catch him out, Jesus replies, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" The lawyer correctly recites the summary of the law, but wanting **to justify himself**, then asks, **Who is my neighbour ? Luke 10.29b**

If love of neighbour is enshrined in the summary of the law, what's new about Jesus's commandment in today's Gospel ? The answer can be found in the words, **Just as I have loved you, you should love one another. John 13. 34b.** We can so easily pass over the words **Just as I have loved you.** Jesus's love is a new kind of love. It is costly and sacrificial, like that of the Good Samaritan to an unknown suffering person. In love from the Cross Jesus can say, **Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing. Luke 23.34**

This new commandment calls for a sacrificial love towards those we don't necessarily agree with or get on with, even those who may reject us. So how should we regard those who, for one reason or another, we may regard as our opponents or even enemies?

One biblical commentator I consulted claimed there are thirty biblical verses about loving our enemies. In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, **But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Matthew 5.44.** Or the fuller version in Luke's Sermon on the plain, **But I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes you coat do not withhold even your shirt. Luke 6. 27 - 29.**

Tony, a priest friend, I once knew, was well known for saying, ***Jesus doesn't ask us to like everyone, that's impossible, but he calls us to love them.*** In my younger days, when I was in trouble at home, my mother would say, ***I don't like you, but I still love you.*** At times it must have been a real struggle for her!

The love of the **new commandment** is not just some heart warming emotion, that makes us feel good and fulfilled. Loving can often be painful and a real struggle, and when we see what's going on in the world around us at the moment, it can be especially hard to follow.

Jesus says that by this sacrificial love, others will see that we are his disciples. If we just love one another in our own narrow world, family groups or chosen friends - and this extends to Church too - then others will hardly notice that love. ***By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,*** said Jesus - so that love must be visible to all. Christian lives should be a witness to this costly love. The love we are called to should seek to bring about a better, more just and equitable life for the rest of humanity. This love should be shown especially to those who are the suffering victims of our world. We and anyone else who sacrifices their lives for others, will then be the true disciples of Jesus.

By God's love and grace we have been called to follow this new commandment and so live a resurrection life of new and sacrificial love.

Amen

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE  
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection – 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter – 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2022**

*Scott MacSween, Ordinand*

**'This isn't how the story ends'**

Have you ever read a good book? And have you read it late into the night and you can't put it down? And is it because you want to know how the story ends? Will they discover the murderer? Will the couple fall in love?

It's a natural reaction to want to know how a story ends. Even looking at our world today, how will the Ukraine situation end, how will Covid end, will Brexit *ever* end?

Sometimes these stories are so familiar we switch off when they are being read. Sometimes we think we know how the story will end, then we are surprised...

The healing at the pool in Bethesda is a well-known story in John's gospel. It describes how Jesus comes across a sick man at the pool by the Sheep Gate, who has been waiting for many years for the waters to be stirred up, so he can get into the water and be healed.

But he is never quick enough, and he has no friends to help him. Each time somebody else gets there first. They are not just carried in, but using the Greek word, literally thrown into the water by their friends. That's how you know who your real friends are – choose your friends based on how well they can throw you. It makes the healing sound like a free-for-all, first come, first served.

But the sick man doesn't have friends to help him. So he sits, and waits again for next time. The same story.

And then Jesus comes along, the man believes in him, and is immediately healed. This much we know from John's Gospel.



Except that... the story is not all it seems. There is a lot more happening than we notice at first. Like the pool, this is a story with a lot of depth.

For a start, let's look at the pool, by the Sheep Gate. Well, let's start with the Sheep Gate.

Because actually there is no Sheep Gate. The verse in the Greek refers to five columns, but it doesn't refer to a gate. In fact, the Greek word 'gate' does not appear in the text at all. Some translations talk about the sheep 'market' instead. But 'market' doesn't appear either! And the word for 'sheep' isn't used in conjunction with the word gate – and, even more strangely, the word used only exists here in this verse.

προβατικός - Out of 800.000 words in the Bible, this is the only time we find this word and so we don't even know for sure what it means. It's something to do with sheep, but that's all we know.

The Jewish historian Josephus doesn't even mention this place of supposed healing. The prophet Nehemiah wrote about a sheep gate, but that was 500 years earlier. So I think what has happened is that the earliest New Testament translators have taken the references to five columns, and something to do with sheep and said 'oh yes that must be the sheep gate that Nehemiah was writing about'

And that's what happens in our life sometimes – we see one thing, and we see another thing, and we try to make sense of it all, so we imagine a connection between them. Our brain needs to try to explain things.

So if in the story you've had a picture in your mind of a gate with little fluffy sheep going in and out, sorry to change that picture for you. The story is going to be a little different.

Now, how does this change the way you look at the story? Does it start to raise questions in your mind? It does for me.

Of course those people wanted to be made better. But maybe even more importantly, they wanted to be clean. That's why the pool was outside the holy city, Jerusalem. People who were unwell, or who had a disability, were regarded as ritually unclean and, under the strict laws of cleanliness in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, did not have access to the holiest places unless and until they had

been cleansed of their affliction. So they waited by the pool, day after day, year after year. And they told each other the familiar story that when the water was stirred up, *this* time they would be healed.

But this man did a different thing. In response to Jesus's invitation, he made a leap of a different kind, without knowing where the story ends.

As Christians, we know that the crucifixion is NOT the end of the story – we know about the resurrection. We don't have to know WHY Jesus was resurrected, or HOW. We just need to know THAT he was resurrected. All the other questions we have, we won't get answers for them but that's ok. Some of the early Christian theologians described this as "Faith Seeking Understanding". We have heard these stories many times but we still don't fully understand what was going on. The man didn't ask for his healing by Jesus to wait until he understood fully what was going on. He just accepted, as we all can, that maybe a different outcome is possible.

The others who were waiting at the pool did not recognise Jesus, they continued to wait and then probably lament that they had missed their chance yet again.

This story in John's Gospel reveals the effect Christ can have on people, and it applies to all the areas of our lives that need healing. Every one of us is in need of the wholeness he releases in us. Sometimes we can spend decades metaphorically like the man by the pool, stuck in our sense of helplessness at the circumstances of our lives or past. We all want to hear the words: 'Stand up, take your mat and walk'.

Some people say – "show me something first and I will believe", but people with faith say "I will believe and then things will happen". These are like the two types of people by the pool.

In a recent book by Dr Lisa Miller, scientists can now prove that people who believe in God or a higher power have stronger, more resilient brains and a faster recovery. It's a very recent discovery for scientists but this shouldn't surprise us, it's something that Christians have known for 2000 years.

Jesus' healing is not first come, first served. It is the message of resurrection and it's available to anybody. It's not about who can get to the front of the line first, this is an ever open, *wide* open gate (if I can use that word again!).

There is no formal demand from Jesus, and no formal statement of faith needed before the healing. Jesus doesn't say – "tell everybody that you believe in me and I'll see what I can do for you". And in the same way, there is no record of what the man may have said, just an acknowledgement that he was healed. Even later, when asked by the religious authorities, the man didn't know who Jesus was. That's like us, we don't have to know exactly WHO Jesus is to be healed by him.

The root of the Greek word 'sheep' is προβατων – and that actually has another meaning, not just about sheep – but about people - all moving in a certain direction, all walking the same path – we are all those sheep.

So maybe the story is referring to Jerusalem the heavenly city, not the earthly one "The holy city, the new Jerusalem" as it says in Revelation 21.

Just by opening your heart, by opening your mind, opening them .... to another ending to the story.

Because suddenly the man can enter Jerusalem, not because he is able to walk, or he is thrown or he is the first one there, but simply because he believes, believes in something that he doesn't need to understand before he accepts it.

And that's the thing to take away today, that when we realise that we don't fully know how the story ends, and we open our hearts to something greater than ourselves, we can take our first steps to being restored in the Risen Christ.

Amen.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE  
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Trinity – 26<sup>th</sup> June 2022**

*Reader Jane Quarmby*

A few years ago our eldest grandson and his friend came to us for a holiday. They were 15 and feeling very intrepid, flying out to France from England without an adult present and both we and they enjoyed their two weeks with us. Our grandson was going through what they now call “personal grooming” as a phase which meant hours in the bathroom doing his hair and whatever else young lads do in there. I was reminded of him when I read this chapter in Luke which whilst in my Bible is called “The Saviour on the way to Jerusalem”, could equally well be called “But first”. The reason I’m so strongly reminded of him is that halfway through the holiday they were both keen to go fishing, so Grandad agreed to take them the next day. The three of them spent a happy afternoon sorting out the rods and nets and whatnots, and in the evening Granddad explained that they’d have to leave the house by seven in the morning to get the best spot at the lake and before it got too hot.

The next morning came, and Granddad and friend were all ready to go at 7 am. No sign of grandson who apparently was in the bathroom doing his hair. Quite why he needed to do this just to go fishing is a mystery to me but obviously most important to a teenager. Time ticked on and Granddad, punctual as ever, went fishing with friend. An hour later, grandson appeared, beautifully coiffed and smelling, as my grandfather used to say “like Fifi’s poodle parlour” and was astonished that no-one had waited for him.

He learnt a valuable lesson that day – especially when I escorted him on foot to the fishing lake rather than driving him there.

It echoes, in a very minor way, the lesson Jesus is teaching his followers and would be followers in our passage from Luke today. One man agrees to follow him but first, wants to return home and bury his father. Another agrees to follow him but

first, wants to say goodbye to his family. You'd think that was reasonable, wouldn't you? Respect for one's parents was most important in Jesus's time in Israel, a holy and respectful duty was to bury one's parents decently and with honour. If I was going I knew not where, I would want to tidy up at home, I'd want to say goodbye to my family and friends so they'd understand that although I loved them, I needed to follow Jesus.

But both would be followers earn themselves a fairly stinging rebuke from Jesus. The dead must bury the dead – how does that work then? Jesus meant the spiritually dead should bury the physically dead. He is asking of his followers such a level of commitment that it takes precedent over all other relationships. The cost of true discipleship is high. Earlier he says to a follower that the Son of Man has nowhere even to sleep. Any disciple of his must be ready and willing to go anywhere at a moment's notice, give up their family and their home, security, friends and all that they love, to put Christ and his work, first and foremost. No “but first I just need to do this, that or the other”, it's drop everything and come now, not when you're ready. This isn't a human timescale, it's God's. The illustration of the ploughman would have helped throw light on this apparent unreasonableness of Jesus, this unsympathetic stance.

