ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

Epiphany - 8th January 2023

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd James Johnston, Chaplain

A friend of mine commented the other day how sending Christmas cards is going out of fashion, as we are more apt nowadays to send messages on social media to our thousand 'closest' friends. There is no doubt an ecological dimension to this shift, and a background of increases in the cost of postage. But I must admit I still enjoy receiving Christmas cards, partly as they enable us over a period of weeks to remember in love the people who sent them. Opening and closing a WhatsApp message doesn't seem to have the same effect - but that's probably just because I am middle-aged.

Two of the most popular images on Christmas cards are the Virgin and child and the three kings. When the two come together at the Epiphany (which means 'revelation'), figures representing human power and wealth are seen laying down their gifts before a sight so precious that human power and wealth are lost in wonder. It was only in the second century that the idea of the visitors to the manger being kings emerged, with its echo of Isaiah's prophecy heard in our Old Testament reading this morning. It's interesting how the idea has stuck. I suspect it's partly because there is something compelling about worldly power being shown brought to its knees by a holy infant. The love of power

encountering the power of love. That is as true for our time as it was in the first century.

There is another reflex going on in the paintings too. The incarnation is about God forgoing privilege to be one with us. Found not in wealth and splendour but in poverty and imminent oppression. The visitors respond to that forgoing of privilege by kneeling down themselves. Meeting God on a stable floor. (Ask yourselves how clean that would have been.) As we have seen in previous reflections, life with God is all about call and response.

But the first century visitors weren't actually kings, so far as we know. They were *magoi* (from which we get the word magic) – astrologers, fortune-tellers, representatives of a different belief system. Matthew's account of the Christmas story shows God's new life pulsing through unlikely people, as Herod and the establishment stand around dismissing or fretting – and then murdering, to make sure there is no actual threat to them. The Christmas story shows how strangers are called as unexpected witnesses to God's life-changing action – the poor and marginalized, living outside the walls of respectability, or foreigners like these.

So we mustn't be surprised that that's how the story continues. The Gospel shows Jesus constantly going out to those who were beyond the boundaries of respectability and bringing them in. Showing those around him, then and now, that there are no barriers to God's love. The hostility he encountered came from those whose standing and power were challenged by his message. Herod the Great at his birth, and later Herod Antipas and the might of Rome at his death. But Jesus's message of God's radical, inclusive love proved stronger, and still does.

Our readings today from the prophet Isaiah and Paul's Letter to the Ephesians also reflect on this – how God's vision is far wider and greater than our human assumptions, and how, if we follow Christ, we will always be surprised where it leads us.

What of the gifts the visitors brought? What might they signify for us? Gold points to our economic interests. Security, home, work. For many, a source of worry and anxiety. For others, a sign of indulgence and injustice. Gold is freighted, heavy with meaning. How easy is it for us to lay it down and walk away?

Incense might have been part of the magi's apparatus from which they earned their living. It's also traditionally a sign of prayer, as its smoke rises to heaven. But smoke can also hide things, become a smokescreen behind which we shelter in religiosity while others are suffering. How easy is it to lay aside the props of faith in order to worship the living God who is spirit and truth?

Myrrh is used for embalming. Part of us always wants to keep things as they are, resistant to change. Not allowing the new life of Christ to break in and colour our thoughts and responses. How easy is it for us to lay aside our desire to keep everything as it is? The magi were changed by their encounter, responding to the promptings of God as they left for home by another road.

These are the sort of questions the gifts of the magi ask us. What are we willing to offer God in this new year? What are we willing to lay down before Christ?

Perhaps in the end the compelling thing about these mysterious visitors is their willingness to journey into the unknown. It's good to ask ourselves at the start of a new year where we are willing to be led in response to God's call. The magi were willing to travel far, way outside their comfort zone. We must be prepared

to do the same as we follow where Christ leads. How far are we prepared to go to meet him? And what will we offer when we get there – materially, emotionally, spiritually? There will be joy, wonder and praise, but there will also be sacrifice, fear and uncertainty. Yet in the end there will be salvation – fullness of life, healing from hurt - for all people, in all places and for all time. It's a radical agenda, and in our baptism we made it our own. That's an exciting prospect for a new year, if sometimes a daunting one.

Matthew's gospel, extracts from which are set for many of our Sunday readings this year, begins and ends with a wide and inclusive vision, disturbing to those who would limit faith experience to those who conform to a specific set of beliefs or rules. His gospel begins with a genealogy that speaks of how outsiders have always been included in the history of salvation. It continues with outsiders arriving at the stable and being welcomed in. It insists that no one is outside the scope of God's loving purposes, and at the end the apostles are sent out by the risen Christ with words which resonate across space and time: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ... And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

There are times when that does feel daunting. But the Spirit of God is always there to guide us, so that although we may find ourselves having to take a road we might not have expected or even wished to travel, we may trust that it will lead us home. For it is in God, revealed in Christ, that our true home lies, the end of all our desiring. Our Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

The fifth century philosopher Boethius wrote this prayer, with which I will end:

> O Father, give the spirit power to climb
> To the fountain of all light, and be purified.
> Break through the mists of earth, the weight of the clod,
> Shine forth in splendour, thou that art calm weather,

And quiet resting place for faithful souls.
To see thee is the end and the beginning,
Thou carriest us, and thou dost go before,
Thou art the journey, and the journey's end.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

Presentation of Christ in the Temple – Candlemas

29th January 2023

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

If you want a joyful, colourful and flavourful Candlemas festival: come to Marseille! Candlemas is, indeed, celebrated in style in this city. No less than eight days of celebrations, with processions, renewal of vows, special candles and biscuits that are blessed and shared, and much more.

The people who will start gathering in the small hours, on Thursday, to pray, and sing, and walk together, are faithful to a long tradition that goes back to the beginning of the 5th century. The one who started it was John Cassian, born in what is now Romania. Cassian was also the one who first established monastic life in the middle of Marseille and whose writings inspired Saint Benedict, founder of Western monasticism and today one of the patron saints of Europe.

Having witnessed in Bethlehem and Egypt the great feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, unknown at that time in Europe, Cassian introduced it to Marseille, even before it was instituted for the whole Western Church by Pope Gelasius at the end of the 5th century. A beautiful encounter between East and West in Marseille. This is heritage that can bear fruit even today.

The true meaning of Candlemas is to be found in its dual nature. There is rejoicing for the revelation of the Christ Child in the Temple, greeted by Simeon and Anna. At the same time, the prophetic words of Simeon, who speaks of the falling and rising of many and of the sword that will pierce Mary's heart, lead on to Christ's Passion. They warn that the journey of the disciples, like that of their Master, is the way of the cross.

The Eastern Churches call Candlemas the "Feast of the Encounter": for on this day, we hear, in the words of Luke, about the encounter between the Lord who

is coming and the people who are waiting for him, represented by Simeon and Anna. The gift of God encounters the hope of humankind. Simeon and Anna sum up the long line of generations of those who seek God, of those who long for him. They are bearers of all the expectations Israel had since the promise God made to Abraham: "in you all the nations of the earth will be blessed". A promise which God has made to offer to all humankind his love and salvation.

Simeon and Anna's lives had been infused with the hope that the Messiah would bring radical newness to the world. And now that their eyes had been opened, they saw in Mary's child born in poverty what was still hidden from the eyes of the world: "The Lord whom you seek has suddenly come to his temple." And thus, God has kept his promise to Israel; in the words of the psalmist, "the King of Glory has come in" and so redemption is at hand.

There is much gladness in Simeon and Anna's encounter with the Christ Child and their faithful hoping and waiting are transformed. These marathon runners of prayer and holiness can be fearless in speaking about Christ's presence among them. In this moment of recognition and thanksgiving, Simeon's response is to praise God in the beautiful words of the Nunc Dimittis, the canticle many Christians say every evening at the office of Compline: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people to be a light to lighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of thy people Israel." Simeon understands that what God will do through this child is a universal offer.

In this scene of intimacy and awe in the temple, we can find the common thread of every human life: God comes to meet us. God's primary and characteristic gesture towards humankind is to come to meet us. We are all here this morning because, one day, we welcomed God who asked - delicately, patiently - to be let into our lives. In the Temple, an encounter happened in the simplicity of a dialogue, an exchange of glances, a respectful gesture, perhaps a smile. Likewise, there is nothing formal or spectacular when God comes to meet us, no fanfare or hosts of angels who sing the Gloria, no fireworks or unusual star in the sky to be observed and followed, no deus ex machina moment. The invitation to an encounter is so subtle, that it might go unnoticed. Will we allow ourselves to be surprised by the God who wants to engage with us in a conversation marked by simplicity and familiarity?

The expanse of the paths God takes to meet us is most astonishing: each time different, each time adapted to each person. He sends the Spirit to draw us out

of slumber, of habits, of discouragement, of comfortable tranquillity; to secretly lead us towards him, because, like Simeon and Anna, we thirst for him, even if we can't name this longing.

The encounter with God does not happen in an instant. It is a long journey. Simeon and Anna have spent long prayerful years growing in faith and awareness. They have learnt attentiveness to God - so deeply, that when the moment comes, they can be open to the prompting of the Spirit. God is patient. He gives us time - a lifetime - to prepare ourselves to encounter him.

The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber recognised that we get prepared to encounter God through our everyday encounters with other human beings and with the world. He said, "Meet the world with the fullness of your being and you shall meet God." Since God came to visit his people, to experience life with us in the radical simplicity of a human existence, all our human relationships can become visitations, God's breaking into our lives with light and blessing. We should learn such attentiveness to our human encounters, that we could hear God speaking to us through them.

Today, the joy and peace of God, which have been announced at Christmas, are confirmed by Simeon to be a gift to every human being. We need to celebrate this light that breaks in even today, in the midst of the darkness of the world. As Christians, we are charged, like Simeon and Anne, to watch over the hope of all humanity. Therefore, we come, on the feast of Candlemas, to catch a glimpse of this light so we can tell others what we have seen, and witness, through our lives, to our encounter with God in Jesus Christ through the Spirit.

May the light we'll hold in our hands at the end of the service prompt us to allow ourselves to become a light for others and may God give us the grace of the Encounter, so that all our encounters become paths towards his Light.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

Third Sunday before Lent - 5th February 2023

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd James Johnston, Chaplain

There are times when I look at a set of Sunday readings and wonder what the church compilers were thinking when they grouped them together. Today is one of those Sundays. It always raises two questions: what did the Bible passages mean for their original hearers, and what might they mean for us now?

We begin with the 'who what why when where' questions that arise when we read any extract from the Bible. Our understanding is deepened once we know more about who it was written by and for, what sort of text it is (history, teaching, prophecy, poetry, polemic), why it was written (is it a reflection on an event that has already happened, or the hope of an event yet to come, or a piece written to persuade others of a truth or a point of view?), and when it was written (was it at the time of the events described, like Paul's Letters, or some years later looking back at them, like the Gospels?).

That's a lot of things to think about when we come across a piece of Scripture, but it's always rewarding. I notice, for example, that none of the women here this morning are wearing hats. In my childhood they invariably did, and there were also no women clergy then. But didn't St Paul say that women should keep

their heads covered in church and be silent? He did, but our understanding of what he meant has been enhanced through a better understanding of the context of his words, written to a particular community at a particular time in a particular place. Only then can we ask intelligently what they might mean for us today. So, ladies, please keep talking and singing, and Roxana, Jane and Christine, please keep preaching. And if any of you wish to wear a hat, remember that (at least in the Church of England) it is now possible for it to be a bishop's mitre.

So what would our readings today have meant to their earliest hearers? A glib response might be that usually in the Old Testament it's about Israel and usually in the New Testament it's about Jesus. And sometimes it's both.

The New Testament scholar Tom Wright has an interesting take on the combination of our readings today. He points out that Isaiah's stinging rebuke in chapter 58 contains the seeds of the Sermon of the Mount, which is where the words from St Matthew in our Gospel this morning are taken. (Matthew, writing for a predominantly Jewish faith community, his focus being to demonstrate that Jesus was the promised Messiah, albeit not like they were expecting.)

Isaiah was insisting that true piety must be part of an outward movement to share your blessing with the world. Fasting is useless if injustice is not being challenged. Look after those in need, and your light will rise like the dawn. God will be present when you call him, provided you do not ignore the needs of others.

Jesus's challenge to be salt of the earth and light to the world was not only an agenda for his followers at the time, or for the early church that was evolving when the Gospels were written. It was a direct challenge, like Isaiah, to the Israel of his time. The ancient call was that the people of Israel should be a light to the world, that through them God's justice and mercy would be shared with all the nations. The city set on a hill, unable to be hidden, was Jerusalem, where (in the prophecies) the nations would come to learn God's law. Yet at the time of Jesus's ministry, the society around him – understandably perhaps, under the shadow of Roman occupation – had become more inward-looking. Jesus's concern was that it was losing its vocation. His call was for Israel to *be* Israel, while there was still time. To take up what the law and the prophets had pointed to, leaving aside the narrow interpretations of some of the religious authorities, notably among the Pharisees, who were so anxious about the detail of the laws about purity that they had stopped looking outwards to those in need. (The best known example of this criticism is the parable of the Good Samaritan.) It was a challenge to authority that cost Jesus his life.

But Paul, in his letter to the early church in Corinth, realized that Jesus's challenge had actually succeeded. The events that it set in train came not through human wisdom or worldly force but the sheer power of the gospel which the crucified one had preached. It was, in the end, Jesus who became salt for the world, a light-bringer to the nations, Jesus who became (when everyone had rejected him) the one set on a hill who could not be hidden. The sermon Jesus preached was an agenda that he himself fulfilled. That's why it can be said of our readings today that they are both about Israel and about Jesus.

What do these readings mean for us now? The injunctions to be salt and light – what do they say to us? Two commodities of which a small amount can make a big difference. A tiny pinch of salt transforms the flavour of cooking. Light from a single candle can light up a dark room. The symbols Jesus uses are powerful.

On 19th November 1960, a lawyer named Peter Benenson was travelling on the London Underground when he read in a newspaper that two Portuguese students had been imprisoned for drinking a toast to freedom. He felt disturbed by it, and when he came out of the Tube he went into a church to process his thoughts. There must, I think, have been a candle burning there, for he found himself thinking of the Chinese proverb 'better to light a candle than curse the darkness'. By the time he left the church, he had formed the idea that if enough people wrote letters to the Portuguese authorities, protesting about the imprisonment of the students, it might have some impact. The idea became Amnesty International, of which he was the founder, with its symbol of a candle surrounded by barbed wire. It's a candle that has shone brightly in the darkness for over sixty years. Amnesty now has over ten million members worldwide.

Jesus's words don't require us all to found a worldwide movement. But what we do need to do is look outwards, caring not just for those who come to our churches but also for those who don't, not least in a city of great need like Marseille. Under the leadership of the Archbishop here, Cardinal Jean-Marc Aveline, a project is currently under way to pool the knowledge and resources of different churches in helping some of the most vulnerable in our communities. There should in due course be opportunities for us all to help in a practical way, without each of us having to invent the wheel ourselves.

Closer to home, it's even more simple. We can be salt and light to those we encounter each and every day. Simple gestures, which can be life-changing. Offering a meal to someone who normally eats alone, a shoulder to cry on for someone living through a crisis, a small beacon of hope to another at a frightening time. It can make all the difference in the world. So let's do it, let's become the agenda of the sermon Jesus gave, giving thanks to the one who showed us how.

'Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly … Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.'

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

Second Sunday before Lent - 12th February 2023

Eglise du Sacré-Coeur, Oppède

The Revd James Johnston, Chaplain

I wonder what keeps you awake at night. Worrying, it seems, is part of the human condition. Our early ancestors were kept safe by their 'fight or flight' response, which we have inherited. The response is easily triggered, in some more easily than others.

The last time our readings today came in the church's three year Lectionary cycle we were days away from a global pandemic. Days away from a wave of anxiety encouraged by governments to keep people safe from infection. The after-effects of that anxiety are now beginning to be understood. Some have compared it to a form of post-traumatic stress response that has particularly affected young people. How can we, as parents, grandparents, godparents, best help them, and ourselves?

At the height of the pandemic, the naturalist Sir David Attenborough encouraged people to spend ten minutes a day looking at something in nature. He said it would calm their spirits, and it did. His advice in some ways was not

dissimilar to that of Christ to his followers, two thousand years earlier. 'Consider the lilies.'

In today's Gospel we hear Jesus telling his disciples very clearly: 'Do not worry' - three times in the course of a few sentences. He knew how much time we all waste in worrying about unimportant things. We are easily distracted from what matters most. We are also given a constant sense of what other people want us to believe our lives should be like – this food, these clothes. It takes self-discipline to give attention to Jesus's words: 'Isn't life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Don't strive for all this – instead, strive for God's kingdom, and his justice.'

The words which come immediately before this story in Matthew's Gospel are Jesus's advice to the disciples: 'No one can serve two masters. You cannot serve God and wealth.' There is deep truth in that. We all think that we need just a bit more, but the reality is that when we have a bit more, we think we need a bit more still. On the other hand, if our heart is set on the things of God, the things of Mammon start to fall away. If we start to care passionately about the welfare of another, we stop noticing any lack of our own.

The same is true if we feel passionately about a cause to do with justice, or human rights. We can end up putting all our energy into it, persuading others to join us, working hard to promote the outcome we are striving for, and all the while our own needs fall into the background. Striving for God's kingdom, and his justice.

Perhaps there are three things in particular that we can take away from Jesus's words in our Gospel this morning.