Hand ploughing with oxen takes both hands and strength– one to guide the plough itself and the other to guide the oxen. And you need to look straight ahead – if you turn your head to look behind you then your lovely straight line that you're making will get a wobble in it and a kink. If you take one hand off then you and your plough will go astray, and it won't be easy to turn a team of oxen back round, much less a heavy hand plough. Jesus is saying that if you follow him then you must keep your eyes on him and what he wants you to do, no hesitation or backward glances at your old life. A new life in Christ means just that, entirely new, not a hotchpotch of the old and familiar and the new, no taking out the good bits that you like of each one. You need to be very focused and your absolute priority is looking ahead, on to being a disciple, doing God's work, telling people about Jesus.

Jesus is preparing his followers for what's to come, on this meandering path to Jerusalem, for him and for them. Opposition from the religious leaders is mounting up, he and his disciples aren't universally welcomed wherever they go – and certainly not in the Samaritan village where he had intended to stop for a while.

Historically, the Samaritans and the Jews hated one another, were racially prejudiced against one another and fighting was common between the two groups. James and John reflected this, wanted to bring down flame from heaven to burn the village and the villagers who didn't want them, just as Elijah had done in the past. But Jesus isn't Elijah, he doesn't need to bring fire and destruction to prove God's power, his message is about love, not hatred and destruction. So the two angry men, keen to demonstrate power and inflict pain and suffering on a traditional enemy, are rebuked. Their all too human reaction of wanting to fight back is the wrong one.

It's an uphill battle for Jesus, getting through to his disciples what he is about, and what he isn't about. Whilst his message and commandments are about love and forgiveness, this isn't some idealist without any knowledge of the world. He knows exactly how hard it will be for people to put down their old lives and pick up new ones in his service. His standards are extremely high and he isn't demanding part of them, he's demanding all of them, heart, body and soul.

He still does today. How many people are prepared to drop everything to do God's work without a backward glance, without doing all the jobs that need doing first? To travel wherever He sends us? Or are we also "but first" people, who would like to follow Christ, to do his work, but on our terms, once we've done all the other things that we find important?

How does that make Christ see us? How does it make us feel when we want someone's attention but they are busy and we have to wait? I remember the reaction of a younger grandson who was the apple of his parents' eye, encountering perhaps for the first time, someone telling him he would have to wait to be played with until Grandad has finished reading the paper. Disbelief, puzzlement, shock, disappointment crossed a four year old's face in quick succession. Eventually of course he did get his game and shrieked with glee.

But as we get older, we all experience the sensation of wanting someone's attention but they are too busy for us at the time. In Joyce Mayer's little book of meditations, cheerily entitled "Good morning, this is God," is this:- "A friend of mine had a vision once while she was praying. She saw the Father go into the homes of the people of America, all ready to fellowship and talk to them. He got Himself a chair at the table and sat down. The people got up, and they came and

they went: they came and they went. They kept telling God “Later: stay right there just for a little while, God. As soon as I get this done, I’m going to talk to You.” The end of the day came, and the girl who saw this said it broke her heart, because she saw God, with slumped over shoulders, leave the home. And nobody had ever come to talk to him that day. Don’t get too busy. If you don’t have time to pray and spend time with God, then you are too busy. Take the time to tell God how much you love Him. God is never too busy for you.....”

So let’s not be too busy for God. Put him first and he’ll sort the rest of your life out for you. And you’ll be a true disciple of Christ, not just a “but first” one.

Amen.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE  
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection – 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity – 24<sup>th</sup> July 2022**

*Canon David Pickering*

As we progress through the liturgical year, some Sundays are given special themes, dedications or commemorations. A couple of weeks ago we had Sea Sunday, of course very appropriate for our chaplaincy based in the sea port of Marseille. Early in September there is Education Sunday as the new academic year begins in schools, colleges and universities. Today's Gospel reading begins: ***He was praying in a certain place.*** This prompts me to think of today as Prayer Sunday.

Forty years ago the Alternative Service Book introduced a theme with an introductory sentence for each Sunday. These were dropped with the advent of Common Worship in 2000. However, they've been retained in the Roman Catholic version of the Common Ecumenical Lectionary.

Today prayer crops up in every one of our readings: the Gospel begins with Jesus in prayer; in Genesis we have Abraham's persistent prayer to God not to destroy the city of Sodom. Five times he pleads with God: ***'Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I just speak once more. Suppose ten are found there.'*** God finally relents: ***He answered, 'For the sake of ten I will not destroy it. Genesis 18.32.***

Today's psalm is a prayerful hymn of praise, beginning with, ***I give thanks with my whole heart: before the gods I sing your praise.*** St Paul exhorts the Colossians, and ourselves today, ***As you therefore have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him. Colossians 2.6.*** It's through prayer that we receive Christ as the Lord of our lives, and prayer sustains us in that life.

But perhaps what attracts and intrigues us most in today's readings is Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer: so succinct and unfamiliar compared with the words we know and love. For the form we treasure so much we have to turn to Matthew's gospel, (6. 9-13) the only other record of Jesus' prayer in the gospels. As it's not



included in next year's readings, perhaps we should use today's account to consider this gift and jewel that he gave us in the Lord's Prayer.

It might seem that Luke's shorter version is the original, especially given its context. After seeing Jesus at prayer, the disciples ask how they should pray. Matthew takes this and extends it to our more familiar version. Although textual scholars have had a field day debating and doubting this, I don't think that need trouble us this morning. Perhaps we can just reflect on several key things his words show about prayer in general.

Jesus addresses God simply as Father. Any devout Jew could sincerely pray, '**Our Father, who art in heaven...**' using the formal Hebrew and exclusively religious **Abinu**. But Jesus uses the intimate and personal word **Abba**. We find him using the same word three times later when he prays. On the night before his crucifixion Jesus prays, **Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will but your be done.** Luke 22.42. Then from the cross we have the words, **Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.** And later **Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.** Luke 23. 34 & 46. For Jesus, **Father** is a word a child would use for a caring and loving parent. It is a word of loving intimacy. That is the relationship God calls us to have with him: one of personal closeness. To quote the American Christian writer, Robin Jones Gunn, we have to ask, **If you feel far from God, guess who moved?**

In the familiar Matthew version, God is **Our Father** and pushed away to **heaven**. But, of course heaven is not some distant place or experience we hope to aspire to at some point. Heaven is the very presence of God here with us all the time. He is present in all the positive, good and loving things of creation and life, and even in the darkest times. Through the Cross came resurrection, new life from unspeakable evil.

For He is **Our Father**. The Lord's Prayer is not just a personal devotion, but a corporate act of worship. Throughout the prayer we use the possessive adjectives and pronouns **our and us**, to underline that we pray as a whole community. When we pray for our daily bread, we are not just praying for our own food, but that all people will have the food and nourishment they need. Daily bread can mean all we need for our wellbeing and welfare.

Again, when we come to the forgiveness of sins, this is not just a personal confession, but a prayer for forgiveness, reconciliation and peace among all people, and in all relationships. It may be a personal thing, but I worry that when people prefer the *trespasses* version that they might have some hesitancy about their own particular sins, faults or failings. But there is no need to be hesitant: because of the love of God our sins are forgiven. We can and should face up to their reality, because they are forgivable. The only thing that hinders their forgiveness is our unwillingness to forgive. This is the depth of the meaning in today's reading: ***forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.*** In praying for forgiveness, we must be prepared to forgive. This is emphasised elsewhere when Jesus says, ***Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.*** Mark 11.25. Perhaps *trespasses* is ok after all.

Many books have been written on the Lord's Prayer with line by line and word by word reflections. But this morning let's just consider one more line which sometimes causes confusion. Various modern translations often struggle around the traditional familiar, ***Lead us not into temptation.*** This can have the implication that God might be involved in or a force behind our temptations. But by the modern translation, as found in both Luke and Matthew's version, ***And do not bring us to the time of trial,*** is based on an original Aramaic phrase, ***Cause us not to enter*** a time of trial, testing or temptation.

If St Luke's version is the nearest we have to the original words of Jesus, some may say they are what we should use in our liturgy and own private devotions. But this would seem to give a limited view of what Jesus meant. In some ways he is giving us a foundation for prayer. In the traditional Book of Common Prayer the Lord's Prayer appears towards the beginning and again near the end of daily Morning and Evening Prayer. This sets the whole service in the context of Jesus' teaching about prayer. Many spiritual guides recommend that we open and close our personal times of prayer with his words. Someone once told me that they said the Lord's Prayer for each person or cause they were praying for.

Finally as we look at both Luke and Matthew's versions, we may ask how the familiar doxology came to be included. Among early texts this was first found added to Lord's Prayer in the late first or early second century, in a liturgical document called the *Didache*. It's based on the Old Testament 1 Chronicles 29.11

***Yours, O Lord , are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all.***

In the time of Jesus a Jewish prayer would normally end with a doxology. No doubt Jesus grew up with that tradition. So perhaps we have good reason to conclude our reflection on the Lord's Prayer with, ***For kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.***

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE  
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Sermon – All Saints' Marseille**

**8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity – 5<sup>th</sup> August 2022**

*The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate*

“Tell me, how could we cope with all the worries that come upon us every day?” asked a schoolfriend the other day. “Pandemic, war in Ukraine, inflation, gas and electricity bills that people can’t pay, global rise of populism, environmental disasters on an unprecedented scale...” I didn’t exhort her: “Don’t be afraid.” Nor did I suggest: “Come out, look at the heavens and count the stars.” She might have found my invitation pointless – after all, in a big city, one can barely see no more than just a few stars – and rather surprising and unhelpful.

Yet this invitation addressed to Abraham certainly resonates with me.

I am a child of the Space Race era, the time when the Soviet Union and the United States were competing in the exploration and control of outer space. Yuri Gagarin’s first journey into space happened before I was born – but I watched the live broadcast of Neil Armstrong’s first steps on the Moon. I nourished dreams of navigating the universe in a spaceship, of boldly going where no one has gone before and counting the stars.