First, learning to live more in the moment. Many have discovered the benefits of this through the practice of mindfulness. It is based on the notion that if you can learn to live in the present and not be distracted by anxiety about the past or the future, you will live a more contented and peaceful life. The Christian faith actually helps us do this. For it assures us that we do not need to live burdened with regrets about the past, for the past has been forgiven, and we no longer need to be anxious about the future, for the future is about new life, resurrection. That leaves the present, in which we are offered fullness of life in God's beautiful creation. 'Consider the lilies.'

Where I live, the almond blossom is out on the trees, a first promise of Spring. It always reminds me of the words of the television writer Dennis Potter, written after he learned that he did not have long to live:

> 'I discover … what you always know to be true, but you never know it till you know it. … We're the one animal that knows we're going to die, and yet we carry on … behaving as though [we will go on for ever]. And we … forget that life can only be defined in the present tense; … that nowness [has] become so vivid that … I'm almost serene. … I can celebrate life. Below my window … the blossom is out in full now … and looking at it, instead of saying "Oh that's nice blossom", ... I see it is the whitest, frothiest, blossomest blossom that there ever could be … The nowness of everything is absolutely wondrous, and if [only] people could see that… the glory of it, … the comfort of it, the reassurance ...'

Yet we don't do it nearly enough. Sadly, it can take a life-threatening illness to make us see it. 'Consider the lilies.'

The second thing Jesus's words teach us is to learn to trust God more. Learning to trust God is what, at their heart, the Scriptures are about. The Book of Genesis was written while the people of ancient Israel were in exile in Babylon. They thought they had lost everything. And so they wrote down their story, to remind them of the ways in which God had been good to them in the past and could be trusted through bad times as well as good.

They began telling the story 'in the beginning' – the opening words of the Bible, which we heard in our Old Testament reading. They went on to recall their liberation from slavery in Egypt, their receiving of the Law on Mount Sinai after wandering in the wilderness, and finally their entry into the promised land, their home. The prophets warned that if they drifted away from God they would lose the land. Later, from exile, they wrote joyfully of their promised return. The New Testament takes up the story – John's Gospel begins with the same words, 'In the beginning'. The Gospels tell of liberation, of Christ's teaching how to find peace and contentment - life in all its fullness – and through the death and resurrection of Jesus they end with a promise of ultimate homecoming, of life for ever with the one who created them in the beginning. The message of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is that we may place our trust in God.

The third thing Jesus's words teach us is to attend to our inner life, the life of the soul. The spiritual writer Richard Rohr notes that each of us lives within three levels of meaning. First, my story; my life; my possessions. Jesus teaches us to

let go of this level in order to find our deeper and truer life and security. Secondly, our story; our group, family, community, church. We all need to belong, so this level of meaning is important. It's about being the Body of Christ. Finally, there is the story, the level of ultimate meaning. Jesus is always (including in today's Gospel) drawing us towards this level of sacred identity, to find our true identity and security in the transcendent love of God.

In summary, when Jesus tells us not to worry, he is not advising us to be irresponsible about our everyday personal and family responsibilities. Instead, he challenges us to find a deeper security – the life of the soul – from which we can deal with those responsibilities wisely and joyfully. Part of what coming to church is about is the search for that deeper truth, that deeper security, in order to discern what's important and what not, what to worry about and what not.

So let us make time for God, go deep within ourselves to find God's silent spaciousness. And from that place will come the security and strength to live with joy and freedom, finding a love that will sustain us whatever we have to go through – and to ensure that our priorities are wise ones.

Three things. Learning to live in the present. Learning to trust God. Learning to attend to our inner lives to find deeper security and strength. That's not bad advice to offer to children, grandchildren, godchildren. 'Consider the lilies.'

Amen.

ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
Homily – 5th March 2023
2nd Sunday of Lent
Gospel according to St John 3, 1-17

Père Laurent Notareschi
Parish priest of Sainte Anne with Saint Francois Xavier, Marseille and Ecumenical Delegate of the Archbishop of Marseille

Dear friends,

First, I would like to thank you for welcoming me to your church and to this service. I feel very honoured to share with you this precious time in the eyes of the Lord, allowing us to strengthen further the bonds of friendship and fellowship which unite us and enabling us to take a further step along the beautiful path of Christian unity.

For those of you who experienced the celebration of Ash Wednesday on 22nd February, which marked the beginning of the blessed season of Lent, we heard our priests or pastors repeat to us this invitation from John the Baptist in Mark's Gospel:
"Repent [be converted, be transformed], and believe in the Good News!"

The texts we are given on this second Sunday of Lent seem to me to be a good extension and development of this.

We have heard the invitation made to Abraham to leave his country and his father's house. An invitation to go on a journey, even though the destination is not yet known... Is this not the meaning of our pilgrimages?
Being aware that the geographical journey we are making opens us up and makes us receptive to inner journeys, to conversion, transformation, which the Lord offers us as a gift in his great generosity.
A pilgrim on the road to Compostela has written this:
"It is not the road that is important but the fact of walking".

Like Abraham, we too may be called by the Lord to leave behind a number of things that are too burdensome in order to make ourselves more receptive to his grace, his love, his presence.
To leave our comforts, our habits that are sometimes too strong and too addictive, in order to make room for him in our hearts, to let Him satisfy us.
To free ourselves from our sins, to learn from our mistakes, not to remain bogged down by our failures, in order better to welcome the full light of the Risen Christ. Yes, this is the meaning of Lent.

In the passage that we heard from John's Gospel, it is no longer a question of leaving behind and going but of being "born from above" or "born of water and the Spirit". With the historical perspective that we have today, we might read into this our own experience of

baptism: washed of our sins by the water of baptism and enlivened by the Holy Spirit which we have received in abundance, we have become children of God in the footsteps of Jesus Christ who led the way – a sort of rebirth, therefore.

But we might also understand it as the work of conversion, of transformation.

This is what I experienced myself: baptised at the age of 3 months, having taken my first Communion, been confirmed and made my profession of faith at the age of 13, I was still far from knowing God. It was witnessing the healing of a 10-year-old child, who regained the use of his legs and sight, during a charismatic revival meeting in Ars in 1985 (when I was 17) which led me to realise how much God is present and how much he loves us.

A conversion, then, a transformation, and a real rebirth because for me my life of faith began then.

But the Lord also grants us grace to experience several conversions, several transformations. We never finish being converted. We never finish discovering the closeness of God to us every day of our lives, we never finish discovering the power of his love for us and for those around us, for the very world which God has loved so much.

Is not our life by its very nature a succession of conversions or rebirths? With its clearly identifiable times of adolescence, mid-life (owing to the mid-life crisis), bereavements and the various trials we have to face... With death and resurrection as the ultimate conversion, the ultimate transition?

Meanwhile, since I am in no more of a hurry than you are to experience that ultimate transition, like Nicodemus, let us always welcome these new births that the Lord sends us, as well as all the stimulating conversions he offers us in his great goodness. May they help us realise how much God loves the world, and therefore loves us.

John the Evangelist reminds us of the teaching of salvation, and not of judgement, that Jesus, "the Son of Man", will write in his own flesh, in his own human existence, in order to communicate it to us better by offering himself to death on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, and by rising again to demonstrate to us (if it were still needed) that nothing is impossible for God and that his Love is stronger than everything, even death.

In this spirit, I wish you all a good journey towards Easter, in the light of the Risen Christ.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

3rd Sunday of Lent

12th March 2023

Eglise du Sacré-Coeur, Oppède

The Revd James Johnston, Chaplain

The more you look at John's Gospel, the more beautiful it gets. Throughout, it tells of how in Jesus everything is changed, how he offers us not only a vision of our fullest humanity, but also the clearest window there has ever been onto the divine.

The scene in our reading today is one of the most vivid. Last Sunday's reading from John was of the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus, the religious leader who comes in secrecy by night, one for whom being associated with Jesus would place him in danger. Today's encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well takes place at noon, the brightest part of the day. The outcome of this encounter is that she tells her community about him, until they too come to see that in this man everything is changed.

Who is the woman at the well? In contrast to Nicodemus, we are not given her name. We are told she is a Samaritan and has had a lot of husbands. Some suggest the reason she goes to draw water at noon is to avoid meeting anyone else. Most people would go to the well in the morning or evening, when it is cooler. Those in disgrace, shunned by their community, have to go in the heat

of the day. Or perhaps by setting the scene at midday John is just highlighting the contrast with Nicodemus's nocturnal caution. Nicodemus leaves his encounter in doubt and darkness; the woman leaves hers encouraged and enlightened.

One thing about the woman at the well is that she is an outsider who becomes included. The Gospel is full of them. The Samaritans were a despised minority. As the woman remarks, it was unheard of for a Jewish man to request a drink from a Samaritan woman – by asking the question, Jesus had crossed boundaries of ethnicity, culture and gender. And within the despised minority, the woman herself was marginalised. She has been divorced five times, at a time only husbands could instigate divorce. In a society which judged people's acceptability by reference to honour and shame, Jesus repeatedly crossed boundaries to associate with the unacceptable – the marginalised, people with disabilities, the mentally unwell, people who were troubled, lonely, estranged. How does the church measure up? It is good to ask ourselves who we might be excluding, and why.

Yet for all the differences that separate them, the woman at the well is receptive to Jesus. As ever in the Gospel, those least bound up with power and status are most open to him. As Paul notes in our Epistle, faith in Christ crucified gives you a different understanding of status. Its power is transformative. Honour and shame no longer matter. What matters, says Paul, is the revelation of a God nailed to a Cross. Teaching us that what matters is not honour, but love.

Who is the woman at the well? One thing about her is that she is a model of discipleship, and so a model for us. She is one of the spirited women in John's Gospel who understand Jesus's significance better than many of the men. She starts off cheekily, but she's also courageous and vulnerable. Jesus responds to

her with humour and warmth, and although she tries to keep the conversation light-hearted, she slowly realises that what he is telling her is life-changing. When he offers her the water of life, she begins by trying to turn it into a joke, but when he touches on her personal life, she is outwitted. Surprised to find herself understood, accepted for who she is and not condemned, she makes a last attempt to take refuge in generalisations – 'I know that Messiah is coming' – a safe, future idea. But Jesus replies: 'It's happening now.' And she accepts the nowness. In the end she becomes an evangelist: 'Come and see.'

Who is the woman at the well? One thing about her is that she is a symbol of reconciliation. This story would have reminded its original hearers of other women met at wells – Isaac meeting his future wife Rebekah, Jacob his wife Rachel, Moses his wife Zipporah. This is going to be a story about a marriage. Yet this woman was a Samaritan, and Jesus was Jewish. We noted earlier that the Samaritans were despised as outsiders (which is why the parable of the Good Samaritan was so shocking to his hearers). Although the Samaritans shared a common ancestry with the Jews, they had intermarried with the invading Assyrians centuries before and were therefore considered impure. The two groups also disagreed about who held the true faith – those from Judah in the south who had been taken as captives to Babylon and returned to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, or those from the north who had never left home but were considered to have collaborated with the enemy. The symbolic 'marriage' taking place in this scene is a reconciliation between the two parts of ancient Israel, a bringing together of Samaria and Judah at the well of their common ancestor Jacob. That would have been a powerful statement in its time. John's message is that this is a Gospel of reconciliation for the whole world. It is good for us as the church to reflect on our internal divisions. What sort of message do we send to a world thirsting for spiritual water?

Who is the woman at the well? One thing about her is that she is the one to whom Jesus uses the words 'living water' to describe his gift to us – a spiritual resource that will never run out. The Bible is full of references to water as a source of life. Jesus's description of it as a source of abundance – 'gushing up to eternal life' – was a powerful image in a world where water was scarce. As often in John's Gospel, an ordinary symbol is used to open us to deeper truths.

There's also a link to our Old Testament reading, where the people of Israel are panicking because they have no water in the wilderness. Even though God has rescued them and is bringing them to ultimate safety, they lose faith in God because they lack water. It is only when Moses strikes the rock at Horeb, and water flows from it for them to drink, that their faith is restored and they are able to move on. But the place itself is remembered for their doubting, and the story of their doubting handed down.

For us, the image of living water gushing up to eternal life is a good one to take with us into the coming months, as anxiety about water shortages increases. There's a sense of scarcity, as we become conscious that our physical resources are finite. Yet our faith is in a God who is abundant, whose Spirit is a source of living water that never runs out. It is good to be reminded of this. Will we be more like Nicodemus, or more like the woman at the well?

Who is the woman at the well? We will never know. What we do know is that on this day, all over Christendom, her story is being told.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

Third Sunday of Lent - 12th March 2023

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

How long can someone survive without a drink of water? Around three days, at an average temperature and with no strenuous activity, some experts say. When one is forced to go without water, things can turn unpleasant quickly. The reason is that more than half of our body is water. Thirst, which signals the need to replenish fluids, is, therefore, a crucial reflex.

Like many other people in the Western world, I often take drinking water for granted: I only need open a tap to quench my thirst, and I pour litres of water down the drain every day without much thought about this precious resource. It is easy to overlook the fact that one billion people worldwide lack access to safe drinking water, and nearly three billion experience severe water scarcity at least one month each year.

I have absolute sympathy for the Hebrews on their exhausting journey to God, trudging through the wilderness without water. If I were Moses, I would not hold against them their complaints and quarrels. After all, besides the unpleasantness of having a parched mouth and throat, dehydration affects how the brain works and disrupts one's mood. I can't help but wonder, however, if it wasn't the Hebrew women who urged their fathers, husbands, and sons to approach Moses and complain. Women don't shy away from discussing their vulnerabilities, ailments, and needs. In Moses's time, women and girls were responsible for sourcing water for their families. Even today, women and girls worldwide spend an astounding 200 million hours collectively fetching water - long journeys by foot, often more than once a day, which leaves them exposed to danger and frequently deprives them of education and opportunities to earn a living.

The Hebrews are thirsting in physically hostile territory: thirsting for water, thirsting for the promised land flowing with milk and honey. They are caught between promise and fulfilment, questioning whether God is truly with them.

We've just heard about Jesus who is likewise thirsting in hostile territory. Why did he cross the border into Samaria? His Jewish contemporaries would rather avoid this land because "Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans," as the evangelist explains matter-of-factly. What a euphemism! The one-thousand-year-old animosity between them and the Samaritans is entrenched and bitter. Jews would consider the Samaritans to be apostates from true faith, albeit sharing with them their founding history and part of the Scriptures, as well as the expectation to see the arrival of the Messiah. Both nations, once a family, are caught, each on their own, and against each other, between promise and fulfilment. Both thirst for God's presence. Is God still among them?

It is, therefore, very unusual that Jesus sits by a well, a tired, thirsty, vulnerable outsider, waiting for someone to offer him a drink of water. That person could only be a woman, coming to quench her thirst and collect water for her family. But it is noon, a rather unusual time for someone to fetch water. Whoever might come, she is sure to have good reasons to avoid her fellow townsfolk, and the conversations and gossip that usually happen while drawing water. Jesus, the inappropriate interlocutor, is not shy to initiate contact with the Samaritan woman who comes with her water jar. In so doing, he puts aside prejudices and transgresses cultural, political, and religious boundaries. How often, do you think, we set aside the stereotypes we carry and cross the social and cultural lines we draw, to enter a conversation with an unlikely interlocutor? How often do we listen to God's call to transgress boundaries, break the rules, embrace the stranger?

Even in our times, we might choose to overlook the Samaritan woman once we become aware of her backstory. Many commentators have labelled her as a "fallen" woman, playing on her admission that she's had five husbands. However, there is very little we can know about this woman's story. In Jesus' times, women were not allowed to initiate a divorce, only men had that right, and divorces could occur for a variety of reasons, ranging from childlessness (which was always considered a woman's fault) to unsatisfactory household work. Having had five husbands could mean being widowed for five times. There are any number of ways we might envision this woman's story as tragic rather than scandalous. What we do know is that she prefers to go unnoticed.

She heads to the well in the scorching heat of the day, carrying whatever injury, anxiety, or despair her complicated past has inflicted upon her. She carries the weight of a thirst she cannot yet name.

But then she meets Jesus, who sees her as she truly is, with all her pain, hurt and longing. And he names it all - without any shaming or condemning.

Their conversation is - many have observed this - Jesus' longest conversation the Gospels have recorded. She responds to Jesus in such a way that leads him to reveal his true identity - she is the first person and, moreover, an ethnic and religious outsider, to whom Jesus reveals his identity in John's Gospel. She can now name her deepest thirst: "Give me the living water," and her identity changes: from a shamed and dismissed outsider, to a witness and disciple. She will bring to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, not one or two people, as Andrew and Philip did, but a whole city - not through a charismatic proclamation, but through honesty about her personal story: "Come and see … He told me everything I have ever done", and with her own questions: "He cannot be the Messiah, can he?". This is why the Eastern Churches do not abandon the Samaritan woman to obscurity in her city, but give her a name, Photini ("the enlightened one") and celebrate her as a disciple and apostle, one who thirsts for the living water.

Our human condition is to thirst, yet human thirst extends beyond physical water sources. Like the Samaritan woman, we crave the living water that satisfies and refreshes, revives and purifies our very souls. But how long can we go without it?

God does not desire us to shrivel from a parched soul. He longs to quench our deepest needs and longings. In a few weeks, on Good Friday, we will hear Jesus cry out, "I thirst" from the cross: it is not Christ's humanity alone that feels the thirst. It is his divinity too.

As intense as our thirst for God might be, his yearning for us is infinitely deeper. As exhausting as our journeys to God might seem, the journey his Word has taken to become incarnate, breaking barriers and crossing borders, infinitely surpasses them. The stream of living water between God and ourselves is none other than Jesus Christ. We are all invited to partake in this mystery, to drink of this outpouring of love embodied in him. So let us drink deeply and be renewed.