Those were not only daring, but also liberating dreams for those who lived, like me, under a political regime whose promises for a flourishing future we did not trust and which drastically limited and controlled the lives of ordinary people through a climate of fear. Our horizons shrunk more and more.

Nowadays, for many people, a broad spectrum of worries, fears, anxieties are a permanent condition. Over-anxiety is very much a problem of our time, as Jamie pointed out last Sunday – yet there is nothing new under the sun.

Abraham's story was one of exhaustion from warfare, of insecure life in the wilderness, of childlessness, of no future to live for.

The community to whom the letter to the Hebrews was written were weary of suffering (public ridicule, confiscation of property, imprisonment) and disheartened by the delay in the coming of the Lord to confirm their belief.

One of the Desert Fathers, Makarios of Egypt, wrote in the 5<sup>th</sup> century: "I am convinced that not even the apostles, although filled with the Holy Spirit, were completely free from anxiety. The advent of grace does not mean the immediate deliverance from anxiety."

What about us? Like Abraham, we may know of anxieties over conflicts, insecurity, fruitless life, and lack of horizon. We may need to be reminded that there is light and beauty and peace outside our fears, beyond the very close horizon of a life with many limitations.

Fear dominates, it closes down all else. Horizons shrink, we can only see what is immediately in front of us. It is hard enough to live with fear in the short term – how to cope with it in the long haul?

God responded to Abraham's fears with an invitation that contained a promise: "Don't be afraid. Come out, look at the heavens and count the stars." Could star-counting soothe one's deepest fears?

Little did Abraham know that the 6000 stars or so that are visible on a clear night in the wilderness were only the tiniest fraction of the estimated 200 billion trillion stars in the universe. Nevertheless, the starry sky spoke to him of the countless blessings yielded by God's promise.

While we, people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, choose to entrust our future to science, technology, pension schemes, Abraham wasn't afraid, to paraphrase Corrie ten Boom, to entrust an unknown future to the God he knew, whose voice had called him to step out of his fears. That is what the author of the letter to the Hebrews calls faith, "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen".

Faith helped Abraham to live in impermanent, fragile, and insecure earthly dwellings – and yet to move forward into a future beyond the promised land,

towards the city with foundations not made by hand, whose architect and builder is God.

We too are people who have been promised a dwelling in this city – we are heirs of the same promise made to Abraham. Therefore, says Jesus Christ, we should not be afraid, for it is our Father’s good pleasure to give us the Kingdom, that is, the future built upon the foundations of God’s love, mercy, and goodness. Jesus Christ is the first fruit of that future, the first of those living fully a resurrected life, a life of love and meaning and peace beyond death.

At the darkest times of our lives, when our horizons crowd in, leaving no room to breathe or move, we should go out and consider the stars, lights in the darkness of our fear, glimpses of hope, reminders that it is not fear that holds the earth and the universe on course.

Be not afraid! The lostness we see all around us and within us is not the last truth about the world and about ourselves. Faith should help us to see, beneath appearances, the truth that holds the Universe on its course: the truth of God’s love, and of God’s peace.

Step out in faith, accept the invitation to live and journey within God’s promise, as the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke once said: “Believe in a love that is being stored up for you like an inheritance, and have faith that in this love there is a strength and a blessing so large that you can travel as far as you wish without having to step outside it.” (*Letters to a Young Poet*)

God’s promises lead to freedom, if we consent to them: freedom to leave anxiety behind; freedom to have confidence about a future secured not by human endeavour but by God alone; freedom to find fulfilment not in earthly possessions but rather in our relationship with God; freedom to boldly go where no one has gone before and count the stars – that is, God’s blessings. And also the freedom to generously make real for others God’s promises: the promise of freedom in the midst of oppression and tyranny; the promise of plenty and peace in the midst of hunger and war; the promise of joy and loyalty in the midst of fear and betrayal; the promise of hope in the midst of despair.

Let us, in faith, always hold onto God's promise of love and life in the midst of hatred and death, of salvation and renewal in the midst of sin and decay – that is, onto the promise of the living Christ.

“Let your loving-kindness, O Lord, be upon us, as we have set our hope on you.” (Ps 33.22)

Amen.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**  
**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection – 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity – 21<sup>st</sup> August 2022**

*Jane Quarmby, Reader*

Our gospel reading this morning about Jesus healing the woman on a sabbath, and the criticism and outrage this caused, reminded me of something David said a few years ago. When challenged by people about preaching on a Sunday, because that is work, he replied “No, it isn’t. I work in the week, preparing my sermon and the services I take so that when it comes to Sunday I’m not working, but worshipping.” There was no answer to that!

But why was it such a problem in Luke’s account? All Jesus did was say to her that she was healed, and touch her. It wasn’t a four hour operation or anything strenuous by the sound of it. So why was the leader of the synagogue so upset about it? Surely he should have been happy that after 18 years of pain and misery this poor lady was able to stand up straight. Or was he jealous because this happened so easily and quickly when he had not been able to do anything at all for her?

Let’s go back to the beginning, to the 10 commandments in Exodus. Here we find the fourth commandment which was given to the Jews and which has been passed down to us over the centuries. It’s one of the longest. “Remember to observe the Sabbath Day and keep it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh is a Sabbath Day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no-one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them, but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.”

So there we have it – no work, because it is a holy day. In fact for the Jews it’s the holiest day of all. It begins on Friday evening with the lighting of candles, prayers



and a special meal, and closes at sunset on Saturday after two more special meals, prayers and attendance at the synagogue. You wear your best clothes and generally honour the day.

A lot of this passed on to Christianity, albeit on a Sunday.

All so far so good – but what exactly is work? This is where things get complicated as over the generations, work was defined in detail in Jewish law and it prohibited any form of work unless an urgent human or medical need is life-threatening. The 39 categories covered the usual types of work in those days – ploughing, sowing, reaping, preparing grain for baking, wool from shearing to weaving, killing animals and tanning their hides for leather, writing, building, making and putting out a fire, moving things around and so on. In addition, the rabbis added more and more. They believed that if every Jew observed the Sabbath on two consecutive occasions the Messiah would come. And so it got more and more defined and restrictive. What began as a relatively simple commandment of keep the day holy, spend it in rest and communication with God, became hedged about with all manner of petty rules. Backed up by the severest of punishment – death by stoning for transgressors.

So the rabbis and synagogue leader, immersed in all this, would have been shocked to see Jesus doing what they considered to be work – after all, if this woman has been ill for 18 years it's hardly a life threatening emergency and she should have come on any of the other six days of the week. It doesn't seem to have occurred to them that they had just witnessed a miracle – God's power at work, right there and then. How many people would they have seen healed like that regardless of the day of the week?

What better way of making her day special than of healing her? Imagine being able to stand up straight and be free of pain, after 18 years of suffering. Especially as it was considered that she was possessed by an evil spirit, making her an outcast, an object of ridicule. Evil spirits belong to Satan – as Jesus points out, this woman is a daughter of Abraham who has been bound by the Satan for 18 years. What better day to release her than the Sabbath, the holiest day of the week? Jesus knows as well as they do what the law permitted and what it didn't – the rabbis themselves would have thought nothing of watering their stock and untying them to do so, therefore why shouldn't Jesus untie this poor soul and let her find relief?

It's a power struggle going on – the synagogue leader has been well and truly upstaged and doesn't like it. But for Jesus, this poor crippled lady represents also the whole of Israel, bent double and needing to be untied from the grip of Satan by his kingdom message. It's what he is on his way to do. So he has no problem in calling his critics hypocrites, and holding a mirror up to their actions and their petty-mindedness. So absorbed in manmade restrictions they had no pity.

Perhaps our society today has much to learn from this. We have moved forwards - or have we? How many of us really do observe the fourth commandment? Do we put on our best clothes, give thanks to God for what we have, spend time in prayer and stop doing our usual work? Admittedly it gets fuzzy when one is retired, but the point is more about making the day holy, of making a pause in the busyness of our lives, to pay attention to God, making one day out of seven special. It also does us good to rest and recharge our batteries.

We try hard to obey the commandments about murder, idolatry, etc – but I wonder as I look around at people I know, busy working on a Sunday, no different from any other day of the week, if they even know about the fourth commandment. Sunday is used as a chance to catch up ready for another working week, people working long hours in shops and restaurants etc, whether they realise what they are doing? The effect it has on their lives, on their children and loved ones. What will they have gained from it in later years?

Do we use the Sabbath to do some good in the world as Jesus did? Or are we, too, all so tied up in knots about everyday manmade things and manmade rules that we have lost sight of God, that we can't see a miracle when it happens in front of us?

Amen.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE  
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection – 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity – 28<sup>th</sup> August 2022**

*Christine Portman, Reader*

The words of today's Collect:

*God of glory, the end of our searching, help us to lay aside all that prevents us from seeking your kingdom, and to give all that we have to gain the pearl beyond all price, through our Saviour Jesus Christ.*

Today's psalm lists many joys that come through a close and trusting relationship with God: *They will not be afraid of any evil tidings; their heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord. Those who fear the Lord....have great delight in his commandments. Their hearts are sustained and they will not fear.* Human hearts seem programmed to yearn for the peace that this closeness brings. In Hebrews chapter 10 we read: *This is the covenant I will make with them .... I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.* And yet ..... We may long for that *pearl beyond price*, we may hear the Good News, but all too often we fail to seek God's kingdom. Something holds us back - *prevents us*, as today's Collect puts it.

The opening of the reading from Ecclesiasticus gives us a clue: *The beginning of human pride is to forsake the Lord; the heart has withdrawn from its Maker.* God is still there, but we've put up the shutters. We're no longer available, no longer listening. Today's readings all point to the culprit: pride. From the time of the Desert Fathers, it's been seen as the chief of the seven deadly sins – and for that very reason: pride *withdraws our hearts* from God and separates us from his love. It's the sense that I, with my personal views, preferences and desires am in the end more important than God's will: this is the root of all the other *capital vices* as they were also called. Greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony and sloth – they all stem from pride: putting ME first. They're the complete opposite of the virtues we're asked to embrace: chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, kindness, patience, and

humility, virtues that link in closely with the Fruits of the Spirit Paul talks about in Galatians.