Amen.

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

19th March 2023
Mothering Sunday

Reflection

Mothering comes in all shapes and sizes. Mothering work is never done.

The fourth Sunday in Lent has long been a time for respite and celebration amid the austere period between Ash Wednesday and Easter. During the Middle Ages, people would return to the church in which they were baptised, where they grew in faith. Later on, this was the day when those in domestic service were permitted to visit their families - they went "a-mothering". It meant returning to places where refreshing love could be found. Refreshment Sunday and Laetare Sunday (meaning "Rejoice" Sunday) - these were earlier names for Mothering Sunday, marking a temporary easing of the penitential Lenten discipline.

Beyond the customary exchange of flowers and simnel cake, this Sunday was about returning to one's roots, to that which nourishes and sustains and to what gave them life and sustained them in life, and acknowledging, before God, the love received.

This is a day to offer gratitude to the women who have birthed us into the world and have raised us with boundless love and selflessness. A day to reflect on the lives of our mothers, on the paths they have walked and the memories they have etched into our hearts. This is also a day to reflect on the profound impact of those who have shown us the tenderness and devotion of a motherly spirit. It is a day to bask in the joy of God's all-encompassing love, he who is the source and sustainer of every love.

There is so much to rejoice in this Sunday.

Yet, on this day of celebration, the readings bring images of the hardships that can come with motherhood, that many of us will find too hard to bear.

In the story from Exodus, we witness an incredible display of compassion and love exhibited by women who are driven by an unyielding desire to protect the vulnerable in the face of cruelty. Love triumphs over all. Despite the brutal conditions, it is the selfless nature of a mother's love that ultimately prevails. In a remarkable act of sacrifice, the birthmother surrenders her child to ensure his survival, while the daughter of Pharaoh, a woman deprived of motherhood, cherishes a child who is foreign to her in every way imaginable – in race, culture, faith and even blood.

The poignant cameo from John's Gospel, depicts a transformative moment in the bond between a mother and her child, as it comes full circle from Bethlehem to Calvary. These two images of Mary, one holding her new-born son and the other cradling his broken, lifeless body after the crucifixion, encapsulate the depth and range of a mother's love, from the joys of nurturing and protecting to the sorrows of grief and loss. This is the timeless power of a mother's embrace.

Behold the Mother! Standing at the cross - "Stabat Mater", in the words of the 13th-century hymn. It is impossible to imagine the raw emotion of Mary's anguish as she watches her son's life slipping away. As the pain she experienced when giving him birth brought hope for the world, so the pain experienced at his death will bring salvation to the world. Does she know it?

Behold the Mother, the 'fount of love', as the old hymn says. Her love, which flows from God's eternal source, continues to pour out.

Mary does not cry out in despair. She does not speak. She does not seek hollow words of consolation. Instead, she holds on to hope, a hope that anticipates the Easter dawn. To hope is to have faith in the victory of life, without knowing what tomorrow will bring. As a beautiful French hymn says: "until the dawn of Easter, the woman alone carried the hope of the world".

Where shall we take our stand? At the cross - where we can learn the true essence of mothering. To stand at the cross means to behold the suffering of world and to hold onto the belief that even amidst the darkness, the light will ultimately prevail.

Where shall we take our stand? At the cross - where we are brought to birth as a new community and as new people. The things of Christ - forgiveness, compassion, kindness, thankfulness - become a natural part of us because we have been loved into that way of being. At the cross, we are reminded that we are cherished and beloved, and this realisation empowers us to love others with the same selflessness and devotion as a mother loves her child.

What kind of mothering qualities do you possess? This question is not solely directed towards mothers or women. Mothering qualities, whatever they may entail, are a manifestation of the divine likeness present within us all. As disciples of Christ, we are called to embrace mothering as an expression of our faith, and to recognize that we are part of a new family, one formed by the blood of Christ shed for us on the Cross. This is a family where we find solace, encouragement and love, and are called to give and receive in equal measure. This is what we celebrate and remember on this day.

Let us celebrate our calling to mothering, for we are created in the image of God who nurtures and cares for us as his children. Through Jesus, we are invited to join a new family of everlasting love and mutual belonging, to belong to him and to each other.

As we act in the love we have found in Jesus Christ, we can become a source of comfort and support for others, and offer a nurturing space where they can meet God and find his consolation, a place to which they can return to be refreshed.

You may have heard that, in tribute to His Majesty King Charles's service, people across UK are invited to take part in the Big Help Out on Monday 8th May, with thousands of organisations joining forces to support their local areas. Let us pray that many will be moved to "Join in. Lend a hand. Make a change." May we too feel inspired to connect with those around us and extend a helping hand to those in need. We can certainly make a change.

Mothering comes in all shapes and sizes. Mothering work is never done.

And as Paul said in his letter to the Colossians, "whatever we do, in word or deed, let us do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him".

Amen.

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

ALL SAINTS', MARSEILLE

THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

26th MARCH 2023

As we gather on this fifth Sunday of Lent, our Lenten journey has led us near Jerusalem, to Bethany - which means 'the house of affliction' in Hebrew. The path to Easter goes through places like this one, places of heartache, of loss, mourning, weeping, anger, frustration, questioning… Why did God allow this to happen? Where was God when this happened? Where is God now?

In moments of anguish, humanity's natural reflex is to be overtaken by a maelstrom of questions. There is one question that rises above the others, a question that our Gospel passage repeats three times: could God not have prevented our personal pain? Where was God when all this happened? Where is God now?

In the house of the affliction, Jesus Christ made his presence known and there, at the graveside, he wept.

Jesus, God and man, wept. The Son of God was overcome with the weight of grief, his very being was consumed by sorrow. Jesus stood at the grave of his friend and cried.

It is in this poignant scene, captured so vividly in John's Gospel, that we see something which is really at the core of the shared humanity that binds us to Christ, something we can find solace in, when despair, anxiety, grief overwhelm us: Jesus wept.

Jesus wept, and so he validated human grief. As Martha and Mary looked on, they were assured that not only was their brother Lazarus worthy of mourning, but they themselves were worthy of being mourned alongside. The promise of resurrection that was there did not diminish the vital work of grieving that needed to be done. We too are called to participate in the task of empathy and lamentation, to come alongside those who are beset by sorrow and weep with them.

Jesus wept, and so he acknowledged the intricate tapestry of human experience, with all its sorrows and joys interwoven. While the resurrection of Lazarus would bring about a profound change, it could not undo the events of the past. Jesus' tears honoured the truth of human change: things will never be the same again.

Jesus wept, and so he demonstrated the power of silence. In the face of loss and sorrow, there are moments when nothing to be said. Sometimes, tears could be the best language. Sometimes, the most faithful response to loss is simply to sit in silence.

Jesus wept, and so he showed a deep understanding of the complexities of faith and trust, that are intertwined with emotions. In Martha's words we see the tension between frustration and trust, as she expresses both resentment at Jesus' delay and faith in his power to heal. And in Mary's lament, we witness the raw vulnerability of a soul laid bare before God, blaming Jesus for the pain of loss yet surrendering to him in humble supplication. Faith encompasses the full range of human psychology and in his tears, Jesus embraces our journey of faith as a mixture of joy and sorrow, hope and despair.

Jesus wept, and so he confronted his own mortality with honesty. He knew that the raising of Lazarus, while a sign of God's power, would also set in motion a chain of events that would ultimately lead to his own arrest and crucifixion. And yet, in the face of this looming threat, Jesus did not falter. In his tears, we see his willingness to walk the path that was set before him, no matter the cost.

Jesus wept, and so he revealed the profound potential of sorrow to act as a formidable agent of transformation. Through his own encounter with the devastation of death, Jesus discerned the immediate need to restore life. Can Jesus' tears move us to consider where life needs to be restored in the world around us? Jesus' tears serve as a powerful reminder that our own experiences of sorrow and loss can serve as a catalyst for transformative action.

We can trustfully pray to God with the fervour of the Psalmists, out of the depths of our anguish, confusion, anger, perplexity, and anxiety, for we are assured that He weeps when we weep. We can anchor our hope in Jesus Christ, for he is the resurrection and the life.

What commences as a story of lament, will culminate as a story of resurrection and life, for God is not a mere spectator to our anguish and affliction, but a force that acts with purpose. Truly, human experience teaches us that the divine action we crave may not manifest in the time, place, or manner we deem fit. So we must wait in hope, even while we cry out of the depths to God. Let us not forget that God's promises are not solely reserved for the future, but a present reality, as articulated by the words of Jesus Christ: 'I am the life.' Though we may not want to live forever on earth, we yearn for that fullness of life that God has promised.

We stand at this point on the road to Easter where we hear that the world will not have the final say. Not even ours shall be the last word. But God will have the last word - and His last word is 'the resurrection and the life'.

Amen.

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – Easter Vigil and Service of Light

8th April 2023

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

"Night truly blessed, when hatred is cast out, peace and justice find a home, and heaven is joined to earth and all creation reconciled to God."

These are the words the church says or sings in the Exsultet, on this most blessed of all nights.

This is the night when we gather to retell the timeless stories of our faith - ancient words which bear witness to the glorious deeds of God; through them, the unending love of the Father reverberates through the ages: God seeks to bridge the divide with humanity and reaches out to us in love, thus creating harmony from chaos, liberation from the shackles of oppression, hope from the clutches of despair, and life from the grip of death.

This is the night when we assemble as one, united in our proclamation that we are a people moulded by the Resurrection of Christ: amidst the shadows of this night, all was in readiness for the dawn of the first day of the week. Like a seed that is sown into the soil, Christ was poised to break open the bonds of death, to sprout new life into the barren world, to bring restoration and healing - he, the Morning Star who knows no setting and gives his light to all creation.

A fresh daybreak surges forth, while the very earth trembles in celebration and joy: Christ is risen!

The tomb's entrance, that has been barred by stone, now lies open, not to liberate Christ, but for us to witness the truth of his promises, and to listen to the very same word that echoed and resonated within the Easter sepulchre, even now filling the world's void with boundless hope and faith: "He is risen".

While joy and fear still hold hands at dawn, Christ comes to meet us and says: “Do not be afraid”. Do not be afraid, do not yield to fear - these are the words he repeats to us today, this very night. Therein lies the seed of hope. This is the right that we claim tonight - one that is indelible and unwavering: the right to hope, an irrevocable gift from God.

The hope of Easter is no mere semblance of hope, no mere superficial or fleeting aspiration. It is the hope born anew on this night, sourced from the very heart of God. It is the hope anchored in the profound awareness that God is in our midst, constantly illuminating a path to walk in newness of life - walking alongside us in the stillness and obscurity, through uncharted territories, or in the bright light of day.

This is the night where every corner bereft of hope is infused with God’s presence, when the world, as we know it, is transformed, and renewed.

This is the night which brings an invitation and a promise: Christ meets us at dawn, beckoning us towards a path that leads to a fresh and reinvigorated existence, to a life replete with novelty and wonder. The risen Christ invites us to embrace resurrected life, with him and in him, in the Galilee of the nations, as Matthew the Evangelist calls it, the Galilee that is a gateway to the world.

The light of the Resurrection has dawned to illuminate the entire world, not solely Christ’s first disciples, and certainly not just us. Rather, it is a light that we are invited to take to the entire world. For God yearns for communion with all humanity.

Christ’s invitation and promise to share his resurrected life is to be taken to the world, as we strive to live as Easter people, every day and everywhere, open to Christ-like transformation, allowing God to mould us into a new humanity, endowed with a singular gift - the ability and willingness to bear witness to God’s kingdom through our lives. May we become Easter people ready to offer consolation, ready to bear the weight of others’ burdens, ready to be messengers of life in a time of death. In every nook and cranny of the world, may we bring the song of resurrected life.

May the Lord give us abundantly his love to walk this path and his light to recognise him when we journey to Galilee. Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

Easter Day – 9th April 2023

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

I met a friend last week who said that she is always amazed in Spring that flowers and hedges and trees bring forth new growth 'when it doesn't seem possible'.

This is the day that changes everything. On Good Friday, for Jesus's followers, all hope had died in those who had loved him and found God in him. Mary Magdalene, in grief, comes to the garden where they had laid his body. Peter and the other disciples are preparing to go back to fishing, back to the living they had left to follow the one they believed was the Messiah. Death has stolen all they had hoped for the future, and they are not only grieving but also frightened for their own safety through being associated with Jesus. As dawn broke on the first Easter Day, all they could feel was a sense of failure and despondency. Even when they were called by Mary Magdalene to the empty tomb, we are told that in their puzzlement they 'returned to their homes'.

But Mary stays on. She bends down and looks into the darkness of the tomb, facing the worst thing that could have happened to her – not only the horror and grief and loss of hope that surrounded Jesus's death, but now even the

taking away of his body, which she had hoped to anoint in a final act of care. And then it happens. She hears her name, and she turns and recognises Jesus. Her whole life is captured in this moment. Just as God at the beginning of creation speaks the name of each thing created, so the risen Christ begins to re-create the world, beginning with Mary. Her past is acknowledged, yet now she can face a future filled with hope and love. That is what Easter does for Mary. She knows now that the God revealed in Jesus will be with her until her death and beyond it. And she runs and tells the disciples: 'I have seen the Lord.'

What of Peter? If we read on in John's Gospel, we find another story of redemption. On the night before Jesus's death, Peter had stood warming himself at a charcoal fire in the High Priest's courtyard, when he denied three times that he even knew his Lord. Now, beside another charcoal fire at the lakeside, the risen Christ asks Peter three times if he loves him. Not only forgiving and restoring him, but also charging him to become the leader of his Church. That is what Easter does for Peter. Acknowledging the reality of the past yet opening up a different future.

What does Easter do for us? How does this story connect with ours? For each of us, our past helps to make up what we are now. Some things about our past we miss deeply. Loved ones we have lost, places and activities we have had to leave behind, health or capacity that is declining. There are perhaps days when we wish that we could turn the clock back. And all of us sometimes - through bereavement, depression, loss of hope or purpose - know what it means to live in Holy Saturday, when all we can feel is sadness and loss.

Yet Holy Saturday is also Easter Eve. And the message of Easter is that the God who loved us into being will love us into wholeness and healing. The Resurrection of Jesus assures us too that, beyond this earthly life, we will be with him in Paradise (as he promised to the one who hung beside him on the Cross), and that our loved ones also are caught up into that updraught of love, where - in the words of St Paul - nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Other aspects of our past may be painful. Hurts that we carry, things we have done that we wish we had not, resentment that we nurse against others. What does Easter say to us then? The answer is that, while the past cannot be changed, it <u>can</u> be redeemed. Memories can be healed, hurts forgiven. The risen Christ came and stood among his disciples with the marks of the nails still showing in his hands. God can heal and redeem pain, even when it doesn't seem possible. The encounters with the risen Christ described in the Gospels assure us of God's creative power to redeem our past, calling us into a future of hope, love and freedom. Like Peter, recognising the reality of the past yet opening up a different future. It is good to be reminded that the future is full of possibility, in a world where at the moment there seems to be so much hurt and pain.

But God's creative power is endless. We find it in forgiveness, in positive change, in the healing power of love. So today, as we gather in church to celebrate the risen Christ at Easter, we bring our complex stories, everything that makes us who we are, and we hold them beside his story, so that our lives may be shaped, redeemed and empowered by his.

That is the message of Easter. We are loved beyond our imagining by the God who creates and re-creates, and who will go on doing so until the time comes

when everything will be gathered into God's boundless love, once and for all, and there will be no more sorrow, no more crying and no more pain. For we have to do with a God who will go on creating and re-creating until that final purpose is achieved – a purpose that will not be frustrated by death.

It is within that context that we are invited to see the resurrection. We are invited to accept with the lens of faith that there lived a man so completely open to God that after his death those who knew him could only say that God was in him as in no other human being, in his life and in his death and in what followed it. We are invited to accept with the lens of faith that our creator, who makes each of us of flesh and spirit, is able to hold each of us in a relationship of love that is changed but not ended by the death of the body. As Rowan Williams once put it: 'God is seen not to be at the end of his resources when we are at the end of ours. When we face death, in Christ God assures us that he is there beyond it, and that our relationship with him is not exhausted by the horizons we are used to.'[1]

It's an astonishing claim, but it is why you and I are here this morning, saying together the words which have echoed down the ages: 'Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!'

Amen.

[1] Rowan Williams, *God with Us*, 2017.

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

16th April 2023
2nd Sunday of Easter

Reflection

The first Sunday after Easter serves as a juncture in the Church calendar, a moment of reflection upon the landscape of God's world and the landscape of our lives in the wake of the Resurrection. Even as we exalt in the triumph of life over death, we cannot help but feel the weight of the stark realities of our world, of uncertainties pressing upon us, threatening to cast a pall over our newfound hope.

What now? What lies ahead? How ought we to embrace the Resurrection as a reality that can infuse our lives with new purpose and meaning, more than just an intellectual concept?

These questions are hardly novel; countless others have pondered them as well.

The first Sunday after Easter brings us the story of the inner struggle of Thomas. As we listen to it, year after year, we may be stirred by a cocktail of emotions: a dash of wariness, a pinch of scepticism, a whisper of envy. Envy for those whose minds are not beset by what we perceive as a dissonance between the truth of Resurrection and the unceasing march of death in our world.

Every time I read the story of the doubting disciple's encounter with the risen Christ, I find myself drawn closer to Thomas. In a world that prizes certainty above all else, Thomas's doubt is a beacon of authenticity. Rather than dismiss his questioning as weakness, I value his openness to doubt publicly, without the weight of shame or guilt. Thomas stands in the great tradition of God's people searching in their faith, yet fully and humbly trusting God's

mercy. He is a spiritual twin of the desperate father who in the Gospel of Mark pleads: “Lord, I believe. Help thou my unbelief.” (Mark 9.24). A spiritual twin of the Dutch priest and writer Henri Nouwen who wrote: “I am praying while not knowing how to pray. I am resting while feeling restless, at peace while tempted, safe while still anxious, surrounded by a cloud of light while still in darkness, in love while still doubting.”

I am reminded by Thomas’s humility and honesty that questioning minds are a gift from God. One of the greatest blessings we encounter as Christians is the freedom to admit that we have doubts. Do we make good use of this freedom?
Thomas voiced questions that, perhaps, the other disciples were afraid to raise. He didn’t settle for easy answers or blindly accept the claims of others. Instead, he sought truth in his own way, and when he did find it, he proclaimed it with conviction and passion: “My Lord and my God!” His faith journey is an encouragement to all of us to wrestle with doubts and questions, to be honest about our struggles, and to seek truth with the same tenacity and honesty as Thomas.

The story of the Resurrection is strenuous to embrace, Thomas reminds us. It is an uphill battle to embody it in our daily lives, especially when our lives are marked by sorrow, bereavement, uncertainty, and the unyielding grasp of death. We sang jubilant hymns at Easter - but the week that followed was complicated affair. We are not the first one to grapple with this - not the last ones either. Struggle and strife are part and parcel of the post-Easter encounters with the risen Christ, an intrinsic part of the disciples’ journey. In Matthew’s account about Christ’s last appearance after his Resurrection, we read that "when [the witnesses] saw Jesus, they worshiped, but some were doubtful." (Matthew 28.7)

What I find most moving in Thomas’s encounter with the risen Christ is the way Jesus reveals himself to his disciple: in a body that bears wounds, a body that does not conceal its vulnerability and suffering. These are not wounds that have faded with time or healed. These are wounds so fresh that Thomas feels he could touch them. They signify Christ’s real presence and Christ’s real pain: Christ’s presence where it hurts, in our very pains; the risen Christ’s dwelling in the heart of our broken lives, of our suffering.

Christ’s wounded body is a poignant sign that certain pains may stay with us for ever. Some experiences of hurt, grief, trauma leave indelible marks. Some wounds remain open, even in the face of the Resurrection. Christ’s resurrected yet wounded body speaks to all who bear wounds in their lives with a profound sense of compassion. We can and should celebrate Jesus’ resurrection, while still hurting, aching, mourning, feeling vulnerable.

Christians gather on this first Sunday after Easter thirsting for hope amidst pain, for peace amidst tumult. We believe in the truth of the Resurrection, while we still endure the anguish of a world riddled with affliction. This is, perhaps, the moment to be reminded that our faith is built upon a bedrock of paradoxes: to live, we must die; to receive, we must give; to sit at

the banquet table in God's kingdom, we must serve. Let us not attempt to unravel these paradoxes but live with purpose within them.

Doubts and wounds are the reality of life after Easter. Yet in the convergence of pain and questioning, new life can emerge, as the risen Christ welcomes the ones who, even while struggling to believe, yearn for his grace. Even when we cower in fear behind the locked doors of our lives, Christ will come to break through our insecurities and doubts, and call us into a life of faith. Answer to Christ's invitation by taking the first step in faith. And as Martin Luther King once said, "you don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step."

May the risen Christ take each of us by surprise again, gently encourage us to take step after step in faith, and call us to declare afresh: "My Lord and my God."

Amen.

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

3rd Sunday of Easter – 23rd April 2023

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

A couple of years ago I saw an advertisement by a film company looking for extras to shoot street scenes in Marseille. I thought of applying, but somehow the deadline came and went, so you will be relieved to know that your chaplain does not feature in the finished product now showing on Netflix. It is called *Transatlantic*, a fictionalised account of the work carried out by Varian Fry and others during the Second World War. Fry was an American journalist who, with the help of certain staff at the US Consulate a few hundred yards from All Saints, carried out dangerous and life-saving work on behalf of an international organisation committed to saving refugees from Nazi Germany, smuggling them out of Marseille to the Spanish border.

The atmosphere of living in an occupied city is well conveyed in *Transatlantic*. In the days since Easter, I have found it something of a window onto what it might have been like in Jerusalem under Roman rule, and how such an atmosphere would have played into the rapidly accelerating events that led to Jesus's arrest, trial, torture, crucifixion and death. The knowledge of that edginess, the distrust that lurked in the air during the accounts of Jesus's Resurrection appearances, also offers an insight into the reactions of his

followers as they struggled to come to terms with the events that followed his death.

Our reading today from Luke's account takes place on the evening of the first Easter Day. In it, we sense the depth of the disappointment of the two disciples who are walking away from Jerusalem. Mulling over the misery of the last few days, the crushing of their hopes, perhaps also fearing for their own lives as believers in the one who had apparently been eliminated by the authorities of an occupied city terrified of insurrection.

What happens next is a profoundly moving story, one of the most beautiful in the whole of the Gospels. The two disciples are joined by Jesus on the road, though they do not recognise him. He invites them to tell their story. They tell him of the messianic hopes that had been raised in them by their teacher and friend, and how these have since been dashed: 'But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.' There was no space in their hopes for crucifixion and death, and they feel utterly bereft. Even the confusing reports from earlier that day that Jesus was alive have not rekindled any hope in them.

Jesus responds by putting the story they have told into the context of a wider story, that of the Scriptures: 'Beginning with Moses and all the prophets…' He shows them how the Scriptures had not promised a Messiah who would immediately be a glorious king, bringing freedom and prosperity. On the contrary, it was 'necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory'. Seen in this light, suffering and death do not destroy the credentials of the one on whom they had set their hopes, but instead confirm those credentials as being set within the wider purposes of God.

As Jesus speaks, the gap begins to close between the disciples' expectations and the reality of what has happened. They later comment that their hearts 'burned within them' as he talked to them. Hope was being rekindled, as they began to understand the deeper meaning of the events they had been caught up in. One thing that we, too, learn from our Christian pilgrimage is how the Scriptures can help us to find integration for our broken hopes and dreams within the reality of our lives, leading to a sense of reconciliation.

The final scene of the story, as so often in Luke's writing, takes place in the context of a meal. Jesus does not seek the disciples' hospitality, but they insist on making him their guest. Yet when he sits down with them, it is he who becomes the host, breaking bread, blessing it, breaking it and sharing it. Carrying out the fourfold actions which we saw on Maundy Thursday, as we noted how they are the Christ-like pattern for human life. That's the moment of revelation. Stunned, the two disciples realise who their companion on the road has been. It is a scene that has been painted by countless artists, including the one by Caravaggio which you have at the top of your service sheets.

We know from our own lives that there are moments when we encounter Christ in other people. Suddenly the veil is lifted and we become aware of our common humanity and our common belonging to God. A shot of pure love, often when we least expected it.

And we still do the same things with bread and wine. We take these elements, made from the fruit of the earth and fashioned by human hands, representing our life and work. We give thanks for them, and for all God's gifts to us. And, as

we break the bread, we commit ourselves to a way of living that is the way of love, costly in its willingness to be broken, to suffer for love's sake. And then we share the bread, as we share our lives with one another. We become in this central act of remembrance a family of faith, focused on God, members of one another. As the hymn 'Hail, true body' (Ave Verum Corpus) puts it, it is a foretaste of the kingdom of God.

Notice how one of the two disciples in our Gospel story is not named. One is Cleopas, but we are not given the name of the other. That leaves room for us to inhabit the story, allowing space for our broken hopes to be brought to Christ for healing, to find his encouragement on the road.

For the road to Emmaus is the one we travel in church each week – opening the Scriptures and breaking bread - as we bring together our separate stories and learn to see them in the context of God's wider story. And sometimes, by grace, it enables us to come to terms with broken hopes and find new meaning. If we look beneath the surface of the Easter encounters in the Gospels, we do not find human strength and confidence. Instead, we find fragility, people at their lowest ebb. But Easter is about learning to interpret earthly experience in the light of heaven. Taking into our consciousness the story of Jesus, the great narrative of life and death, encounter and betrayal, teaching and miracle, and letting it speak to us and heal us. Easter invites us to live the risen life of encounter, renewal and forgiveness which the two disciples on the road to Emmaus experienced, and which is ours to experience if we will take the road too. For our lives as Christians are lives of pilgrimage, inspired and encouraged by the one who has travelled the road before us.

And so, in this Eucharist, let us bring our broken hopes and dreams and lay them before Christ. Like Mary in the garden, shedding her tears. And as we receive his body into our hands, may we hear the risen Jesus calling us by name into something new, something we could never have imagined possible, his own risen life. Beckoning us into a different future.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection –4th Sunday of Easter – 30th April 2023

Canon David Pickering

Two verses from this morning's Gospel, *Truly I say to you I am the gate of the sheepfold.* And the concluding verse, which is one of my favourite sayings of Jesus, *I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly*.

Today is commonly known as Good Shepherd Sunday. Every year in our three year cycle of readings this day, the Fourth Sunday of Easter, takes for the gospel a part of John 10, a chapter concerning Jesus the Good Shepherd. Interestingly, today's passage does not contain that actual title: it comes in the first verse following today's reading. We'll have to wait until April next year to hear that!

However, today's reading creates a vivid picture of someone who can truly be called a good shepherd: he knows his sheep, he calls them by name, they know his voice and he leads them. But he also protects them, by being the door or the gate of the sheepfold. (It may be my age, but I prefer the "door" of the sheepfold rather than the "gate", which is found in most modern translations.) Here in France the patous, or Pyrenean sheep dogs, guard and protect the flocks. But in New Testament Palestine a shepherd would sleep in the doorway of the fold to protect his sheep. This may well have been what the shepherds were doing in the Christmas story.

Jesus, by calling himself the door or the gate, shows that he knows all about the vigilance that is needed in caring for sheep. Sheep stealing has always been, and still is, a serious crime. In Britain the death penalty for sheep, horse and cattle stealing was only repealed in 1832. No doubt it was a common feature of life during Jesus's time. It would be familiar ground for his audience, and as was his custom, Jesus takes it stage further. **All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them.** Who does Jesus mean? All the Old Testament prophets? Most scholars suggest Jesus is alluding to those who came with false

messianic claims - there were always plenty of these around - or to predecessors whose teaching failed to prepare the way for Jesus. He may also have had in mind the misguided religious teachers of his day. Stephen Verney, in his book of St. John's Gospel, *Water into Wine,* comments that Jesus might have added, *"and most of those who will come after me."* What Jesus may have seen in the religious leaders of his day, the Scribes, the Pharisees and the priestly caste, was their disingenuous extremism. We see this with their desire to stone the woman accused of adultery, to whom Jesus says the loving words: "**Neither do I condemn you. Go on your way, and from now on do not sin again".** Here we see Jesus opening a door for the woman.

For today's Good Shepherd passage, with its focus on guarding the sheepfold, leads to the third of the great "I am" sayings in St. John's gospel, " I am the Door." Jesus is not just a secure and productive door, or gate. He is one through which the sheep can pass. **"Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture".** And it is in that pasture that "**they may have life, and have it abundantly".** Jesus, in his risen life is**, "the gate"** or "**the door"**. This is expressed in his words to Thomas in the penultimate "I am" saying in John 14.6**: "I am the way, and the truth and the life".** It is in and through Jesus, the risen Christ, that we humans can realise our full humanity, in a life lived in love and service.

But a door or gate often needs a key, not just to secure it but also to open it. We have two keys that help Jesus to be an open door for us: Scripture and the Church, but both keys need to be used properly. We need to remember that Jesus came to give fulfilment and meaning to scripture. We can only understand the Old Testament in the light of the person, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus and the New Testament are the fulfilment of the Old Testament. We only need to read St Matthew's Gospel to see how Jesus' whole being lives out the promises of the Old Testament. Our second key is the Church. It's also in St Matthew's Gospel that Jesus calls Peter the Rock on which he will build the Church. To Peter he gives the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

On our way back from Ireland last week, Christine and I had an overnight stay in Chartres. Returning late at night to our hotel, I couldn't make the key open the door because I'd pushed it in too far. Christine then used it properly and the door opened easily. We need to be careful how we use the keys of the Church and

Scripture to open Jesus as the way of life for us. We can become too focused on either the Bible or the Church, but neither is in itself the Way. In Jesus's day, the religious leaders were so focused on their traditions and practices that they were stealing the people away from the true ways of God. But Jesus returned us to the true focus of our faith: our life in God. Jesus is the door or the gate that opens up our lives to be lived in and with God.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

4th Sunday of Easter – 30th April 2023

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

Today is known as 'Good Shepherd Sunday', when each year our readings are based around the theme of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. This year our Gospel comes immediately before Jesus speaks the words 'I am the good shepherd'. It contains the reference to Jesus being 'the gate for the sheep', as well as the image of a shepherd whose sheep know his voice.

As ever, when looking at the parables of Jesus, we need to ask ourselves what they would have meant to their original hearers, then reflect on what they mean for us now, two millennia later.

Sheep and shepherding were part of everyday life in antiquity. In both biblical and non-biblical sources, the shepherd was a common metaphor for a leader or king. The quintessential leader in the Old Testament was David, the shepherd boy who became King of Israel. John's imagery addresses the question of rightful leadership. In a thinly veiled reference to the Pharisees (who have just challenged Jesus's healing on the sabbath of a man born blind), Jesus contrasts the shepherd of the flock with thieves and bandits. The parable emphasises the shepherd's self-giving care.

In first century Palestine, sheep belonging to different owners were often kept at night in an inner courtyard known as a sheepfold, and in the morning the different shepherds would arrive to call out their sheep. That's when the closeness of a shepherd to his own sheep became apparent, as the sheep would only follow the voice of the one they knew and trusted. On one level, the parable is suggesting that the sign of the real leader is the response that comes from the heart, when people hear his voice and follow him in trust and love.

But Jesus's original hearers are mystified by the parable. He therefore expands on the metaphor about shepherds, using the words: 'I am the gate for the sheep'. John uses many metaphors to illuminate different aspects of Jesus's identity. So, in this chapter, Jesus is both the good shepherd and the gate for the sheep – both a voice and a way. It is an image about liberation, about sheep – us - being led to abundant life through the calling of the one described later as 'the way, the truth and the life'. Trusting the voice of the shepherd, in a response from the heart. The word Jesus specifically uses is 'saved'. Here John offers the notion of salvation as meaning not specifically the promise of life after death, but the promise of life in all its fullness now. 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'

What might these parables mean to us now? In considering this, let us explore one aspect of the idea of sheep recognising the voice of their shepherd, with reference to a contemporary debate.

Throughout the ages, followers of Christ have had to grapple with moral issues of the times in which they have lived. Two hundred years ago, the Church of England was tying itself in knots over the perceived rights and wrongs of the

slave trade. Prophetic voices such as those of William Wilberforce and John Wesley argued that slavery was inherently wrong and must be abolished. Others argued that slavery was approved of in the Bible, and that it was not for so-called progressives to abolish something clearly stated in the Scriptures. To which the abolitionists replied that, having discerned that slavery itself was wrong, the biblical texts now needed to be approached in the light of that discernment, with a proper understanding of their historical and cultural context, guided by the Gospel imperative of love. The progressives prevailed, though the fallout from that controversy is still often in the news today. Thinking back to those debates, it is worth pondering how Christian believers, faced with such strong views held on both sides, were able to discern their shepherd's voice in all the shouting.

Fast forward two hundred years. In a few weeks' time, the final stage of the Church of England's discernment process known as *Living in Love and Faith* will (or should) reach its conclusion. It is a debate that has been going on for over thirty years, and at an intensive level for the last six. It concerns the extent to which people who identify as LGBTQI+ should be fully welcomed and affirmed within the church. In January this year, the Bishops of the Church of England issued a set of draft proposals authorising such affirmation, including a set of prayers for blessing people in same-sex relationships. The Bishops' proposals were accompanied by a pastoral letter which said this:

> 'We want to apologise for the ways in which the Church of England has treated LGBTQI+ people. … For the times we have rejected or excluded you, and those you love, we are deeply sorry. The occasions on which you have received a hostile and homophobic response in our churches are shameful and for this we repent. We have not loved you as God loves

you, and that is profoundly wrong. We affirm, publicly and unequivocally, that LGBTQI+ people are welcome and valued: we are all children of God.'

This was followed in February by a debate on the draft proposals in the General Synod (effectively the Church of England's parliament) in which a range of views was expressed, including those of a vocal contingent of conservative evangelicals who argued that homosexuality was disapproved of in the Bible and that it was not for so-called progressives to abolish something clearly stated in the Scriptures. To which the progressives replied that, given what we now know about LGBTQI+ identity (namely, that it is neither a matter of choice but simply an aspect of human diversity like being red-haired or left-handed, nor an illness that needs to be cured), we now need to approach the biblical texts in the light of that knowledge, with a proper understanding of their historical and cultural context, guided by the Gospel imperative of love.

The vocal contingent has since become increasingly vocal, supported by Anglican Bishops in parts of sub-Saharan Africa (who have announced that they no longer recognise the authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury). The question now is whether, in the final version of the proposals due to be published in July, the Bishops in the Church of England will have the courage of their convictions, or whether they will bow to pressure to water down or even withdraw their proposals.