Some people say that the forces that prevent us from seeking God are external. They blame the wickedness of the world around us or our flawed human makeup. Others prefer to think of the cause as a concrete figure like Satan or The Devil. Etty Hillesum had the misfortune to be a Jew in wartime Amsterdam so she knew well what it was to live in evil times. In her journal she wrote:

*....as we walked through the cold, narrow Langbrugsteegand then waited at the tram stop, "What is it in human beings that makes them want to destroy others?", Jan asked bitterly. I said, "Human beings you say, but remember that you're one yourself....."The rottenness of others is in us too," I continued .... "I see no other solution, than to turn inward and to root out all that rottenness there. I no longer believe that we can change anything in the world until we have first changed ourselves".*

When Jesus went to dine at the house of the leader of the Pharisees, notice that they were *watching him closely*. These were religious people, but it seems that their invitation wasn't necessarily a friendly gesture! What might have been their motivation? Their role was to interpret and uphold God's word – yet it seems that, blinded by self-interest, most of them were unable to see Jesus for who he was. So sure were they that *their* understanding of God was the only truth, that Jesus appeared to them to be nothing more than a terrible threat to their ideas and their status. So Jesus told a parable about finding our place at the table. He made it clear: *all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted*. The pride of the Pharisees has led to complete spiritual blindness, so much so, that he has to remind them of something that they seem to have forgotten. Although they pride themselves on their knowledge of the Law, he then needs to teach them about their duty to show charity to those less fortunate than themselves.

We know what they did to Jesus in the end, and that for all they did, they were powerless against him. In three days the Temple they destroyed was raised up again – and for eternity. Yet not unnaturally we're often tempted to take the short-term, very human view. We might look around us and think that Ecclesiasticus and the psalm have got it wrong. Often it feels like those who *cling* to pride very much

get away with it. Ecclesiasticus may tell us that *the Lord brings upon them unheard-of calamities, and destroys them completely*. But we see the rich get richer and the poor grow poorer. We despair at those who exploit the weak and feel powerless in the face of public figures who lie unashamedly and get away with it. We might ask, are these people really punished for their pride? There's a whole sermon in there about the why, how and when of God's judgement, but this morning, let's reflect on what happens to we humans in the here and now when we ignore the laws that God has written on our hearts.

I recently read an interview by Simon Parkes. He was speaking with Boris Johnson, who was remarkably open about his perpetual busy-ness: *I'd suddenly be conscious of the black cloud of depression moving in from the west, and it was really about not having enough to do, and that's partly why I do it*. Simon Parkes probed a little deeper:

Parkes: *You seem to fear introspection.*

Johnson: I probably do. I just don't dare look under its stone. And I won't. The cupboard will remain locked. I will never go to that terrible fridge marked 'psyche'. I'll never open it. No, forget it. Someone else can do that. Sod it. The truth is, it's probably like *Peer Gynt*. I'd probably find nothing there anyway. That's what I'm terrified of.

*Parkes replies, "Or you might find something better than you could possibly imagine".*

Etty Hillesum died in Auschwitz, but amid all the suffering and the enormous evil she witnessed, she remained in *life and light* to the end of her life, her heart *open to the riches of God's grace, bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit in love and joy and peace*. When we recognise God as our true friend, in whom we can confide all our inmost thoughts, then who knows what riches of his grace we may receive?

Amen.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE  
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection – 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity – 28<sup>th</sup> August 2022**

*Scott MacSween, Ordinand*

In our Bible readings for today, we heard a clear message of humility, and so I want to reflect on what that teaches us as Christians in modern society.

In the last few weeks, like many of you, I've been on holiday. Catching up with old friends that I haven't been able to see, in some cases for 18 years.

The downside of seeing old friends is that they can remind you of very stupid and highly embarrassing moments from your younger days. Isn't youth a wonderful time for learning! But I am not going to share any of my stories with you today, otherwise we'd be here all day!

I'm talking about friends. True friends. The nice thing is that people that have known you for a long time, they know the real you. They understand what's important to you, what your weaknesses are, even what is most annoying about you! And yet, despite all that, still they want to be your friend.

We don't have to pretend around these people. In fact, if we do pretend to be something different, they will usually bring us back down to earth very quickly!

We have to be humble to be the same person that they have known for years. And that's one reason why we value them as friends, in case we try to become something we are not.

The message to be humble is easy to say but hard to do in this society. We are taught to 'reach for what we want' and to 'not let anyone stop us', so humility can sound like a difficult word, even a ridiculous one. "If you're humble they'll just walk all over you" seems to be the message.

Our true friends keep us humble and grounded. But that's not easy in this society. There is a decline of Western Christian culture. One book on the subject opens with

the words "There is a flow to history and culture" and the flow in society is undoubtedly towards the cult of celebrity. The Instagram influencer, the billionaire businessman, the famous footballer, the pompous politician (I'll let you choose which one). They seek our admiration and their recognition until they become famous. And then strangely it flips, and we seek theirs. And along the way, they often pretend to show humility as a way of growing their popularity.

But true humility is deeply humbling. Let me explain what I mean.

In eastern France, we find the Taizé community. A Christian community of 120 brothers who commit to live together. When they join the community they relinquish all their worldly possessions. They give it all away - not to their own community, but to the poor. They enter the community with nothing except their white robes. Even the vegetables they grow are given to local people in need. That to me, is true humility.

Hebrews 13:5

**Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you."**

Yet at Taizé every day, hundreds of young people come from all around the world to be with these brothers. To sit and watch and talk to and learn from them as they go about their daily prayers and worship and just to experience some of the wonder of life in the community. As a visitor, one is just humbled by being in the presence of the brothers, who have humbled themselves in a society that does the opposite. It's very strange isn't it?

True humility is humbling.

I imagine that's how it might have been to be in the presence of Christ. Who had everything, but gave it all up for others, for a simple life.

Humility is a very clear theme in the Bible. In Luke 14, Jesus teaches us not to assume the positions of praise and pride:

**Instead, when you receive an invitation, go and sit in the least important place. When your host approaches you, he will say, 'Friend, move up here**

**to a better seat.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up.”**

This echoes Proverbs 25:

**Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great; for it is better to be told, "Come up here," than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.**

In our celebrity-obsessed world, the quest for recognition, influence, wealth, fame and the praise of others drives too many of us. But in the end, this pride-filled drive leads us into conflict and destructiveness, as all of life becomes a game of winners and losers. Who is the one who got noticed? Who got the top job?

On a bigger scale, the priorities of whole nations are placed into conflict as politicians wrestle to find a place in the corridors of world power, while their people’s needs are used as bargaining chips or forgotten altogether. Just look at Putin’s war in Ukraine.

Values, integrity and fidelity all end up being expendable. They are replaced by a need for success or victory or popularity, and the ends justifies any means. But, of course, the ones who end up paying the most are those at the ‘bottom’ of the game – the innocent losers - the homeless, the refugees, the addicts, the patients on waiting lists, the families on benefit. They have no influence; they are just pawns in a bigger game of power and influence.

Humans seek power and authority and praise. We seek to climb the slippery pole of careers or community involvement. And that’s when we become most vulnerable. We think we can then choose how to behave. The rules don’t apply to us anymore, and so we see many examples of people accused of behaviour that is shameful and illegal. Humanity is fallible, greedy and proud, ever since the Garden of Eden. We build these celebrities up, and we watch as they rise. And then, like a firework, bang, it’s all gone and quiet.



Ecclesiasticus 10:14-17

**The Lord overthrows the thrones of rulers, and enthrones the lowly in their place.**

**The Lord plucks up the roots of the nations, and plants the humble in their place.**

**The Lord lays waste the lands of the nations, and destroys them to the foundations of the earth.**

**He removes some of them and destroys them, and erases the memory of them from the earth.**

When our earthly lives are over, and our achievements and our possessions are stripped away, we are all the same.

The Bible teaches us that that true, vibrant, authentic life is found in simplicity, fidelity, contentment and humility, even if to our ears it may sound naive and out of touch.

And let's not pretend it's easy. True humility requires courage. The courage that can only come from God's strength. When all around us, the signs of success seems to shout "I have, I know, I am", we have to have courage to say "I don't have, I don't know, I am not"

The brothers at Taizé have nothing. Yet they have everything. There is a real freedom in humility. We can be authentic with ourselves and each other.

Returning to the idea of friendship – Jesus is our oldest and most faithful friend. No matter what we have done in the past. He knows it and yet He still loves us unconditionally, despite it all. The son of the all-powerful God who overthrows rulers, plucks up the roots of the nations and destroys them, is the same loving God who humbly welcomes every one of us to his banquet.

Amen.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Sermon – 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**11<sup>th</sup> September 2022**

**All Saints' Marseille**

*The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate*

The Pharisees and scribes grumble, 'This fellow welcomes sinners!' Isn't this outrageous? Surely, Jesus knows that all that is unclean should not be approached, lest one gets contaminated by uncleanness. Surely, he has learned that some people are not acceptable company. They are a lost cause. There is no need to try to retrieve the lost ones – there is no place for them in God's Book of Life.

Today, we find Jesus in truly mixed company. It is not the first time, not the last time either. He was in mixed company at his birth in the stable, visited by shepherds and wise men alike. He will be in mixed company even in his last hour, on the cross, with one criminal on his right and another one on his left, while, at the foot of the cross, self-righteous people watch and comment.

Let us not be very swift to judge the Pharisees and scribes and their insistence on rules and regulations about who belongs and who does not – after all, our own Christian tradition has established rules about belonging, about who can be 'in' and who cannot. These rules match what we believe about God. Yet how can we know what God believes about us and whose name he wants to write in his Book?

Once again, Jesus tries, by means of parables, to give us a glimpse of how things work in God's kingdom.

One cannot fail to recognise that, very often, Jesus' parables start with life as lived. A sower scattering seeds in the field, visitors arriving at a late hour who need to be fed, children who are not very eager to help with domestic chores. Familiar situations that develop in a surprising way. This morning also, there is

something familiar about a lost sheep and a lost coin - or lost property, in general. Lost by accident, by inattention, through our own fault, or through life circumstances.