How are Christian believers to discern their shepherd's voice in all the shouting? Are they to listen to voices of exclusion, fuelled by prejudice and the fear of difference, or to voices of inclusion and acceptance? They could do worse than reflect on the words of Jesus in today's Gospel reading: 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'

I don't deny that these are complex debates and that passions are running high on both sides. And everyone is entitled to their own view. But I would like to suggest that, in the end, the test for where to find the shepherd's voice is not all that difficult. When Jesus was asked which commandment was the first of all, he replied: 'The first is … "…you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' (Mark 28-31)

Put simply, it's about loving. And if it's not loving, then it's not Christian. Let us pray that the voices of inclusion and acceptance will prevail.

Jesus said: 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

5th Sunday of Easter – 7th May 2023

A Service to mark the Coronation of King Charles III

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

What is the meaning of a coronation?

This is a question that sociologists Edward Shils and Michael Young tried to answer in 1953. They proposed that the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II served as a powerful testament to the collective sentiments and ideals that forged the unity and identity of British society. To them, this momentous event symbolised a profound act of national communion.

Even those who have previously witnessed or even participated in the grandeur and extravagance associated with royal festivities and jubilees would readily agree that the Coronation of the United Kingdom sovereign is an altogether distinct spectacle. Archbishop Cosmo Gordon Lang, while preparing to preside over the coronation of King George VI in May 1937, observed: 'Some persons may ask - many more may think - are not all these ancient rites and ceremonies quite out of place in this modern world?' It is no mere paradox to say that the very merit and meaning of these rites is precisely that they are in a sense out of date. But in another sense, they are most truly 'up to date'. Consider the world around us - ancient empires and monarchies vanished, new dictatorships created, everywhere restlessness and uncertainty about the future. In the midst of all this, our king is to be crowned […] as his predecessors have been crowned for more than a thousand years.' His words could easily resonate with us today.

For over a millennium, Britain has faithfully safeguarded the precious tradition of the Coronation rite. At its core lies the framework crafted by St Dunstan in 973, witnessed first at Bath Abbey for the Coronation of Edgar, first King of All

England. The remarkable resilience of this symbolic ritual, enduring and evolving amidst a multitude of distinct contexts, is truly a testament to its extraordinary adaptability.

But the Coronation not only embodies the rich tapestry of Britain's own traditions, but also finds its direct inspiration in the anointing and crowning rituals of Israelite kings, as recounted in the Old Testament. The biblical account paints a vivid picture of the anointing of Solomon: 'Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the tent, and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet; and all the people said, "Long live King Solomon!" And all the people went up after him, playing on pipes, and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth was split by their noise.' (1 Kings 1: 38-40). It is this description of Solomon's coronation, the most detailed in the Bible, that served as foundation for the crowning of English monarchs at Westminster Abbey since 1066. King Charles III, being the 40th monarch to be crowned here, partook in an order of service that has remained largely unchanged since the late 14th century.

The profound connection with the anointing of King Solomon holds a deep significance. There exists a poignant scene in King Solomon's life that serves as a model for righteous leadership. While Shakespeare eloquently enumerated the virtues befitting a sovereign as 'justice, verity, temperance, stableness, bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness, devotion, patience, courage, fortitude' (Macbeth IV, 3), King Solomon, recognising his own inadequacy in the face of such weighty responsibility, prayed: "O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David; I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil." (1 Kings 3.5) However, the posture adopted by Solomon, praying for discernment, wisdom, and a deep communion with God's heart is not limited for leaders of nations or even leaders of the Church, for that matter. In the royal priesthood of all believers, as emphasised by the first letter of Peter, each of us should aspire to pray as Solomon prayed: for a listening heart, for understanding, for the ability to discern between good and evil.

In a moment unparalleled in the history of Coronations, King Charles voiced a prayer in the Abbey: 'God of compassion and mercy whose Son was sent not to be served but to serve, give grace that I may find in thy service perfect freedom and in that freedom knowledge of thy truth. Grant that I may be a blessing to all

thy children, of every faith and conviction, that together we may discover the ways of gentleness and be led into the paths of peace.'

This prayer beautifully encapsulated the theme of the Coronation Service, "Called to Serve", which reflects the King's unwavering dedication to serve God and the people, reaffirming the duty and privilege of the Sovereign to serve every community. From the very inception of the ceremony, the theme of selfless service was proclaimed, as the King responded to his welcome extended by one of the youngest attendees saying: 'In [Christ's] name and after his example, I come not to be served but to serve.' His response echoes the words of Jesus we heard in the Gospel reading today: 'Who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? I am among you as one who serves.' (Luke 22.27)

Amidst the grandeur and splendour, a moment of profound serenity emerged, the anointing of the King with holy oil. Indeed, it is not merely a crowning and enthronement that takes place during the Coronation, but a sacred act of anointment, signifying that the monarch is set apart, dedicated to God, consecrated. In this pivotal juncture, the monarch is reborn, assuming a new identity. He receives a gift from the Holy Spirit, to uphold the frailty of the human person in steadfast fidelity and to nurture the bond that unites the community in a sacred space of restoration and revival.

The former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams recognised that 'the coronation service has this much in common with priestly ordination: it singles out someone to occupy a position whose point is to manifest something about the whole community's life. Priesthood and kingship are not about an individual's successful performance but about fidelity to a position, for the sake of the community's peace and well-being. Priests and monarchs are not exempt from censure and judgement when needed. They are there so that we can gather around something other than our preferences and anxieties and prejudices.'

In his first Christmas message, King Charles spoke of the symbolism of light triumphing over darkness, that transcends the boundaries of faith and belief. And he continued: 'It is in this life-giving light, and with the true humility that lies in our service to others, that I believe we can find hope for the future.'

The 70 years since Queen Elizabeth's Coronation have brought significant changes to our society, rendering it more fractured, secular and diverse than

before. In this evolving landscape, the monarch serves as a symbol of a realm of shared values that transcends the realm of politics. In a world plagued by uncertainty, where leaders frequently flout national and international laws, the solemn oath taken by the King to “uphold law and justice with mercy” takes on a unique and profound significance. As eloquently articulated by the former Bishop of London, Richard Chartres, the monarchy, ‘having lost the attributes of rulership, once again embodies transcendent themes of the kind vital to the preservation and good health of the community.’

Let us pray that the Coronation was a moment of communion for many, transcending boundaries of faith and belief, resonating with the yearning for unity and healing that many people unmistakably harbour. And let us pray that as Christ’s disciples we were renewed in our common calling to serve our Saviour by serving others.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

5th Sunday of Easter – 7th May 2023

A service to mark the Coronation of King Charles III

Eglise du Sacré-Coeur, Oppède

Jane Quarmby, Licensed Lay Minister

It's not every day we get to see the full pageantry, spectacle, and pomp of a king's coronation, done, as always, with meticulous precision by the Armed Forces, the Church and all who took part in yesterdays' ceremony. Months of planning, rehearsal, polishing up and getting ready went into the event – for it was an event. Only people over the age of 70 were even alive at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, a few years after the end of the 2nd World War, when people desperately needed something to celebrate, to dress up, see the golden carriages and the jewels and wonderful clothes, along with the colour of the uniforms. Not so different today really, as we emerge from the heartbreak and disruption caused by a world wide pandemic and a world-wide recession, with war once again in Europe. So whether we are monarchists or republicans or not bothered either way, it's wonderful to see something like yesterday's coronation of a real, live King.

Nowadays, the numbers of people who profess themselves to be members of the Church of England are dwindling in Britain. But yesterday goes to show that it still plays a vital role in the life of Britain and the Commonwealth – the coronation took place, as coronations have for over 1000 years, in Westminster Abbey. The King and Queen were crowned by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The King was anointed with the same oil, made from oil from the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, as are priests, and took two oaths. The first was the Coronation Oath, when he was asked by the Archbishop to confirm that he will uphold the law and the Church of England during his reign, with his hand on the Holy Gospel. The

second oath, the Accession Declaration Oath, is where he is required to state that he is a faithful Protestant. Only then did he get to be crowned! King Charles' coronation included involvement from other faiths and denominations too, recognising the Church of England's role in creating as the late Queen said "an environment for other faith communities and indeed people of no faith to live freely".

And today it's time for parties and celebrations. The priceless crowns and regalia will be put back securely for the next time along with the jewels, the cloth of gold robes and the golden carriage which takes 8 horses to pull it – and in Anglican churches everywhere today we both celebrate and think about what it all means.

According to an eminent anthropologist, Dimitris Xygalatas, *public rituals like these, with their explosions of light, colour, sound and pageantry have unseen benefits and are important in improving the unity of nations and communities.* He says *"The scale of this undertaking might seem exuberant. After all, King Charles may have dominion over all swans, dolphins whales and sturgeons in the UK's waters but he will wield little political power beyond a largely ceremonial role.*" But he goes on to say "*the lavish spectacle of a state ritual is far more than gilded carriages and foreign dignitaries. It brings broader benefits to society that shouldn't be overlooked. Across all cultures, ceremonies mater. When a ritual is loaded with magnificence, our brain tells us that something momentous is happening. Collective ceremonies act as social glue. They brandish symbolic markers of group membership and coordinate people's appearances, actions, and emotions. By doing so, they create feelings of unity that can transform individuals into communities. Research shows that when people participate in group rituals, their heart rates synchronise, and this helps them feel more bonded. This effect extends not only to the people performing the ritual action, but to the entire community watching it.*"

So far so good. But today our Bible readings also remind us that God is infinitely more powerful than even earthly kings in all their magnificence. As Jesus once said – look at the lilies of the field, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed as these are. And Isaiah describes in great detail just how far beyond us is the Creator God and how no-one can be compared with Him, the everlasting God, the Creator of all things. Wonderful language: "who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?"

We may think we are invincible but we're not, as Mohammed Ali, not a man given to modesty, found out once on a flight. When asked by the stewardess to put on his seat belt, he replied "Superman don't need no belt." To which she replied "Superman don't need no plane, either!"

Sometimes we all need to be brought back down to earth.

And how then do we reconcile the words of Jesus in today's Gospel? This isn't the first time the disciples have been wrangling over who is the greatest of them and he must have been getting tired of it. After all, none of them can do the things he has demonstrated to them over and over again, all the miracles, the healings, the teaching. Most of them don't really understand what he's been saying for so long. So once again he tilts their world, their understanding of things, upside down. "I am among you as one who serves." So they must become like him, servants. Not their idea of greatness at all – seniority and age are hard won, ambition prized, wealth and power too. But here's the boss telling them they still have it all wrong, they must change their values and behaviour.

The disciples and people of their time were not so different from us now - many still find it hard to accept that concept of the servant king. Competitiveness and ambition are still prized by many. Leadership styles are still all about being in charge, telling others what to do, getting ahead, getting recognition, climbing the ladder to power. It's about leadership for one's own sake, one's own glory, one's own standard of living and wealth.

But Christian leadership is very different. It is about leading for others, not oneself. As the saying goes, the Christian church is the only organisation which exists for the benefit of non-members. It isn't about praise, recognition, hierarchy, advancement or wealth. It's about putting others first, without expectation of thanks or even acknowledgement. It's about caring more for others than oneself, not judging others, sharing with them, encouraging them, caring for their needs before one's own needs. Egos are to be left at the door.

Christian leadership is still about leadership, but a unique style of leadership. Authority is still required, but so is the ability to wash someone else's dirty feet.

There is a church in Santa Fe, New Mexico, that has a sign over the only door into the sanctuary, that says Servant's Entrance. There is no other way in or out. The church is only for servants, people who serve as humbly as Jesus served.

However, Jesus, having put his disciples right in their thinking, does then cheer them up by telling them they will be rewarded far more than they could have

hoped, for standing by him through all the difficulties and dangers they have shared. They are all to get a kingdom, thrones, and positions of judgement. That is generosity on an epic scale – they have not understood, they have got things wrong, and they are about to desert Jesus when he needs them the most. But they, like all of us, will be rewarded far beyond what we deserve by God.

So it's not an easy path, this path of service, but it's the one we all need to stumble or stride along. Not all of us are leaders, but all of us have influence over ourselves and the people we know and come into contact with. Everyone at least has responsibility to lead themselves.

What Jesus is teaching and modelling here is a lifestyle that is *for others*. How can we live this way? We may not get it right, but we need to keep trying.

King Charles took a vow of service. So must we.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – 6th Sunday of Easter – 14th May 2023

The Revd Sue Goodwin

I wonder what you would notice if you were to walk around any city today, be it in France or in the UK? Or maybe even villages? We once had an African priest who stayed with us and was amazed at how many churches there were in towns and in almost every village. His conclusion was that we must be a very Christian country and he was bemused to discover how few people actually attended the churches.

When I walk around the city of Stoke-on-Trent I observe that the town centres are mostly full of fast food outlets often selling ethnic foods, charity shops, nail boutiques, tattoo artists and betting shops. Those churches that are visible look pretty rundown and many are no longer churches but offices or gyms. There are some smaller shops left but also a lot of empty shops, homeless people and evidence of drug use. There are also mosques, temples and signs of other religions. Supermarkets are often out of the town centres but there are office blocks and car parks but not a lot to inspire! What I wonder does that tell us about our society today? I haven't had time to walk round Marseille this time but over the past weeks I have walked around Pau. The French café culture is alive and well together with bars, supermarkets and a lot of posh shops selling the latest fashions. Also a number of large churches, though I wouldn't be able to tell you how well attended they might be. When did you last walk round your local area and take note of what is there? What or who are our "unknown gods"?

Paul had observed in Athens that the city had many idols and wayside shrines dedicated to every conceivable god and even one to the "Unknown" god. His conclusion was that they were very spiritual. They certainly seemed to be hedging their bets and trying to keep on the right side of any possible deity. He had already spent several days talking to people first in the synagogues, then in the market squares and had aroused the interest of the locals who loved to hear about any new philosophy and were eager to hear more. So he had been invited to speak further at the Areopagus where public debates took place.

Paul was never averse to telling people about Jesus and was probably encouraged by the interest of the Athenians as he had twice recently been hurried out of cities because his teaching had caused such controversy that his life had been endangered. His missionary strategy was always the same. When arriving at a new town or city he would first preach in the synagogue trying to convince the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. This usually brought about a few converts. Then he would move on the local meeting places in market squares or by the river seeking out non-Jews. Again this would often get a good response. But also it often provoked an adverse reaction as some saw their livelihoods and businesses being damaged. Then rent-a-mob would be summoned by the business community and Paul and his team would be driven out of town. It was this that had happened to Paul in Thessalonica and Berea and Paul was now in Athens on his own waiting for Silas and others to join him.

So Paul used what he had observed in the city as a starting point for his message. He used the altar to the "Unknown" god to explain who this might be, the Lord God Almighty, the creator of the world and everything in it. The one indeed for whom they were searching. This God, Paul explained, didn't need offerings or sacrifices and was in fact so close to them that (quoting from their own poets) he was indeed "the one in whom they live and move and have their being." I love that description don't you? But it must have been a mind-blowing thought for the Athenians. The concept of a god so close, so intimately involved in their lives was totally new for them. Paul again quoted from their philosophers saying "for we too are his offspring". The thing about Paul's God was that he didn't have to be appeased and he was not judgmental. Paul tried to make connections to make the gospel appealing to his audience. I wonder how good we are at doing that?

It is a good model for evangelism. To observe, to immerse oneself in the culture and then find pegs on which to hang the message. Paul knew the direct approach that he used with the Jews would not work with the Athenians. They didn't have the knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures or the expectation of a Messiah. So his approach was embedded in the local culture. Even so it didn't always achieve what Paul intended. He went on to talk about how ignorance is no excuse now as God had sent his Son whom he had raised from the dead. For some of his hearers talk of resurrection was a bridge too far but others were intrigued and wanted to hear more so they agreed to meet again.

What can we learn from this? How do we make connections with people to hear the good news of Jesus? Perhaps we need to begin by asking ourselves how well we know God? Is he also a bit 'unknown' to us? We can only speak of what we know or rather of whom we know. Do we need to dig a bit deeper ourselves into who God is for us? Is our knowledge and love for Jesus evident for others to see?

I think Paul was so passionate about Jesus that no-one hearing him speak could doubt that he knew the Lord. He faith was infectious for those open to hearing what he had to say.

Secondly we need to know our context – the culture in which we live, at home, at work, and in our local community. Do we listen carefully enough to the heart ache of others? I regret that in the last few years of my time as a vicar I was so busy with other things (being rural dean and a training vicar) that I didn't really know all my flock. I didn't make space in my schedule to listen to their stories. I was preoccupied by the task in hand, whatever that task might be. I learnt more about some of my flock when I took their funerals and wished I had known them better when they were alive. Others I have learnt more about in my retirement. Shame on me.

Looking and listening gives us a heart for people and their situations and may reveal a way in which to share the love of Christ with them.

Finally I think we need to be able to speak of what we know about Jesus. Personal testimony is so helpful and stories are the best means of conveying the love of God. Jesus was a wonderful story teller. We all probably have a favourite story that Jesus told or of something he did. The prodigal son, the lost sheep, the feeding of the 5000 or the wedding at Cana. I personally love the story of Zacchaeus – perhaps you can see why! Peter in one of his letters says we all should be able to give an account of the hope that is within us. St Francis is reported to have said "Preach the gospel and if necessary use words." Our actions of loving service often speak louder than our words.

Perhaps I could sum up Paul's way of sharing his passion for Jesus as **looking, listening and loving.**

And we all need more of the Holy Spirit to help us with that.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

7rd Sunday of Easter – Sunday after Ascension Day - 21st May 2023

All Saints' Marseille

Jane Quarmby, Licensed Lay Minister

On Thursday we celebrated Ascension Day, along with members of the congregation of St Raphaël. Those of us who could go to Aix enjoyed a convivial lunch, met new people, and got to know familiar faces a little better. We prayed, sang and worshipped together. As Christians have done for 2000 years. Today, we are still focused on those remarkable passages of St John's Gospel and St Luke's book of Acts, as they are the fundamental core of our belief, even though they may be difficult to understand.

Many artists have painted the ascension of Jesus into heaven, from the great masters like Rembrandt to decorators of church buildings everywhere. Most depict a rather dream like figure in flowing robes rising up from the ground with a hand raised in blessing upon the people below gazing up at him. Somewhat irreverently, they tend to remind me of the Fairy Godmother on the stage attached to a harness being tugged up into the air, or the words from Star Trek "beam me up Scotty". But that is perhaps a little harsh – after all, how do you depict such a strange event? Luke describes it as "he was lifted up while they were watching and a cloud took him out of their sight". And that, in this day and age of science and space exploration, of rocket packs and aircraft, is still something we cannot explain simply. When Luke was writing, Jerusalem was the centre of the world, separated from heaven by the sky, with the lapis lazuli floor of heaven above. So it was a much simpler idea of going up into the sky and on up into heaven. They hadn't seen the amazing photographs from space of the world as a round globe, and no-one knew about Australia. So they were left to describe this amazing event as best they could.

Which leads us to another puzzle for many – what is heaven? And to answer that we need to go back to the Bible. As Tom Wright says "Though many hymns and prayers (mostly from the 19th and early 20th century) speak of heaven as our home, that isn't how the Bible normally puts it. In the Bible, heaven and earth are the two halves of God's created world. They aren't so much like the two halves of an orange, more or less identical but occupying different space. They are more like the weight of an object and the stuff it's made of , or perhaps the meaning of a flag and the cloth or paper it is made of: two related ways of looking at the same thing, two different or interlocking dimensions, the one perhaps explaining the other." Or a simpler explanation from Tom Wright is this: "Heaven in the Bible is God's space, and earth is our space." Heaven isn't somewhere up in the sky, heaven and earth are two interlocking spheres of God's reality and so far, the risen Christ is the only one to be fully at home in both of those spheres. So when Jesus was lifted up, he wasn't shooting off into space, but was going into God's dimension as signified by the cloud which hides him which in the Bible signifies God's presence. And one day, God's dimension and ours will be combined once and for all – the Second Coming of Jesus.

Every now and then, through worship and prayer, we get a glimpse of God's dimension when it overlaps more closely with our own. In Celtic worship, there are some places where the barrier between our space and God's space is said to be thin – for example Iona and Lindisfarne, where it is easier to feel closer to God. Pilgrims go there for that glimpse, to feel the presence of God much more closely than perhaps they can in their busy and pre-occupied lives, to hear God's voice and re-align their lives. In these places, and often in a quiet church or chapel, where the prayers of the centuries linger in the air, one can feel at peace, secure and loved. We can't see those feelings, we can't touch that presence but we can be open to it. God's space is close.

It is through prayer and worship that we bring these two dimensions ever closer – and through doing God's work. As the disciples are still gazing at the spot where Jesus had disappeared, they are asked the question: "Why are you standing here staring into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you saw him go into heaven."

And in response to this extraordinary experience, the disciples went home to pray with the other followers, including Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers. They didn't rush off and go back to their day jobs, they went and prayed for guidance and support in what was to happen next. In what they were

to do next. And soon they were to receive the Holy Spirit, the helper sent by Jesus to do his work in this dimension – which we celebrate as Pentecost. They had a job to do – as we do now.

Today, the 21st of May, is a new feast day in the history of the church. It is of a modern martyr call Franz Jägerstätter. You may never have heard of him. He was an Austrian peasant farmer, not very well educated, but he knew his Gospels. When Hitler's Nazi Germany took over Austria, all the men of service age were called up to fight in the German army. Franz refused, despite being advised by his priest and even his bishop that it was his duty. He was the only one in his village to refuse – very few people stood up against Hitler and his demands, or against his ideology of hate and his Holocaust against the Jews and all those whom he persecuted so ruthlessly and cruelly as he tried to conquer the whole of Europe and beyond. Franz was beheaded on August the 9th, 1943. He stood up for what he believed in against all the odds. He witnessed to Jesus and his preaching and his way of living, with great courage. He in his way lived a life that showed the values of Jesus which have the power to transform the world in which we live.

Jesus sent out his disciples to spread the Good News, to work and live in such a way as to transform our world – to continue his work of creating a new world, one in which goodness prevails against evil. He himself came to kickstart that process and we today are needed as much as ever to continue the work. You only have to see or read the news every day to see how much still needs doing – missile strikes against Kyiv from the Russians, democracy threatened in Thailand, warring army chiefs in Sudan, LGBT people killed or imprisoned in Africa for being different, people of colour discriminated against in work, income, housing, justice, rich people amassing huge fortunes whilst others die of hunger or thirst, women and children exploited in the sex trade, lives destroyed by drug pedlars, members of politicians' families beaten up just because they are related, corruption in government and business. The list of injustices, cruelty, violence and unfairness goes on. Daily we hear of how we only have a short time in which to come back from the brink of destroying all life on the planet.

As Thomas Gumbleton puts it: "We still are a long way from witnessing to the true message of Jesus, all the values that Jesus came to show us that are so different from the values of the world around us…..there are many ways in which the world in which we live, even the things our government sometimes asks us to do, that would go against the way of Jesus. We have to understand that, that our culture isn't always leading us in the way of Jesus, and our national

policies aren't always leading us in the way of Jesus." How do we sort that out? One of the things we need to do is what Franz did - read the scriptures, read the gospels, come to know Jesus and understand that his way is a very special way.

Jesus prayed all through his ministry. In our gospel today he is praying to God the Father and in his prayer is identifying himself. We too can identify ourselves through prayer, and to accomplish what we need to do as God's people, we need that Holy Spirit which Jesus sent to his disciples. We need it just as much as they did because we have just as much to do as they did.

It's time to stop looking up into the heavens. It's time to live the way of Jesus.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

Pentecost – 28th May 2023

All Saints' Marseille

The Reverend Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

When was the last time you embarked on the exhilarating journey of learning a new language and experienced the joy of progressing from a timid beginner to an advanced or even confident speaker?

Regardless of one's motivation – whether it is for work or study abroad, moving to another country, preparing for a holiday or simply for the pleasure of it - learning a new language can be an immensely fulfilling yet challenging experience.

If you are someone who feels intimidated by languages, you might find yourself wishing for a shortcut to learn them, much like the one granted to Christ's disciples on the Day of Pentecost. If you've ever wondered why all people on Earth couldn't speak a single language, you can blame the Babel event: it is the story of proud people coming together to build a stairway to heaven, an exclusive connection with the divine. It is the story of God's response, which resulted in a confusion of their language.

Are the people of Babel truly at fault for desiring an up-close and personal encounter with God? Many of us yearn for an experience of God, one that reveals his presence. However, quite often, like the people of Babel, we attempt to dictate the terms of our connection with God. We construct barriers and frameworks, striving to elevate ourselves to God's level, essentially instructing him to operate within the confines of our own constructions. Yet, it is God who is always more inclined to descend and unite with us here on earth, far more than we could ever ascend to the heavens through our own endeavours and efforts.

The story of Babel has been recounted as a cautionary tale, a form of punishment, and even as a rationale for the ongoing division among different groups of people. Consequently, the multitude of languages spoken on Earth has almost been regarded as a curse. Conversely, a unified language has come to be seen as a symbol of a virtue and a grace to be acquired anew.

However, Babel is more than a mythic account of the rich tapestry of nations and tongues. It serves as a fitting portrayal of the human condition. How often do we find ourselves lost in the labyrinth of miscommunication, entangled in the cobwebs of misunderstanding, even if we speak the same language?

Babel also functions as an allegory of how humanity has forgotten the vocabulary of God and the grammar of grace. It portrays our deviation from God's design for humankind, which was to spread out and embrace diversity, encompassing different languages, cultures, and ways of being in the world.

The echoes of Babel reverberate through our beings. We humans find solace in the cocoon of uniformity. Diversity, in all its forms - linguistic, cultural, political, or religious - becomes a harbinger of chaos, a spectre of threat that robs us of our perceived status and privileges. Diversity births within us an unyielding fear of a future where the presumed “order” of things is irrevocably disrupted. Thus, we erect towering walls to shield ourselves from the encroaching world. In this self-fashioned unity, humanity seeks refuge within its own self-imposed boundaries. Yet, a human unity devoid of divine will is destined to succumb to the shackles of oppressive conformity.

I dare you to see the story of Babel as an unacknowledged blessing. The richness of languages and the tapestry of diverse cultures are blessings bestowed upon us. In truth, it is our disparities as human beings that allow the gears of this world to turn. The Pentecost moment challenges our inclination to perceive diversity as a looming threat. It urges us to relinquish the notion that one must forsake their manifold identities to find a sense of belonging. It beckons us to transcend our fear of “the other”. For in the acknowledging and celebrating our differences lies the revelation of blessings yet unveiled.

Christ’s disciples are not only sent into this realm of blessed diversity, but they are also equipped with the tools to navigate it: they are granted a crash course in a tongue that transcends mere words and the language of our bodies. It is the language of the Kingdom of God, the language of the Spirit.

The apostles will acquire fluency in this language woven with threads of peace, forgiveness, reconciliation, generosity, love, fidelity, gentleness, patience - a language they had learned in their communion with Jesus Christ. 'Peace be with you,' he said to his disciples, as we heard in today's Gospel passage. Words that transcend every barrier, offering blessing to every soul that encounters them. Imagine the revitalising breath that would sweep over the Earth, if we were to communicate with the world in this language!

The journey of learning the language of the Spirit is both arduous and deeply rewarding. We are far from reaching mastery, for this is not yet the language that permeates our everyday conversations, our work, or our being in the world. Mere acquisition of a language is insufficient; true fluency requires assiduous practice and application.

How then can we ascertain our confidence - that is, our faith - in speaking the language of the Spirit? When the language of the Spirit is spoken confidently, barriers will crumble, prejudices will be confronted, fears and anxieties will be alleviated. There will be a passion for unity, an enthusiasm for building bridges, and a dedication for the work of reconciliation.

The ever-fresh, ever-renewing Spirit is at work in each of us, yearning to be translated into the very language of our existence. It impels us to venture beyond the confines of our comfort zones and to embrace the God-given diversity of this world. It urges us to articulate the truths of God's kingdom in a language that resonates with others, captivating their hearts, minds, and spirits, so that the echoes of Babel may be transformed into the symphony of Pentecost.

As God encourages us to attain proficiency in the language of his Kingdom, let us celebrate the unity we share in Christ, even as we cherish and affirm our diverse identities in him. May his Spirit help us dream dreams, enlighten us with the vision of new and abundant life in our church and strengthen us for his service.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

Trinity Sunday – 4th June 2023

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

Why celebrate Trinity Sunday?

In a few moments, gathered as one family, we will profess the faith of the Church: We believe in one God. We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ. We believe in the Holy Spirit. In the words of the ancient prayer attributed to St Patrick, we will bind ourselves to the Trinity, through belief in the Threeness of God, through confession of the divine Oneness.

Yet, however diligently one may read the Scriptures, the word 'Trinity' cannot be found. It was a few centuries after Tertullian, the founder of Western theology, coined the word 'Trinity' in the early third century, that the doctrine of the Trinity began to take shape, built upon foundational elements such as Paul's wonderful closing benediction in his second letter to the Christians in Corinth and Jesus' Great Commission, as recorded in Matthew's Gospel - both of which we have encountered today.

Since then, the most eminent Christian thinkers have applied reason, philosophical rigour, and insight to comprehend and interpret the Church's understanding of 'Father', 'Son' and 'Holy Spirit', one God in three Persons. "A likeness of the Divine Trinity is discernable in the human mind," said Thomas Aquinas, while Julian of Norwich proclaimed "...our soul is a created trinity, like the uncreated blessed Trinity, known and loved from without beginning…".

Yet, for both common mortals and every theologian or mystic, the Trinity remains a mystery. Even St Augustine, himself author of a treatise on the Trinity,

acknowledged honestly: “Can anyone comprehend the almighty Trinity? Everyone talks about it - but is it really the Trinity of which they talk?”

It is a human inclination to try to bring wonder within the bounds of our understanding, to domesticate transcendence. However, we can recognise that the doctrine of the Trinity is not a purely intellectual pursuit initiated by Augustine or Thomas Aquinas. Instead, it serves as a framework for the faith community to comprehend the nature of God, as revealed in the salvation story.

The first Christian community had listened to this story, understanding how God had intervened throughout history and remained active in their lives as beings created in His image. That community directly experienced the resurrected life of Christ and embraced a hospitable and inclusive way of life, which mirrored Jesus’ own. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, that community recognised its calling to proclaim the Gospel boldly and to venture out into the world to fulfil the mission to make disciples in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Every generation can deepen its comprehension of the Trinity, recognising that we will never fully grasp its reality, its life, its dynamism. Yet, in this pursuit, we come to realise the inherent limitations of words – particularly when we attempt to articulate our understanding of God. Ultimately, metaphor emerges as the sole language accessible to us when we speak of God and, especially, when we dare to delve into the mystery of the Trinity.

Richard Rohr, an American Franciscan priest and writer, draws inspiration from the early Church Fathers who spoke of the being-in-one-another of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as a ‘perichoresis’ - a circling movement. Rohr goes on to describe the Trinity as the Divine Dance, a dance that draws us into the embrace of love that is our Triune God’s circle.

Rohr is not the first to contemplate the Triune God’s call and invitation for us to join them. One striking depiction of this invitation is Andrei Rublev’s icon of the Holy Trinity, which illustrates our service sheet today. Based on the narrative from the Book of Genesis regarding Abraham’s hospitality towards three visitors at the Oak of Mamre, Rublev’s icon captures the essence of the Holy Trinity as an embodiment of spiritual unity, peace, harmony, mutual love and humility.

In the icon, the three distinct yet inseparable persons form a circle, in silent communion, symbolising their unity and oneness. Their gestures are gentle and restrained, reflecting the transcendent nature of their conversation. They represent the Holy One in the form of three, eternally extending hospitality and finding pure enjoyment in one another's presence.

Notably, one of the three figures points towards an open fourth place at the table. The gesture symbolises the Trinity's invitation, their willingness to offer and make room for us to join them. By referring to God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit we acknowledge the inherent plurality of goodness and love. We are graciously invited to partake in this plurality.

You may have observed that Jesus does not explicitly delve into the intricate details of the Trinity. Instead, he speaks of the "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" for the sake of proclaiming the Gospel of God's presence and envisioning the manifestation of God's kingdom in the present reality. As such, his promise "I am with you always" encapsulates the essence of the Trinity itself and stands as one of the most comforting declarations found in Scripture.

If we genuinely embrace the truth of this promise, it should make a profound difference as to how we engage with the world.

If we truly believe that God is present, how will we treat one another? How will we act toward each other? How will we care for this Earth that has been entrusted to our stewardship, if we genuinely believe that God is by our side in the garden?

Why celebrate Trinity Sunday? Following Pentecost, this is the time when we embark on the journey of comprehending how we can live as a community of faith. Trinity Sunday serves as a day for us to rejoice in our understanding of God and how we manifest that understanding in our lives.

It is a day to ponder what would our lives, our way of being in the world, our community resemble if everything we said and did began with "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." An invocation of the Trinity might cause us to pause and question whether our intentions and actions truly align with the essence of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The Trinity proclaims the presence of God alongside us. It affirms that, regardless of the circumstances, God will always be there: God the Father — the

Creator of the Universe, source of all life and goodness, assuring us that He never forsakes His children; God the Son - Jesus Christ, God's eternal Word who entered the finite world as Emmanuel, God-with-us, risen and alive; God the Holy Spirit — dwelling with us today, enlightening the Scriptures, breathing life into our faith, interceding for us in our weakness with sighs too deep for words, guiding and strengthening us, blowing as forcefully and unpredictably as the wind. The loving, liberating and life-giving God, Three in One and One in Three.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

1st Sunday after Trinity – 11th June 2023

Eglise du Sacré-Coeur, Oppède

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

Karl Barth, the Swiss theologian, used to say that clergy should preach with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other, for preaching was of little use unless it connected with people's lived experience.

What might we have read in the newspapers last week?

On 6th June, the annual commemoration took place of the D-Day landings. It's an event which becomes increasingly poignant as the number of those who remember the *débarquements* as lived experience reduces each year. Yet the collective memory lives on through the act of commemoration.

Last week I also came across an article about Ivor Perl, who at the age of 12 was deported from his native Hungary and interned at Auschwitz, where his parents and seven siblings died. Arriving in England after the War, he spent the next fifty years working and raising a family. Late in life, however, he began to talk about his experiences in the camp, visiting schools in order to make sure that another generation would know the story. Interviewed last week at the age of 91, Perl expressed doubt whether 'us talking' had made a difference, as he looked

around at the brutality and violence still in evidence across the world. Yet his interviewer pointed out that it had made a difference, through helping to preserve the collective memory.