Yet, it is not only physical items that we might lose – there might also be parts of ourselves. Dreams, hopes, friendships, enthusiasm, joy ... It is not easy to retrieve them. Sometimes we feel as if we have lost our entire self: in grief, anxiety, anger, guilt, disappointment, regrets ... We feel lost when the circumstances of life overwhelm us.

And what about the heart-rending, unquenchable sense of loss when someone who deeply matters for us is no more?

Today marks in the US the tragic anniversary of the 9/11 attacks when 3000 lives were lost. Today, and in the days to come, millions across UK and countless people around the world will mourn the loss of Queen Elizabeth and pay tribute to her life of steadfast and selfless service to the good of her people, and to her witness of faith in Jesus Christ. Today we are reminded that, in this life, some things that are lost cannot be got back. We are left bereft and yearning.

Some things that are lost cannot be replaced, either. In our Western world, so much is disposable and temporary. Everything from tissues to relationships. When an item is lost, before setting on searching, we may want to consider if a search is worthwhile. Who in their right mind, in our efficiency driven world, is prepared to invest considerable time and energy to retrieve one sheep out of one hundred? One per cent losses are perfectly acceptable. Next year, in spring, there will be plenty of lambs to choose from, anyway.

Your ways are not God's ways, says Jesus. God will not say, 'Oh well, ninety-nine out of one hundred is good enough.' In costly love God embraces all humanity. He suffers none to be lost, yet pursues every wandering lamb, frantically searches for every lost coin. He even descends into the valley of death to bring into his light and peace those we mourn. When the lost turn back, God's heart is glad, and he fosters celebration.

No one is expendable for God, Jesus says. Each one of us is of great worth: worth searching for, worth finding, and worth celebrating.

For God each one of us is unique, priceless, and irreplaceable. The neighbour you have known for years, the stranger on the street, the migrant in search of a better life – they too are unique, priceless, and irreplaceable.

God loves us with all our weaknesses, with all our inherited and acquired defects, with all our failures. He loves us just as we are.

Yet there is something else that lies at the heart of the parables we read this morning: it is God's longing for completeness, wholeness, and union, which causes him to search. When one of the sheep is lost, completeness, wholeness, and union are lost. The ninety-nine sheep are incomplete. When one coin is misplaced, the other nine do not have the same value.

Let us also listen to God's invitation to share in his longing and in his search for that which is lost: 'Go after the one that is lost until you find them.' This is an invitation to share with hope in the abundance of his love for humankind.

Queen Elizabeth has heard this call and, through her faith, has shared in God's love for humankind. Hers is a huge legacy to build upon: her insistence that every person deserves to be treated with dignity, and that the rights and freedoms of those who are marginalised, vulnerable or disadvantaged are to be protected and respected, as they are all bearers, with us, of God's indelible imprint. No one should be misplaced like a coin, forgotten like a stray sheep. No one should be considered a lost cause. The Queen was right to say that "on our own, we cannot wipe out injustices", but together, through "thousands of small acts of goodness" we can have, with God's help, a "bigger impact than we imagine." Together, we can work toward the wholeness which is God's will.

The Queen's dedication was rooted in the trust that the Shepherd will always go to find the sheep. For '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' (Romans 8.38-39).

We have heard in today's gospel an invitation to wholeness and abundance of life, which we also call salvation. No one is beyond the reach of God's love and grace. All are invited to the table. We will be carried home to the rejoicing of the heavens. That is the reality and the foolishness of divine love. Everyone matters. Everyone belongs.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE  
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection – 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity – 25<sup>th</sup> September 2022**

*Canon David Pickering*

*'There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus.'* (Luke 16. 19-20) And we know the rest; covered in sores, starving hungry and the local dogs licking his sores.

In the days of the Book of Common Prayer, today's gospel passage occurred every year on the First Sunday after Trinity. Now we only hear it once every three years in our triple cycle of readings. Whereas in the BCP it occurred in isolation among many other gospel passages, in our present lectionary it fits into a pattern of readings covering one of the key themes of St Luke's Gospel; concern for the poor and the danger of riches.

This can be found at the very beginning of Luke's gospel where the evangelist sets out this crucial issue in the words of the Magnificat, *'He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; He has filled the hungry things and sent the rich away empty.'* (Luke 1. 50 – 53)

This theme has also been there in a number of our recent Sunday gospels. Way back on the final Sunday of July we had the parable of the rich fool building his barns to store his riches so that he could enjoy a life of *'eat, drink and be merry'* (Luke 12.19). But this is all to no avail as he dies that night. The passage concludes with the words of Jesus: *'So it is for those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.'* (Luke 13.21)

The following week we had further words from Jesus: *'Sell your possessions, and give alms. . . . For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also'*. (Luke 12. 31, 34) Then, at the end of August, we read the parable of the seats of honour at

a feast, concluding with the encouragement: *'when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'* (Luke 14. 13-14)

Last week we listened to the rather obscure parable of The Untrustworthy Manager who squandered his master's property. Many find this a difficult parable because it seems to promote fraud and deceit. But as I heard in a sermon in Salisbury Cathedral last Sunday, Jesus is perhaps speaking tongue in cheek and maybe with a smile, as he commends taking decisive action and commends the ingenuity of the worldly in dealing with the things of God. This perhaps can be understood when Jesus ends the parable with the words, *'You cannot serve God and wealth.'*

All these passages focus on the potential to make an idol of possessions, the vital obligation to be alive to the needs of poor, and the way in which alms are given and wealth dispersed. In some ways this theme in St Luke's gospel finds its climax in today's drama of the rich man and Lazarus.

In a number of ways it is quite unique as a parable, and therefore all the more interesting. At first glance it would appear that Jesus is giving a clear picture of the afterlife. In fact he is using a familiar folk tale of the time and giving it a new dramatic twist at the end.

A contemporary Egyptian version of the story ends with: *'He who has been good on earth, will be blessed in the kingdom of the dead, and he who has been evil on earth, will suffer in the kingdom of the dead.'*

Jesus changes this to: *'If they do not they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'* (Luke 16.31). Even the resurrection will make no difference to those who have not heeded the multiple teachings of the Old Testament about caring for the poor.

Another unique feature of this parable is that it's the only time we hear an actual name in any of Jesus's sayings. Lazarus means *'God helps'*. Lazarus certainly needed help, and we know his name, but in our modern world there are so many nameless people, who are the poor and outcasts of society. Yet it's interesting that although he's not named in the parable, in later tradition the rich man has been called *'Dives'*, the Latin for 'rich'. By contrast, today, through the glamourising of

the popular press, we often know the names of the rich and the wealthy while the poor and destitute remain nameless - and powerless.

This judgement on the rich and the injustices of society in our gospel are reflected in the other lectionary readings of the day. In both last week's and today's Old Testament reading Amos condemns the affluence and injustice of the people: *'Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory, and eat the lambs from the flock and calves from the stock.'* (Amos 6. 4) This was an extravagant misuse of resources. In Old Testament times sheep would only produce one offspring a year. Such corruption can only lead to exile. *'Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away.'* (Amos 6.7) And just one of many lines from our psalm illustrates the same point: *'The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.'* (Psalm 146.9).

St Paul writing to Timothy clearly says, *'But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil'*. (1 Timothy 6.9-10)

We have to recognise that money and financial systems are a gift of God, and by his grace they should and can be used for the well-being of all. But we do have to ask, why is that some people and nations enjoy such affluence and yet so many of God's children are doomed to a life of suffering and poverty? Even in our own society why are people fearful of how they are going to feed their families in the coming months and heat their homes over the winter? Why do so many migrants leave their homes and risk dangerous journeys to try and find a more financially-rewarding way of life for themselves and their families? Something must be seriously wrong with the way the richness of God's bountiful creation is distributed and shared. Something must be highly amiss in the way the financial systems of the world are managed and worked. Our world economy is just not working when so many have to go without.

The 1980 Alternative Service Book had an intercession petition that read, *'Direct this and every nation in the ways of justice and peace; that men (people) may honour one another, and seek the common good.'* I was pleased to hear it used at the Eucharist at Salisbury Cathedral last Sunday. Jesus said that he came to bring

us life in all its fullness: *'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'*  
(John 10.10)

Perhaps we need to renew our view of the image of God in all people and reorganise our world so that everyone may have a just and fair share in the common good.

Amen.



**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Sermon – Harvest Festival**

**2<sup>nd</sup> October 2022**

**All Saints' Marseille**

*The Revd James Johnston, Chaplain*

Last Wednesday, representatives of different churches in Marseille gathered at the Eglise Saint-Ferréol for an ecumenical service of prayer entitled '*Ecoutez la voix de la création*' ('Listening to the voice of creation'). The service moved from contemplating the creation, through repentance, intercessory prayer and finally a commitment to improving our own treatment of the environment. It is right that such a service should coincide with harvest time, for harvest is a moment like no other when we should stop, reflect, wonder and give thanks for all that we have received.

Harvest is a powerful image, which appears often in the Bible. First, it is designated a time of gratitude. In our reading from Deuteronomy today, part of Moses's farewell speech to the people of Israel just before they enter the promised land, Moses instructs them 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. But it's not just a single act. Living life thankfully is beneficial to us all. If you haven't tried it before, why not begin each day thinking of three things for which you are grateful. I knew a parishioner who, when people asked her how she was, would sometimes reply:

‘not in debt, in prison or in hospital’. There are perhaps more positive formulations one could think of, but there was wisdom in her words. One day, during a time of increased violence in Israel/Palestine, she was admitted to her local accident and emergency department in rural England. On being discharged from the hospital into a snowy night at one o’clock in the morning, she was heard to comment: ‘Thank heaven we’re not in Gaza.’

The point of those stories, and an important reason for keeping Harvest Festival, is that if we can focus more on what we do have rather than on what we don’t, it helps us live less anxious lives. Living thankfully also reminds us of the vital balance that lies both at the heart of creation and in human belonging. The war in Ukraine has made everyone more aware of how much of the world’s grain supply comes from that country. The price of our food partly depends on it. Here in the prosperous countries of the north and west, food security is not something we have often needed to think about before. But it is becoming an urgent problem worldwide. If we could become more aware of our responsibility to those who lack the basics for survival, if we could learn how to care 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 might begin to live differently.