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People who run towards the danger, without a thought for their own safety. Responding to something deeper than the evil in front of them, to the ultimate good which in the end will prevail over it. Responding, whether they recognise it or not, to that mystery for which we have no better word than God, whom Christians believe was revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

Let us pick up the Bible with our other hand. What, you may be wondering, does all this have to do with today's reading from St Matthew's Gospel? Well, as it happens, we find Jesus being criticized by the religious authorities of his time for spending time with the equivalent of *pétainistes*. Matthew and his tax-collecting colleagues were twice despised. First, because they collected taxes, often exorbitantly and to their own profit. Secondly, because they were collaborators both with the occupying forces of imperial Rome, to whom the taxes were payable, and with the puppet king Herod whom Rome had installed.

Think about Matthew for a moment. Our reading notes that Jesus 'saw' him. How many others really 'saw' this man, in the service of two layers of oppression and despised by his own people? What drew (or forced) him to become a tax collector? What assaults on his self-worth might he have suffered as he carried out his work? Jesus 'saw' him, in all his ambiguity, and addressed him personally: 'Come with me.' Become part of the community that embodies God's rule of love. Imagine the impact of that encounter on Matthew. We are simply told that he got up and followed him. Jesus was saying, to Matthew and Zacchaeus and so many others he encountered along the way: 'Come on, you can do better than this.' Offering them new life, in all its fullness.

Time and again, we see Jesus going out to the margins of society, seeking the outcasts and the excluded, those whom others wouldn't touch. Saying: 'Come,

the Kingdom of heaven is for you too'. It was radical, and it made him many enemies. Yet his call, then and now, is the same: 'Come, you can do better than this.'

The religious authorities don't get it. They are too busy being sanctimonious. 'How can you eat with those people?' Jesus replies by quoting Hosea: 'Go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." ' God doesn't want our sanctimonious prayers. He wants our compassion, our courage and our love.

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There is a reason why the double healing story is paired with the call of Matthew. The woman who touched Jesus was considered ritually impure and therefore excluded from her faith community because of her illness. In that era people with disabilities, people who were ill, were thought to be displeasing to God, and thus not allowed into the Temple. But Jesus set aside the fears and taboos of his own culture, touching the supposedly untouchable (both the girl and the woman) and demonstrating that it is not so-called impurity that is contagious. Showing them instead that it is compassion, healing and love that

pass from one human being to another. Jesus welcomes untouchables into his community of love and assures them of their status as God's children.

On Thursday this week, the Church celebrated the feast of Corpus Christi, or as the Church of England calls it, the 'Day of Thanksgiving for the Institution of Holy Communion'. That ultimate example of collective memory: 'Do this in memory of me.' In a few minutes we will recall the actions of Christ at the Last Supper, in which he took bread, gave thanks for it, broke it and shared it. Said to his friends: 'You are now to be my body in the world, your lives offered to God, lived thankfully, your lives broken and shared in the service of others.' In this and in every Eucharist, the four actions of taking, thanking, breaking and sharing are revealed as the proper pattern for all human life.

I would like to finish with an image which sums up something of what I have been trying to say about the importance of collective memory, and of Jesus's impact on the vulnerable and his call to us to care for them too. It speaks also of how we encounter Christ in and through one another. Mother Teresa of Calcutta used to say that when she fed the starving and cared for the dying she was serving her Lord 'under the distressing disguise of the poor'. In her Home for Dying Destitutes there is a bath in which those whom no one else would touch are washed. Over it is written: 'The body of Christ.'

Jesus said: 'Do this in memory of me.'

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

1st Sunday after Trinity – 11th June 2023

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

Jesus saw a man. He stopped, he didn't hurry past - there was no hint of a prior encounter between them. Matthew was sitting with his daily routine which, by the way, was not praiseworthy. He was trapped at the side of the road, entangled in his own greed, unable to move on with his life.

And Jesus said to him: "Follow me" - an utterly unforeseen summons. It stirs a profound longing within the tax-collector, whose very name signifies 'gift of God'. It rekindles the ember of hope still flickering in his heart: might it be possible that he, who had forsaken the calling of his people under the allure of wealth, is now chosen? Can it be that he, the collaborator with the Romans, shunned, and scorned by his own kin, is beckoned by this Rabbi of whom all Judea and Galilee incessantly speak?

In an instant, Matthew comprehends that all is not lost, that he can still fulfil his true purpose. This very encounter unfurls a new path before him. Without hesitation, he shakes off the shackles of his stagnation, leaves behind the wealth amassed from tolls imposed on travellers, rises to his feet to embark on a journey alongside Jesus - who made the tax-collector to 'pass' without a toll from the state of sinner to that of a disciple. It is a journey into the unknown - Matthew relinquishes control and chooses to live with confidence in God.

In this precise moment, Matthew the outcast is reborn as a child of Israel, and even more, as a son of the new Israel being assembled around the Messiah - so that he may bear witness to God's mercy that he has experienced himself first hand.

This calls for a celebration. Christ's disciples, tax-collectors and some disreputable people are gathered to share a meal, saints and sinners united in one place, graciously welcomed at the table of the Lord - the very image of the Communion table around which we will be welcomed in a few moments.

But a controversy erupts over this shared meal. 'Why does your teacher eat with tax-collectors and sinners?', the Pharisees inquire with a sense of bewilderment. Jesus disrupts and challenges the established order; he defies conventional boundaries. His behaviour clashes with religious customs. The Pharisees remain trapped in their preconceptions. As Jesus tells them on another occasion, they "tithe mint, dill, and cumin", observing the law even in its smallest details, and neglect "the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith" (Matt 23:23).

With patience, Jesus invites them to comprehend the profound gift bestowed upon humanity through God's Son: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." We yearn to receive assurance that we are God's beloved children. Within each of us resides the longing for mercy, for God's steadfast love. Yet, paradoxically, we often withhold this very gift from those we deem unworthy or unacceptable.

We, humans, tend to gravitate towards a sectarian and self-centred mindset. We find ourselves excluding anyone who does not align with our personal preferences. We choose to diminish our communities, discarding anything that fails to please us or challenges us, be it differing ideas or people. Sadly, Christian communities are no exception. The demands and distractions of the world have ensnared us, we risk losing sight of Christ's constant presence by our side. We practise parochialism, construct religious clubs, instead of participating in resurrected communities.

What Jesus says here is that mercy cannot be replaced or substituted. Hospitality lies at the very core of our life with God. Through Christ, God extends an invitation to those on the fringes, welcoming them into his dwelling without judgement. He blurs the boundaries, intermingling the included with the excluded, saints with sinners. Here is a command to dismantle the barriers that separate us from those deemed insignificant and unworthy by worldly standards. We are summoned to remain receptive and accessible to those who have been abused, broken, neglected, and consigned to the forgotten corners of society. True disciples are the ones who bravely venture near the world's anguish, willingly exposing themselves to its heartaches and trials. Often,

fulfilling this calling will require us to step away from the comfort of our church pews.

In an age when "following" often implies nothing more than passively receiving someone's tweets, Jesus summons us to a transformative, identity-shifting path of existence, where we become not mere followers, but active learners, apprentices, and disciples. His life and teachings become the very essence and standard of our own lives. As the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "One would have thought that nothing so drastic was necessary for the new disciple. Could not Jesus have initiated him into some new religious experience and leave him as he was before? […] Since he is the Christ, he must make it clear from the start that his word is not an abstract doctrine, but the recreation of one's whole life. The only right and proper way [to follow] is quite literally to go with Jesus. […] Faith can no longer mean sitting still and waiting — the disciple must rise and follow him. He must plunge into absolute insecurity in order to learn the demand and the gift of Christ.". Jesus' call to "follow him" is a call to "absolute discipleship", and that comes at a pretty high cost.

Within the Gospel of Matthew, the calling of the tax collector is swiftly accompanied by profound lessons in mercy. The unclean woman who has become an outcast, the lifeless child brought back to life, and the esteemed religious leader finding restoration — each bears witness to the transformative power of mercy. Likewise, Matthew himself experienced the redeeming touch of mercy. Once restored, they all become living testimonies to the undeniable reality that God is actively present and acting in the world, intricately woven into the fabric of history and the lives of people. They point to Jesus as God's anointed, through whom God's plan comes to its decisive fullness.

As we embrace the path of Jesus, we are guided to a table of unity and hospitality, where God's mercy is to be shared among us, regardless of our stark differences. As we partake in the abundance of God's hospitality, we can celebrate not only our unique identities but also our diversity, both embraced by the boundless mercy of God. Here we will find healing and learn to move together into God's future.

God's mercy is 'exclusively for everyone'. It is an irresistible force that beckons us to respond.

Let us, like Matthew, be inspired by the voice of God in Christ. May we, too, rise above our former ways, relinquishing them entirely, and faithfully follow him to extend our hands in hospitality and mercy to all God's children.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

1st Sunday after Trinity – 11th June 2023

Eglise protestante unie, Manosque

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

Karl Barth, the Swiss theologian, used to say that clergy should preach with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other, for preaching was of little use unless it connected with people's lived experience.

What might we have read in the newspapers last week?

On 6th June, the annual commemoration took place of the D-Day landings. It's an event which becomes increasingly poignant as the number of those who remember the *débarquements* as lived experience reduces each year. Yet the collective memory lives on through the act of commemoration.

Last week I also came across an article about Ivor Perl, who at the age of 12 was deported from his native Hungary and interned at Auschwitz, where his parents and seven siblings died. Arriving in England after the War, he spent the next fifty years working and raising a family. Late in life, however, he began to talk about his experiences in the camp, visiting schools in order to make sure that another generation would know the story. Interviewed last week at the age of 91, Perl expressed doubt whether 'us talking' had made a difference, as he looked

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Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

2nd Sunday after Trinity – 18th June 2023

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

I spent last Thursday in an ecumenical meeting, in which representatives of different churches were invited to describe how their denomination understands the notion that the church is 'apostolic'. We listened to a profoundly mystical description from an Orthodox member which ended with a presentation of Rublev's icon of the Trinity, followed by a presentation by a Protestant member arguing that what mattered most was maintaining the Church's written doctrines, and then the beginning of a presentation by a Roman Catholic member about the apostolic succession, at which point the learning was interrupted by lunch. It struck me that it was actually the lunch, and the friendships that deepened over it, which were in some ways closest to the ways Jesus of Nazareth taught his disciples about the kingdom of heaven. Fortunately, no one asked me what the Anglican understanding of 'apostolic' was, so I didn't get to share that thought with the rest of the meeting.

In our Gospel reading today, St Matthew recounts the moment at which Jesus's first followers move from being disciples (learners of his teaching) to apostles (those who are sent out to share it). The reading begins with a summary of all they have seen Jesus doing: going 'about all the cities and villages, teaching in

their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness'. It's what, at the end of the reading, he asks them to go out and do themselves, as apostles (the 'sent ones').

The more Jesus spends time with the crowds that flock to him, the more he is moved with 'compassion' for them. It's a word that means being deeply moved, sharing their pain, for he sees that they are 'harassed and helpless'. It's the same word used by Matthew when Jesus responds to the hunger of the crowds in both accounts of the feeding of thousands in the wilderness. His provision for them wells up from a deep sense of care for their needs. In doing so, he provides a model for the ministry that is to be done in his name, both then and now.

There's an urgency to the sending out of the Twelve, for the need around them is great. As any farmer will tell you, when fields are ready to harvest, all hands are needed to bring in the crops, not least before the weather changes. That's the image Jesus uses – 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few' - taken, as so often, from the world around him. And it's at this point that he commissions the Twelve, turning them from disciples into apostles. It's a process that has been going on in the Church ever since. From the time of Matthew's first hearers, those who learn Jesus's teaching are invited to go out and put it into practice, to do the things he did, to the best of their ability. The word 'Mass' comes from the dismissal at the end of this service – '*ite missa est*' – the words we now use being 'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord'.

It's a striking set of instructions that the Twelve are given. In the verses that follow our reading today, Jesus tells them that they are to take no money, wear nothing on their feet, not even take a change of clothes, but to give their time

and energy without seeking a reward. Trusting that they will find hospitality, as they themselves have received the hospitality of God: 'You received without payment, give without payment.' The kingdom of heaven is not transactional, but relational.

In this, their first piece of work, the Twelve are instructed to stay close to home, among their own nation, but by the end of this Gospel, after the resurrection, they will receive the Great Commission: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.'

So they are sent out. But before they are, something significant happens. They are named. In Luke's version of the story, we are told that Jesus sent them out in twos. Here, in Matthew's version, they are named in twos: Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew, etc. We have just noted that the kingdom of heaven is relational, and naming is central to that. It's also central to the way Jesus relates to those around him. 'You shall be called Peter.' 'Zacchaeus, come down.' 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' And, in the garden after the resurrection: 'Mary.' We recall how Isaiah chapter 43 begins with the words: 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; … when you walk through fire you shall not be burned'. And, of course, we are named at our baptism, when we receive our identity as daughters and sons of God. That ultimate relationship from which nothing can separate us.

The other thing that was going at the time Jesus sent out the disciples for the first time to preach his message of love was that, troublingly, the powers which that message had unsettled were beginning to voice their opposition, and the first stirrings of the violence that would one day be unleashed on him were being felt.

I don't know about you, but there seems to me to be a lot of violence in the news at the moment. Untreated mental ill health is often the source, though at other times it is calculated and cold-blooded. This time last week we were coming to terms with a knife attack on very young children in a park at Annecy, in which amazingly no one died. This week there has been news of another knife attack, this time sadly fatal, on Barnaby Webber and Grace O'Malley Kumar, two students returning from a night out in Nottingham, and later Ian Coates, a school caretaker on his way to work.

At a vigil held at Nottingham university on Thursday (the same day as the ecumenical meeting), a line of fellow students stretching a mile long not only bore witness to the affection in which the two young people were held and the solidarity of a community in grief, but it also offered a powerful statement of non-violent resistance that was accompanied by some remarkable words from those who loved them best: 'Be kind to each other. Don't have hate in your hearts.' 'Look after those around you.' The local Member of Parliament said: 'We are united in our grief, sadness and shock,' but he added: 'Love wins. It always wins.'

It’s what those twelve young men were sent out to proclaim against a background of growing violence two thousand years ago. And their message echoes down the ages, despite all the horror life can throw at us.

Jesus said: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Or, if you will: ‘Love wins. It always wins.’

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

3rd Sunday after Trinity – 25th June 2023

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

What are your deepest fears? What causes sleepless nights filled with worry? Undoubtedly, the answers to these questions are abundant. Illness, destitution, violence, solitude—just to name a few potential contenders. As we grapple with our fears, many of us seek solace in our faith, hoping to find therein the antithesis of fear: peace. On Sunday mornings, we exchange gestures of peace, saying "The peace of the Lord be always with you." We profess our faith in Jesus Christ, whom we reverently call the Prince of Peace. We beseech God to bestow upon us "the peace that surpasses all understanding". We can strongly argue that our religion embodies peace. Hence it is disconcerting to hear Jesus preparing his disciples for their mission and saying: "Do not assume that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."

How are we to interpret the entirety of this week's lectionary, brimming with an intense and thought-provoking language that defies any notion of tranquillity? The prophet Jeremiah depicts God's presence in his life as "a fire shut up in my bones", a fervent and consuming energy. The Psalmist laments how his faith renders him a target of shame, gossip, insult, and reproach within his own community. Paul, in turn, reminds us that being Christ's disciples demands more than mere pleasantness; we must consider ourselves completely "dead to sin". And within our Gospel reading, Jesus speaks of shattered households, the burden of bearing the cross, and the anguish of lost lives. Jesus warns his disciples that they will face slander and defamation as they bear witness to his mission and ministry.

In essence, we are summoned to grapple with the formidable sacrifices and demands entailed in the path of discipleship.

The 16th-century spiritual writer and mystic Teresa of Avila addressed God, saying, “If this is the way you treat your friends, it’s no wonder you have so few!”

These passages possess an honesty that I deeply value: they do not bring prescription but rather offer description of the potential impact on our families, churches, communities, and the world when we allow the transformative "fire" of God's word to course through us. If we seek a faith that aligns solely with a "gentle Jesus, meek and mild," if we seek harmony at the expense of commitment, if we wish to evade problems and remain on the periphery of situations that demand our active involvement, then this week's lectionary does not cater to our preferences.

If we desire a religion devoid of risks, we may have misconstrued the teachings of Jesus Christ. If neither we nor those within our circle of family and friends have ever been startled or challenged by the way we live out our faith, then it is imperative to acknowledge that something is amiss in our spiritual journey.

Should we embark on a sincere pursuit of our faith, we must be prepared to face the consequences. A life of faith is not exempt from risk; it does not come with assurances of robust health, of wealth, of unbridled prosperity, or unwavering safety. At its very core, the life of faith is rooted in sacrifice, and to deny this truth would be disingenuous.

Yet one aspect of this passage that deeply troubles me is Jesus' mention of familial division.

Divisiveness seems to have become a leitmotiv of our world. More reason for division - and this within our families? What an unsettling thought! We would so much prefer to avoid conflict and division at all costs, at least, in our families - these are, surely, the most painful instances of disharmony. We find ourselves embarrassed by such discord. It can feel almost sacrilegious to admit that our own families are imperfect. So we frequently downplay and dismiss family conflicts. Parents have the experience and the wisdom that allows them to identify what might disrupt the good (and smooth) conduct of family life and peace, don’t they? Should they not build in a firewall to prevent division seeping in?

Yet, this fear of disturbances, and of challenges, this fear that the shallow peace of suppressed conflicts, questions and choices, of complacency might be disrupted, the “fear of fear”, might become the “fear of belonging to Another,

[…] to God" (T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*), who is intent on leading us through mountains and valleys, when we would rather choose a flat landscape.