Harvest in the Bible is also used as an image of our accountability. Whatever your understanding may be of the account we will have to give of ourselves at the end of our earthly lives, consider this: how would you wish to be remembered? The spiritual writer Gerard Hughes used to encourage people to reflect on what they would like said about them at their funeral, and then to

begin to live like that. It is a good way of helping us focus on what is truly important.

In his sermon at the Queen's funeral, the Archbishop of Canterbury noted that people tend not to be remembered for their wealth or ambition but for their service to others. The things they did that were generous, outward looking, considerate, thoughtful towards the people they were with. As he put it: 'Those who serve will be loved and remembered when those who cling to power and privileges are long forgotten.'

Harvest is just as much about giving as about receiving. As our Collect today puts it, 'Eternal God, ... you give us the fruits of the earth in their season: grant that we may use them to your glory, for the relief of those in need and for our own well-being'. At the end of this service, we will be collecting donations for the local charity *Les Restos du Coeur*, helping to provide food for those in need. It is a tiny gesture, but one that matters. We must never turn our backs on those who need our help, even when we don't see how we can realistically make much difference. You probably know the story of the starfish, originally published in an essay by Loren Eiseley in 1969. Two people are walking along a beach onto which hundreds of starfish have been thrown by a storm and are dying because they cannot survive outside the water. From time to time one of the walkers stops, picks up a starfish and throws it into the sea. The other says: 'Why are you doing that? There are hundreds of starfish dying on this beach. You can't possibly make a difference.' The friend replies: 'I can make a difference for this one.'

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus says to his followers: 'I am the bread of life.' The crowd had referred to their foundational faith story of the manna that came from heaven when their ancestors were wandering in the wilderness without food. It is at this point in the Fourth Gospel that Jesus's true significance is disclosed to them. He says to them: 'It was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven'. The past tense becomes present: 'I am the bread of life.' The writer of the Gospel is saying: this is it, there is nowhere further to look, it is the end of all our desiring. The mysterious presence of God, which is all we need. Christ is the bread of life, the true manna, the ultimate provision for us.

It has been pointed out that, when hearing the words 'I am the Bread of Life', the early Christian worshippers would have heard an echo of their own eucharistic worship. And so do we. For it is in the Eucharist that we encounter Christ most closely, in bread and wine. The eternal gift that never runs out but is always available to us, at the Lord's table where all are welcome. It is here that we find life. Jesus said, 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'

This is the gift which people have encountered in the churches of this chaplaincy for over a hundred years. Let us pray that they may continue to do so for many years to come.

Amen.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Sermon – 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**9<sup>th</sup> October 2022**

**All Saints' Marseille**

*The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate*

Geography matters in our lives. It matters where we are born, it matters where we live and work. Nowadays, whether we use a real map or an app on our phones, we can easily become familiar with our surroundings, and find our way. The days when maps had blank spaces corresponding to uncharted territories – which one had better not enter - are long gone: satellites and Google have made the earth visible in the smallest detail; borders are clearly defined and sometimes made visible. Borders have not only a geographical meaning. They are set up to distinguish places that are safe from the unsafe ones, to distinguish us from them, what is ours from what is theirs. And, as we know, they can be transformed into iron curtains.

But less visible on maps and phones, there still exist borderlands, in-between zones, where rules escape control, one does not know what can happen. There are paths that take you in but won't take you out. Such borderlands are often inhabited by people who live on the margins of society, invisible or untouchable because of who or what they are, or where they come from.

Have you ever found yourself caught in an in-between zone? An airport transit zone, for example: when one enters it, there's uncertainty about catching the connecting flight and retrieving luggage or documents, and about how the immediate journey or indeed one's life will unfold. Here one's identity is scrutinized, the right to enter a certain territory is questioned, one might even receive a stamp reading 'you are trapped here'. This is, more or less, the true story of an Iranian refugee who lived in the transit area of Terminal 1 at the Paris-Charles de Gaulle airport from 1988 until 2006. He is stateless to this day, but at least he is allowed to live in a shelter in Paris.

An in-between zone cannot only be a place of uncertainty, but a place of danger and anguish as well, with little hope that cries of distress may be answered. A year ago, an inflatable dinghy carrying 30 migrants from France to the United Kingdom capsized in the English Channel, and 27 people drowned, four women and two children among them. They had called the French police for help, when their boat began to deflate, but were told they were in British waters, so they called the British police, but no one came to rescue. The victims were Kurdish, Afghan, Ethiopians, Somali, Vietnamese, Egyptian. They were caught in an in-between zone. Geography matters. They didn't belong. Unwanted, despised, rejected. Does this mean they didn't deserve to be saved?

Geography matters also in Luke's Gospel. There is the broader geography of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, the city where meaning and power are concentrated, the place where Christ will be crucified. The more detailed geography of today's reading is that of a borderland that is neither Samaria nor Galilee.

Here the borders not only separate Galilean from Samaritan, once members of the same family of tribes, but also separate one worship tradition from another; what is declared to be pure from what has been defined as impure; friend from foe.

Jesus is on the way to the cross and in this in-between zone ten men with a skin disease, a leprous condition, keeping their distance - as they were obliged to do - cry out to him for mercy. They not only live in a geographical borderland, but also in one of social, religious, and physical uncleanness. In this face-to-face encounter with Christ, they are, for the first time in years, seen and heard, they exist as human beings, and they obtain complete healing. Only one of them will come back to praise God and thank Jesus for his cleansing.

'Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?', Jesus asks rhetorically.

Christ's followers have reason to be bewildered. Did the Samaritan really deserve to be cured? Isn't God's mercy reserved for his people? After all, there is a centuries-long history of religious rivalry and ethnic friction between Jews and Samaritans.

If we have listened carefully to Luke's Gospel this year, the healing of the Samaritan shouldn't come as a surprise to us. In Luke's Gospel there is a leitmotif of reversal, which Mary had announced, and Jesus himself had proclaimed at the beginning of his ministry. At Nazareth, through the story of the cleansing of the Syrian general Naaman, Jesus reminded his listeners that God's grace and mercy has never been reserved for Israel (Luke 4:27). This was a story that challenged people in their understanding of who is worthy, and who can claim healing in the name of God. In response, his townspeople drove Jesus out of town and tried to throw him over a cliff (Luke 4:30). It can be difficult to accept the welcoming ways of our God, who encroaches on our borders. The healing of Naaman and of the Samaritan is a reminder that God's promises know no boundaries or borders, that God's grace will not abide by the arbitrary lines we draw between one another. Christ is the border-crosser par excellence and, in so doing, he witnesses to his Father's attention to those whom others consider to be on the margins.

With Christ's arrival, the geography of the borderland between Galilee and Samaria is transformed: the in-between zone becomes a sacred space where God's reversal law is at work. Here God shows up in healing and liberative power. Here it's the geography of God's kingdom which matters.

The maps of this geography are to be read, as the Samaritan demonstrates, with eyes of faith and with gratitude.

Faith doesn't mean "belief", adhering to a certain set of doctrines about God. Faith means "trust." Trust in God's reality and presence. Faith is placing one's trust in God's lovingkindness, regardless of one's personal circumstances. Faith leads one on paths that are cut across ambiguities and uncertainties.

Gratitude is a way of living and acting that never forgets one's dependence on God's grace. It is the basic human answer to God, the Swiss theologian Karl Barth once said, not fear and trembling, not guilt and dread. This is particularly difficult in our largely secularised society, which encourages us to believe that, to a large extent, we have ourselves to thank for what and where we are today, that there is always more in the world to be acquired or accomplished, and that we can have faith only in our hard work, clever investments, and wise choices. Yet, gratitude is not an inborn trait, it should be learned and then exercised, like a muscle. Gratitude begets more gratitude.

Gratitude and faith can unlock the fullness of life, can turn what we have into enough, can push us into those in-between places in the world - and in our lives - where there is brokenness, pain, and rejection, and can help us to read on God's map, as the Syrian Naaman and the Samaritan did, the paths of cleansing, of healing, of restoration.

Walking on those paths will move us forward into God's future with the assurance that there is always more to God's story with us than we can ever imagine or hope for. For that, may we always give thanks and praise.

Amen.



**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**  
**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**  
**Reflection – Last Sunday after Trinity – 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2022**

*Christine Portman, Reader*

*Do not offer him a bribe, for he will not accept it; and do not rely on a dishonest sacrifice; for the Lord is the judge, and with him there is no partiality.* These words from Ecclesiasticus relate closely to today's gospel passage – the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. In the light of the current shenanigans around tax policy we might be tempted to judge both characters pretty harshly, as harshly as we may judge some of our politicians. But before we think about this Sunday's readings, let's consider why today marks an important shift in the Church's year.

You've probably grown used to a lot of green vestments over the past few months – but today is the 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Trinity and so, the last. Soon we're into Christ the King and then a whole new year begins again with Advent. We rarely stop to consider why the accounts of Jesus' parables and teaching begin by celebrating the Trinity, or why this 'season' lasts for almost half the Church's year. How does the idea of God as Three Persons relate to Christ's teaching? At the top of your service sheet you can see the Rublev icon of the Trinity. Perhaps this can give us some clues about the nature of God.

*How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul has a desire and longing to enter the courts of the Lord.* These words from today's psalm show us that God is where we feel at home - like the sparrow who *has found her a house and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young.* It continues: *O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; listen, O God of Jacob.* Our prayer leads us home to God. The Old Testament reading and gospel today are both concerned about how we present ourselves before God in prayer.

The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector is well-known. It's often characterized simply as a warning against hypocrisy – but is it really as simple as that? After all, the Pharisee's lifestyle is not bad. He goes well beyond what the Law requires of him. He tithes on **all** his income, so his giving is self-sacrificial. In addition, he fasts not once a week as expected, but **twice**. He's praying in the right place, with the correct posture – in fact, he's fulfilling all the outward requirements and more. It's hard to class this as hypocritical behaviour.

By contrast, the tax collector would have been seen as a swindler, virtually a thief. Local tax collection was privatized. Contracts went to the highest bidder, who set their own rules. You can guess why they were so roundly detested! Jesus' judgement would have been utterly shocking to those that heard it. Christians have often handed down a very negative image of the Pharisees (not to mention, the Jews in general!), but although we might think of the Pharisees as unpopular, they were often admired in Jewish society. The one in this parable would seem to listeners a paragon of virtue. Why on earth would Jesus say that this 'worthless' tax collector would go home more *justified* than the other?

Is Jesus perhaps drawing our attention to the way these men prayed? Knowing his many failings, the tax collector throws himself on God's mercy. He's so ashamed that he's *standing far off* – hardly daring to go into the place where he'd be expected to pray. *He would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast.*

The contrast with the Pharisee's prayer is marked. He begins with thanks, it's true – but then goes on to make a statement all about himself, what **he** has done for God. Yes, he's thankful, but his prayer is on the point of being self-congratulatory. Before listing all his own achievements, he says: *God, I thank you that **I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector.*** In contrast, as Ian Boxall comments in a commentary on the parable, the tax collector's *prayer is honest, and it is God-centred rather than self-centred.* The words quoted earlier from Ecclesiasticus are clear about how we should pray: *Do not offer him a bribe, for he will not accept it; and do not rely on a dishonest sacrifice; for the Lord is the judge, and with him there is no partiality. He will not show partiality to the poor.* God desires honest relationships. We can't buy his love. His grace and mercy are

freely given, to rich and poor alike. His ways are not our ways: he does not judge the way we humans do.

Apart from on Trinity Sunday itself, we may rarely think much about why God as Three Persons is so central to our Christian faith. In her very interesting book, *The creation of a self-creating world*, Beatrice Bruteau discusses the relationship between God as Father, as Son, and as Holy Spirit. When you look at the Rublev icon, what do you see? How would you describe these three persons as they sit together around a table laid for Communion? What is being expressed in their gestures and their glances? There's love, tenderness, grace and sharing. These are our understandings of a God who is Love, love shared in a community. As Bruteau says, *God is being in every possible way, a community of existence which must be both one and many – the union of unity and multiplicity.*

This is what the Pharisee misses completely – the graciousness of God's love towards all his creation. He was sufficiently well-off to be able to tithe the entirety of his wealth whilst not being driven to starvation and penury. Did he know what had driven the tax collector to have to do the dirty work he was so obviously ashamed of? Did he understand the depths of despair of a man driven to do awful things in order to provide for himself and his family? Can we ever really know, as God knows, what has and is going on in the lives of those we condemn? God's nature is always to be merciful and gracious. Jesus puts words from Psalm 51 into the mouth of the tax collector: *"God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"* In doing so, he would have been reminding his listeners of how the psalm goes on: *The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

To quote the German theologian Joachim Jeremias: *The character of God, says Jesus, is such as described in Psalm 51. He welcomes the despairing, hopeless sinner, and rejects the self-righteous. He is the God of the despairing, and for the broken hearted his mercy is boundless. That is what God is like, and that is how he is now acting through me.*

For Christians, Jesus is the Way and the Truth. His life and teaching bring us to the Life he offers. The introduction to the parable underlines its meaning. Jesus *also*

*told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt. Not only were Pharisees present. Jesus' own followers and disciples were there too. Ian Boxall comments: Perhaps this is less a parable about two kinds of people than two kinds of prayer. The Pharisee's prayer reveals how piety can so easily lapse into self-satisfaction. Though he begins by thanking God, he does so first for what he is not (like other people) and second for what he has done for God, rather than what God has done for him. The parable is a clear warning against setting our own judgement above God's.*

The Holy Trinity is our model of God as Love. Just as the divine love flows endlessly between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, our love must flow between the persons with whom we live and move and have our being in the life with which God has blessed us. The moment we set ourselves apart, as better or more worthy of God's love than other people, we forget the words of Saint Paul that we'll soon say as we join together in Holy Communion: ***Though we are many, we are one body, because we all share in one bread.***

Amen

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE  
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Sermon**

**6<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

**All Saints' Marseille**

*The Revd James Johnston, Chaplain*

Some of the most memorable sayings of Jesus were given in response to someone stopping him as he went about his ministry and asking him a question. The best known of these is the reply he gives when he is asked: 'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' It is worth recalling that there were six hundred and thirteen commandments in the Law of Moses. Jesus replies: 'Love God and love your neighbour. Everything else flows from these.' A reply as beautiful as it is simple.

Often the question asked of Jesus was about an issue that was causing controversy in religious circles at the time. One example is the conversation recounted in Matthew's Gospel when Jesus was asked: 'Can a man divorce his wife for any reason?' Reading that conversation out of context, as a blanket ban against divorce in all circumstances, still causes much misunderstanding and pain, sometimes leaving Christians feeling trapped in loveless or abusive marriages. Recent research has focussed more on the fact that, in Jesus's time, there was a debate going on over whether the matrimonial laws should be extended to allow a man to divorce his wife for any reason he liked, as opposed to being limited to the reasons permitted under the law of Moses. One of the

arguments against the change was that allowing men to divorce for ‘any reason’ would make women more vulnerable, at a time when they had no economic or social security. It was a live debate, and it seems that the question Jesus was actually being asked in Matthew’s Gospel was: ‘Teacher, which side of the debate are you on?’

Another example of a question like this occurs in our Gospel reading this morning. The idea of an afterlife had come into the Jewish tradition quite late – around 170 BC – and not all the Jewish authorities agreed with it. At the time Jesus was teaching, both the Pharisees and those Jews who had been influenced by the Greeks did believe in an afterlife, though they had different understandings about how it worked. The more traditional Sadducees, on the other hand, did not believe in an afterlife at all. They did not accept the validity of any scriptures outside the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament), whereas the idea of resurrection appeared in later writings. So the Sadducees were essentially asking Jesus: ‘Teacher, which side of the debate are you on?’, though they angled the question in such a way as to suggest: ‘Surely the whole notion of resurrection is ridiculous?’

In his reply, Jesus takes them back to the time of Moses (to a saying that was in the Torah) and points out that they will find language there which does allow for the notion of life beyond death. He dismisses their exaggerated, literalist example of what resurrection might be like, presenting instead a vision of heaven which is very different from our present world - expansive, filled with the primacy of life over death and the beautiful sense of God’s eternal love for his children. It is hard for us, as it was for the Sadducees, to understand how things will be when we die. Yet the words of Jesus in today’s Gospel are simple

and direct. He tells us that God is God of the living and the dead: all are alive to him. The implication is that our life will continue, but in a different and transfigured form.

It's worth bearing in mind that Jesus never expressed anxiety about the long term destiny of the disciples he loved. He assumed that their relationship with him would continue beyond death. That is our hope too, as disciples of Christ.

It is, I believe, consoling for those of us who have lost loved ones to be reminded that all are alive for God - our God and theirs. What separates us from our loved ones is our limited human vision and understanding, not God's. That should give us comfort and courage.

As Christians who try to live accordingly, we are already living the life of God. And this life in Christ which we enjoy now, we shall also share with those who have gone before us. Death is an ending of this life before we move into that other dimension where the fullness of God will be made known to us. That is why we are resurrection people and our song is hope.

November is a month of remembrance. Last Sunday we celebrated All Saints' Day, and in our service of Compline on Wednesday we marked All Souls' Day, remembering loved ones we see no longer. In a week's time we will fold into our remembrance those who have died on the field of battle – an act of corporate remembrance.

In remembering those who have gone before us, we are reminded too of our own mortality. In response to a number of requests here in Marseille, next

Saturday we will be holding a session in church about how to plan our funeral. Taking a leaf from Her late Majesty's book, the session will be called 'London Bridge for All'. Planning our funeral is a thing we all ought to consider doing, not least because it will help those whom we love most to take decisions when the time comes, confident in the knowledge they are doing something we would have wanted.

This season of remembrance reminds us that the one thing of which we can all be certain is that we shall die. And as we contemplate that, at these church services we hear again, in one form or another, the words of Christ that confront the certainty of our dissolution: 'I am the resurrection and I am life.' We come back to the scriptures to hear those words, not because we hope to escape the reality of death or to deny its finality. Christians are not, as the sceptics suppose, wishful thinkers or deniers of the real world. If we were, we would not have as our emblem the Cross, a symbol of death.

At the heart of our faith is the story of a man who died; and of a man who died believing in the power of God to confront, redeem and transform that most intractable of human limitations. And so we come to hear again the words of Jesus: 'I am the resurrection and I am life; whoever believes in me shall never die', because they suggest to us something we have already experienced in our own lives, well before their earthly end.

Those encounters with death and resurrection, which punctuate our lives, we bring to God in this Eucharist. And as we come to the altar, we will lift up our empty hands, holding them out to God, who brings all things together, and who



comes to us with his very self. And as we receive the wafer into our outstretched hands, we will become what we receive: the Body of Christ.

Sometimes that wafer is traced with the sign of the Cross. A reminder that although our emblem is a symbol of death, it was also transfigured, once and for all, in the early light of dawn on the first Easter Day.

Amen.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE  
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection – Christ the King – 20<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

*Jane Quarmby, Reader*

In September millions of people watched the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II, some in the streets of London where flowers were strewn in front of the hearse, lining the way and keeping a respectful silence. Many more millions watched the pageantry and spectacle on TV, quietly at home. She had been a much-needed beacon of constancy, dignity, and a deep sense of duty, bolstered by a very strong Christian faith which she was not afraid to profess publicly. Although hers was a role of influence not power, she made her mark in the lives of millions. Her death was peaceful, at home in Balmoral, surrounded by people who loved and cared for her at the end of a very long life. In May next year her son will be crowned King in another beautifully orchestrated display of pomp and ceremony.

King Charles has waited a very long time to be crowned King, at the age of 73 he is the oldest person to ascend the throne. Born into a life of privilege and responsibility, a life lived in the glare of the spotlight of media attention, he may have wealth but his is not a lifestyle many would choose despite the material luxury he is surrounded by. And of course, he had no choice either. He may well have been happier as a farmer and gardener but that was not to be.

King Charles the III is probably the embodiment of what we nowadays think of as a King, someone surrounded by wealth and glamour, with an important role but not actually in charge of anything – that is left to his government. He won't be asked to lead his armies into battle, despite his military service.

What a contrast to today's readings, all about Christ the King, a poor man who was brutally tortured, made to stagger to his place of death, killed when still a young man and buried in haste. He wasn't a military commander, he didn't live in a palace

in the lap of luxury, he didn't have wealth or any kind of status. He was born in a stable and brought up as a carpenter's son. How could this man have been a King? Even the sign fixed to the cross piece that Simon was forced to carry, saying 'King of the Jews', was nailed there in mockery. We all have a pre-conceived idea of what others should be like, and this Jesus didn't fit that idea of a Messiah, God's Holy One, sent to save the Israelites. They thought their true King would be like David, a soldier, someone who would lead them into battle and win against the hated Roman occupiers of their land. The message of Jesus, of love, simply didn't fit. If they'd thought about it, then Jesus's message and preaching, his displays of compassion and healing, would ultimately mean the end of war and aggression if everyone followed them. They still would. We would have no more wars, no hunger, no homelessness, no cruelty to the weak. It would indeed have ushered in a new world, the like of which had never been seen before – one which deep down we all long for but have little idea how to reach.

Jesus knew what the consequences would be of his death, and said to the crowd of weeping and wailing women, that they should not cry for him but for themselves. Those who were deeply ashamed of never having children, he says will be better off soon as they won't know the heartbreak of seeing their children crucified in front of them, when disaster strikes the people and they will wish that the mountains would fall on them and cover them. He is no rebel troublemaker although he is dying the death of one. He is, he says, the green wood. What does he mean by that? Well, if you try and set fire to green wood, wood that is still full of water, you'll struggle to light a fire. It's necessary to let the wood dry out, lose weight, become as they say, tinder dry. Then the wood will catch fire at a spark and cause huge destruction if you're not careful as we have seen in so many parts of the world this summer. So if Jesus is the green wood, and he, with all his urging for ways of peace and love is being tortured and killed, what will happen to those who are in effect dry wood – the rebels, the young hotheads eager to cause trouble for the Roman authorities? If they catch light, the reaction will be catastrophic for the Israelites. Rome will stamp out any resistance with callous savagery, so much so that all those caught up in it will be thankful they have no children to see grow up and become the rebels so meticulously hunted down and dying an agonising death on the cross as Jesus is about to do now through no fault of his own. And of course that is just what happens a few decades later.

Jesus is fulfilling his destiny of service to his sheep, his lost people, by dying a death normally reserved for rebels, and criminals. Everything about him during his life, spent offering peace and hope, mixing with the wrong people, healing whoever needed it, warning of what will happen if the people don't listen to him and mend their ways, has been at odds with his people's preconceptions. Because of that they wouldn't stop and think. Wouldn't recognise him for who he really is. Wouldn't see that he was the real deal, not just some rebel commander about to get them all into deep water.

It's summed up neatly by Luke in contrasting the polar opposite reactions of the two men crucified either side of Jesus. One joins in with the crowds taunting Jesus but the other realises that whilst he and the other one are in this situation due to their own acts, Jesus isn't. He believes in Jesus and is rewarded by him, being promised that he will be in paradise that very day. Like a king, Jesus promises him a place of honour and bliss.

Despite the jeering, the taunts, the cheap wine that only the poor drank, his clothes being raffled off, the pain, the distress it is causing his mother and others, his disciples running away and all the horrendous exhausting things that have happened to him in the last 24 hours, Jesus, unlike the majority of martyrs who died cursing their torturers, astonishingly prays for them to be forgiven.

With the benefit of hindsight, history has demonstrated to all Christians that Jesus was indeed the King. I began by thinking that there was such a contrast between Christ the King who owned so little and our own monarchs with their wealth and jewels and land, the ceremonies that they take part in, the public displays of so much wealth. But then I read about King Charles and his long fought battle against the damage we are doing to our planet, his son the future King, selling Big Issue magazines for charity, the charitable work the Royals do day in day out. And I attended sung communion with Garry at York Minister this month.

As we sat waiting for the service to begin, I looked up at the glorious, beautiful soaring stone ceiling, the skilled craftsmanship at every level that went into creating this temple to Christ the King. Then the massive organ roared out its music, we all stood and the choir, robed and in procession, filed round and down to the front, with the clergy in their gold and red robes, led by a big cross. No palace could be more fitting for any King than this cathedral. The service continued with

the sacred music performed flawlessly by the choir and all was beautifully done. We were given communion from silver dishes administered by the clergy in their robes embroidered with gold and it was all very special. I have to admit, I do love sparkly things!

And we heard a sermon which spoke about being Christian. About how we are identified as Christians by our actions – whether we feed the poor, care for the sick, give shelter to the homeless. The preacher pointed out with a wry smile that here she was, telling us what to do to be better Christians whilst in her golden robes, and how that was a dilemma for her. And I must admit, it was for me too. I wonder what Christ makes of it, our humble King for whom material things meant and mean nothing, that we lavish so much time and money on chapels and churches and cathedrals? Jesus died for us, for our sins. There is as far as we know, no Plan B there – he died once for all. It doesn't do any harm now and again to think about what it really means to be his Body, to do his work.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE  
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – Advent Sunday – 27<sup>th</sup> November 2022

*Canon David Pickering*

***Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.***  
*Matthew 24.42)*

So here we are again, Advent Sunday, the beginning of the Christian Liturgical Year. As we start a new year of worship, perhaps I ought to wish everyone Bonne Année? But instead, I'd rather ask a question: "How awake do you feel?" That seems to be the call of all this morning's readings. The popular Christian writer Susan Stones puts it succinctly, ***The Church begins its new year on Advent Sunday with the alarm clock jerking us out of sleep. There isn't even a snooze button. There is a sense of urgency as we listen to the readings.***

So how awake are we? And to what are we called to be awake?

All our readings seem to challenge us to be awake for special events not far away. In today's well-known and radical passage, Isaiah says of the Lord: ***He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Isaiah 2.4.)*** - words that surely should shake up and wake up our present-day, war-torn and oppressive world. Today's psalm calls us to be awake for the need to ***Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: 'May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers.'*** Psalm 122. 6&7.

And again, in the New Testament reading, another well-known passage, Saint Paul has a clear wake-up call for the Romans: ***Besides this, you know what time it is, how now is the moment to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. (Romans 13. 11 & 12.)***

Isaiah, the psalmist and Saint Paul are all very clear about the need to stay awake and alert to the circumstances and situations that we see around us, the urgent need to establish real peace - and even the need for radical change in the way we live. Yet the Gospel reading seems to be a wake-up call to something more dramatic, even climatic; the Second Coming. It begins: ***But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, only the Father. Matthew 24.36.*** And closes: ***Therefore you must also be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. (Matthew 24.44.)***. So are we awake? Are we ready for the Second Coming?

The word Advent means 'coming', and of course we're looking forward to celebrating and commemorating the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet today's Gospel and other readings call us to be ready and awake for a second coming. In a few moments we will declare in the Nicene Creed: ***He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.***

In its very first years, the Apostolic Church certainly expected Jesus to make an early return. Saint Paul writing to the Church at Philippi says, ***We eagerly wait for our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven (Philippians 3.2)***. And in what are possibly his earliest letters, Paul constantly calls on the Thessalonians to be ready for the Second Coming. ***May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*** sums up his message well (*1 Thessalonians 5.23*).

Over the centuries there have been various speculations about the date. Towards the end of the first millennium many in the Church believed that the year 1000 would see the coming of ***our Lord, King and Judge***. There were a few similar quiet mutterings in the late 1990s - some believed that during 2000 would mark his reappearance. Back in the seventeenth century the scholarly Archbishop of Armagh, James Ussher, was more precise. He predicted from his 'biblical calculations' that the 22nd of October, 1996 would be the day. Can any of us remember anything about what we were doing then? I expect that for most of us, it was a very normal Tuesday. So far Jesus has not appeared at his Second Coming.

So perhaps we should consider this. Since the early days of the small and persecuted Church, history and thinking have moved on. We often have no difficulty in responding to the metaphors and images in other poetic biblical

passages. Maybe we're in danger of interpreting these particular texts in a far too literal sense? In our gospel text, Jesus seems to emphasise that ***you do not know on what day your Lord is coming***. The greater stress is upon the idea that we need to ***keep awake***. Instead of speculating on the date of the Day of Judgement, or whatever other title we may wish give it, the focus should be on making sure that we're ready for it. To paraphrase the hymn *Awake my soul*, "***live every day as if it were your last***".

If we respond to these words with fear, they can seem restrictive and intimidating. But perhaps we might rather see them as an exciting invitation - a call to be awake and alert to the presence of God and Jesus in our world and lives in the here and now. "***Read the papers, and see what God is doing in the world***" was a saying attributed to Fr Herbert Kelly. In 1893 he founded an Anglican Religious Community, the Society of the Sacred Mission, where I trained for the priesthood in the 1960s. Of course he was speaking and I was training in the days well before the internet and rolling news channels. But Fr. Kelly's basic concept is still true: stay awake to what's going on in the world and try to understand where God may be at work.

Do we centre our understanding of the world and our own lives on where God is being revealed? So many forms of the modern media bombard us with negative and alarmist views. How many of us are now drawn into *doomscrolling* on their various devices? No doubt in Fr Kelly's days there was bad as well as good news in the press of the day, but 24-hour rolling news on smartphones and TVs didn't invade people's daily lives.

Is it through a lack of faith that we don't see God and his love working away in our own lives and the wider world? In our evening prayers do we look at what has been good that day? Do we ask ourselves what we've seen or experienced in our personal lives of God's love and goodness? The very fact that we woke up that morning can be counted as a real blessing. And from that moment we should go through the day aware of God's presence in all that surrounds us.

In a recent homily Christine referred to some words of Etty Hillesum. Throughout her writings, this young Jewish woman retained a strong sense of the presence of God, even as, in the most dire circumstances, she awaited her own journey to the gas chambers of Auschwitz. God never goes away. He is always there, waiting for



us to wake up to his presence. And it is this sense of the divine presence that can strengthen us in whatever trials and tribulations we may face in daily living.

To help us awaken ourselves to God in our worship on this new Advent Sunday I found three “awake” hymns. For our offertory hymn I chose *Awake, awake: fling off the night*. It’s always suitable for morning prayer, especially for its reminder in the opening words of the last verse; ***Then sing for joy, and use each day, give thanks for everything alway.***

Amen.