Yet, let us be clear: Jesus does not harbour a desire or intention to pit fathers against sons or mothers against daughters. It is far from his will that we incite conflict for the mere sake of it or manipulate his words to sanction any kind of violence. However, his words serve as a vital reminder that the peace Jesus extends to us is not a counterfeit peace of denial, deceit, or compromises.

Jesus confronts the uncomfortable truths we prefer to evade. He challenges the hierarchies we cling to for a sense of stability. He lays bare the falsehoods we weave to shield ourselves from the discomfort of change. He shakes the foundations of our relationships—with ourselves and with others—that hinder our journey towards the completeness of our life in God. His peace is all-encompassing, grounded in truth, and purifying. It is the transformative peace which does not hesitate to disrupt in order to repair, to make incisions in order to heal.

Genuine peace, Christ says, is a treasure worth fighting for.

The Church has been entrusted with Christ's message of transformation, which is bound to be divisive - why do we try to 'tame' it? There is no mildness or promise of instant gratification and happiness in it (as 'Good News', which very often is used for 'Gospel' nowadays, may sound), but the announcement of powerful, life-changing events.

What, then, should instill the greatest fear within us? It is not the sting of insults nor the winds of change. It is not even the spectre of persecution or the inevitability of death. We should fear a life half-lived — a life of detached devotion and anaemic fervour, a life where piety stands devoid of transformative power. Our true apprehension should lie in any manifestation of Christianity that lacks the essence of the cross, that fails to embrace its cruciform nature.

Imagine, if you will, the profound impact of surrendering ourselves to the disruptive power of Jesus — the unsettling, transformative force that unravels our preconceptions, dismantles our comfortable facades, and even divides us. What if we dared to embrace the peace that comes at a cost, the peace that shatters our illusions, the peace that rescues and restores? Without any doubt, Jesus will guide our feet into the way of peace. He will do so, but only if we grant

him permission. May we embark on this journey of surrender, as we remember the exhortation of Teresa of Avila:

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things.
Whoever has God lacks nothing – God alone suffices.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

4th Sunday after Trinity – 2nd July 2023

Service on Zoom

Canon David Pickering

The opening words of this morning's Gospel passage, "***Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me."*** *Matthew 10.40.*

Three welcomes in one short verse, and two more follow in today's brief Gospel reading, which sounds more like words from St. John than St. Matthew.

I expect many of us, at one time or another, have judged a church congregation by the welcome we received on our first visit. On our recent trip to Ireland we experienced what could have been interpreted as a a lack of hospitality or care for visitors. The service had been advertised as a Eucharist, but our enthusiasm cooled when we discovered it was Morning Prayer. On a cold April morning it was further dampened when we could see our breath in the entrance. The air inside the body of the church was bone-chilling!

But we were given a warm welcome by the sparse congregation and the retired priest, who was even older than I am! In a short homily he warmly assured us that the Resurrection of Jesus was not just something that took place two thousand years ago. Easter is a present, living experience for all who believe. Such words should always be welcome in our lives!

Many of us this morning may also have welcomed not only the brief and precise gospel reading, but also the short passage from Jeremiah. The prophet welcomes the prophecy of Hananiah concerning the restoration of the sacred vessels to the house of the Lord, yet warns that the truth or falsehood of prophesies of peace can only be known by their eventual outcomes. The final verse of this very brief reading sums it up, "***As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word comes true, then it will be known that Lord has truly***

sent the prophet." *Jeremiah 28.9*. Although today we might have welcomed that short reading, Jeremiah certainly was not welcomed in his day!

But how much did we welcome the eleven verse New Testament reading from Saint Paul's letter to the Romans? In trying to get to grips with Paul's deep and sometimes convoluted arguments, it can help to look at the way he uses opposites. In Romans 5 he contrasts the figure of Adam with that of Christ. Later, in chapter 8, he compares life in the Spirit with life in the flesh. In this morning's passage he uses three such pairs, sin as opposed to righteousness (or sin versus God), freedom or slavery, and lastly, wages rather than gifts.

Let's briefly focus on those three pairs. In a short Sunday morning homily, we can only scratch the surface of St Paul's profound theology. A former bishop of Leicester, Ronald Williams, gave the ordinands from his diocese, including myself, a scholarly book he'd written on chapters five to eight of the Letter to the Romans. Once I happily lent it to someone who was preparing lectures on Romans, and I'm not sure it was ever returned, or I just lost it along the way. Yet it had taken him an entire book to cover the basic ideas in those four chapters. Still, I think that if we look at the three contrasting pairs in today's reading, we find a relatively simple and welcoming message.

Let's begin with sin and righteous, or as some scholars interpret Paul's meaning, sin versus God. Whose side would we wish to be on? Here, St Paul sees sin as an entire spiritual condition rather than individual trespasses, peccadilloes or personal failings. For him, sin is a state of being, the way we choose to exist. The opening words read, ***Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions.*** Are we seeking to live our lives according to what God can and does do through us? Or do we let that which is contrary to his creative and loving purposes debase our lives? Do we welcome into our lives that which comes from the goodness of God, that which can be recognised as the fruits of the Spirit? Or are we attracted by that which reduces us from what we are called to be: full human beings made in the image of God?

As St. Paul next puts it, do we want to be slaves or free? Which is the more welcome? Sadly, there is popular image of the Christian life as one of slavery: human beings being held back from what they want to do by lists of forbidden fruit. But rather, the reverse is true: we are created free to enjoy a life of goodness, love, peace and fulfilment. The Christian life welcomes us to full and wholesome living. To perhaps slightly misquote St Augustine, ***Love God, and you are free to do what you want.***

For me, the most welcome words come in the final pairing this morning, ***For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*** What do we prefer and welcome, something that we have to earn, i.e. ***wages,*** or something that comes as a ***free gift of God***? The Christian life is not about earning the love of God. His love for us is already a free gift, born out of his love for all that he has created.

So if we proclaim a free welcoming faith, then we should be a welcoming Church. Sadly this has not been, and in some cases is still not the case. Recent years have revealed an unwelcome truth: for generations, moral, physical and personal abuse have existed in the life of the Church. Vulnerable people have been welcomed only to be exploited. We might ask why so many people have left the Church. In Germany, why have half a million members felt unwelcome and left the Roman Catholic Church in the last year? Seeking to protect churches rather than seek justice for those who have been hurt can't inspire those who are looking for the Good News of Jesus. Turning away people because they are in some way different can't help either. Are we actively looking to give a welcome back to all those who have not returned to the active life of the Church after the lifting of Covid restrictions?

These are serious questions that churches and individual Christians need to ask themselves. "***Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."*** Welcomed as we are by Christ, how do we show his welcome to others? Perhaps our prayers should be for a Church with a renewed and free welcoming spirit, and pray that that begins with ourselves.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

4th Sunday after Trinity – 2nd July 2023

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

'Tell me what you want, what you really, really want.' The first line of Wannabe, a song by the Spice Girls that is having its twenty-fifth birthday this year. It has been pointed out that it is also quite a neat summary of the spirituality of St Ignatius of Loyola, who taught a process of discernment in which we plumb the depths of our motivation and experience, not only to find our most authentic selves, but also to learn how best to respond, in any given moment, to the impulse of the divine.

'Tell me what you want.' In one way, it's the question which underlies each of our readings this morning. Let's take them in reverse order, beginning with the Gospel. Today we heard the closing words of Jesus's instructions to his disciples as he sends them out on their first journey to share the good news of the kingdom. It's a passage that lies at the heart of Matthew's Gospel, with its call for followers of Christ to go out to care for those he calls the 'little ones'.

In Matthew's account, the 'little ones' (*mikros*) means those whom the world rejects: the poor, the vulnerable, the marginalised. This passage in chapter 10 anticipates the better known one in chapter 25 in which Jesus instructs his

disciples that each time they provide for the hungry and thirsty, clothe the naked and visit the sick or those in prison, they will be doing it for him. For they will both encounter Christ in, and they will be as Christ to, those who are in need. The challenge to the church today is no different. We are to alleviate human suffering, bring healing to the darkest places. If we align ourselves with Christ, standing in solidarity with the dispossessed, our allegiance will be to God and God's justice. 'Tell me what you want, what you really, really, want.'

It's amazing what those Twelve started, setting out on their first expedition. Billions now follow the message of Christ, finding in it fullness of life, a profound way of inhabiting the mystery of what it means to be human. It is a faith that (at least on our good days) compels us, inspires us, opens us to the divine love that beats at the heart of all things.

Three days ago, the Church celebrated the Feast of St Peter and St Paul, the apostles who in the earliest days of the Christian faith led its teaching across the known world. It's a time of year when traditionally new deacons and priests are ordained. Seven years ago today, I was one of those deacons. By coincidence (if you believe in coincidence), today is also the fifty-first anniversary of the day one of my oldest friends was ordained deacon too. When we look back, we often find that our lives have been marked by pointers – friends or strangers who acted as waymarks, pointing us in a particular direction. I wonder what, or who, your pointers have been.

When we think about vocation, it's important to emphasise that it is not just about ministry in the church. A few years ago I was invited to a school to give a talk. I remember the chaplain looking appalled as I told him I was going to speak

about vocation. But he relaxed when I pointed out that vocation simply means working out what we are here to do, whatever form of work, training or activity that might involve. 'Tell me what you want, what you really, really want.' What is your true calling? What's the thing that has your name on? What are the nudges you receive that point you in that direction? Life is about call and response. It is hard wired into the Gospel accounts – the angel's message to Mary and her 'yes', the call of the Twelve disciples ('follow me'), the call of each one of the people encountered along the way ('Zacchaeus, I must stay at your house today'). Discerning what we are called to do, and responding accordingly, is where we will find our most authentic selves.

Our Epistle today, from Paul's Letter to the Romans, is also about our deepest drives. In language we may find slightly shocking today, he talks of 'slavery' to sin as opposed to 'slavery' to righteousness (that is, 'being right' with God). Sin is often defined as what separates us from God, and there are patterns of behaviour in all of us that cause that separation - when we become preoccupied with selfish desires and no longer turned outward towards God and neighbour. It does us good sometimes to reflect how we are enslaved to things. What Paul is asking is this: What matters most to us? Where do we place our allegiance? With our own desires, or with God? 'Tell me what you want, what you really, really want.'

Back to vocation. One of the first people I met from my own generation who responded to the call to ordination was the elder brother of a friend I went to school with. He and his family were particularly kind to me at a time of tragedy in my own. I recall at the time being impressed that the elder brother should have made such a profound commitment at so young an age. I lost touch with

them after that – until this week. This morning we are welcoming a group of pilgrims from the US. When I looked up on Google the church they are from, I found that the brother I have just mentioned was until recently their Rector. That's quite a coincidence (if you believe in coincidence). Reading that website had something about it of looking back at a waymark on the pilgrim's road.

We are all on pilgrimage, all of our lives. It's a good image, as it can help reconcile us to the otherwise unsettling realisation that nothing stays the same for long. We have to learn to live with change, come to terms with the loss of loved ones, the loss of our physical and mental capacity, the loss of roles we have had that mattered to us, the loss of certainties that we thought were invincible. Yet all along there is a voice that beckons us on, a sense of purpose we must learn to trust. A faith that teaches us that our ultimate destiny lies in hands that are to be trusted, for the simple but powerful reason that we are loved.

Which brings us to our Old Testament reading. Abraham, the father of the people of Israel, is shown time and again trusting God despite a series of increasingly unsettling calls upon him. His greatest test, which we heard read this morning, comes when God instructs Abraham to sacrifice his son to him. With astonishing faith he sets out to obey God's call. And after the passage we heard, an angel gives Abraham this message: 'Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. … And by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.' Because Abraham had discerned what God was asking of him, and had responded.

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

'Tell me what you want, what you really, really want.'

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

5th Sunday after Trinity – 9th July 2023

Eglise du Sacré-Coeur, Oppède

Christine Portman, Reader

The opening words of today's gospel reading: ***'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another, "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn."*** In other words – you're like whining and complaining children. You're given the chance – but you don't take it. Jesus continues, '***For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.'***

The world in general rejects all God's prophets – especially when they rail against evil and injustice. But as Isaiah says of God: ***"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways".*** We know only too well the fate of John and Jesus: beheaded, crucified. Their detractors use different excuses to dismiss prophets: they're possessed by demons, they're gluttons or drunkards. And so, the world sets aside God's uncomfortable truths.

Those of you who were here in Provence last summer will no doubt remember its intense and unrelenting heat. 17 years ago, 2006 saw the premiere of the film *An Inconvenient Truth.* It sought to highlight the dangers of global warming. The director and presenter were searching for a title when one asked, ***"Why do people find it so hard to grasp?". "Because it's an inconvenient truth"***, came the reply. When it was released it was greeted by a chorus of derision: ***"Nah! Scaremongers! Doomsayers!".*** In particular it was highly-criticised for predicting rising sea levels and increasingly-intense storms leading to flooding in New York. **"What a ridiculous exaggeration!",** people said. Six years later, Hurricane Sandy slammed into the east coast. Following billions of dollars of damage to the city, its mayor said, ***"This is a wake-up call"***. A modern-day prophet had warned of an inconvenient truth, but as Jesus says in today's gospel reading, ***"wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."***

On this crowded planet our lives are filled with inconvenient truths, gross inequalities between rich and poor, environmental pollution, destruction of life-giving forests. We've been warned in no uncertain terms of the dangers of losing biodiversity – especially of pollinating insects, essential for our food production. Foolish, profit-driven farming methods and the desire for personal convenience and cheap food are poisoning once-fertile soils. Meanwhile climate change and poverty drive mass migration. We might prefer to ignore these inconvenient truths, but where might that lead us? Do we expect God to serve up solutions on a plate – or is He hoping we might respond and react in the light of His guidance?

In the UK and USA there's been much comment recently about falling standards in public life - politicians telling increasingly outrageous lies to Parliament, Congress and the public. Last week I heard one commentator say that we now live in a Post-

truth era. Is that true? Are we human beings so wrapped up in tight circles and social media bubbles that we're no longer able or willing to search out objective truth? Have we become like Pontius Pilate, saying, ***"What is truth?"***

Pilate cynically dismissed any idea of objective truth and many people firmly believe that all truth is relative: they say our upbringing and culture colour our ideas so profoundly that there's nothing that anyone can claim to be absolute truth. In a sense, that's true. To quote Isaiah again, ***"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts".*** Our minds *are* too small to see the whole picture.

Yet Jesus, and all the truthful prophets have dared to claim that yes, there is an absolute Truth. **"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life"** has no qualifying clauses! In the opening words of today's gospel, Jesus is showing his followers that there are many different ways of rejecting the truth that's staring us in the face, but that doesn't alter truth itself. The world operates according to God's Word. When we turn away to pursue our own agendas, sin is ready and waiting in the wings.

Sometimes it's said that St Paul's letters are hard to understand – but what he writes in this morning's passage couldn't be more clear. He speaks about that inner conflict we all experience when we know what's right, know we should be doing it, but as the old Book of Common Prayer puts it, the *"devices and desires"* of our selfish hearts turn us away from what we know to be good.

A commentary on the Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church of the USA puts it like this:

When we confess our sins to Almighty God at Morning and Evening Prayer, we use brutally honest and revealing language about ourselves. We can indeed only approach our Divine Creator in deepest humility, freely acknowledging that all too many of the things we think, say and do are offensive to Him and our neighbour, and are the product of our own ever-fertile imaginations and twisted desires. Wouldn't it be nice to have a bigger house, a newer car, a worthwhile pay rise or an overdue dose of public praise? And all this while the Third World is starving, their hospitals are unable to cope with floods of patients and our dear fellow Christians in hostile environments right round the world are in constant danger of discrimination, imprisonment or worse.

So what can we do, when we're torn by the ***devices and desires*** of our hearts? St Paul has the answer:

"So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

The way out of our mess is to submit to the yoke of Jesus Christ. Today's gospel ends with what are often called Jesus' *comfortable words*: he invites us to lay down our heavy burdens at his feet, for in him we will find rest for our souls. But these words are not just to be taken as bland and kindly. They are not "motherhood and apple pie". In their wisdom, those who devised our current set of readings have chosen to omit all the tough and challenging words surrounding today's Old

Testament reading. They've also missed out verse 20 from the psalm: ***The LORD watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy***. From the gospel, the omitted verses 20-25 are *very hard indeed*. You can check them out when you get home: he heaps *woes* upon all who refuse to listen to his words.

Yes, Jesus does offer his people rest for their souls. That rest comes when we speak the Truth, live the Life, and follow the Way he has set before us. In submitting to his Truth we find Life.

'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

Amen

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

5th Sunday after Trinity – 9th July 2023

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

'I do not understand what I do … I can will what is right, but I cannot do it… I am wretched! Who will rescue me from this body of death?' A fierce struggle rages in Paul's divided self. Once a Pharisee, he used 'to tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others' (Matt. 23.4), as Jesus has rebuked this religious party for doing. Many years after his life-changing encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul remains unrelenting in his self-expectations. The zealous persecutor of Christ's followers is now 'consumed by zeal' (Ps 69) for his mission, perceiving it as a matter of life and death. He bears the weight of a harsh yoke, one he has willingly placed upon his own shoulders.

One wonders if Paul has ever truly grasped Christ's gracious invitation and wonderful promise: 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest'?

Christ's words resonate deeply with each and every one of us. There is nobody who will not, at some point, find themselves burdened by a load too heavy to bear alone. As Augustine of Hippo observed, we already carry the weight of our mortality and the evidence of our own flaws and shortcomings. We feel the weight of our work, our responsibilities, our worries for ourselves or our loved ones. We feel the anxiety of the times we live in, where the failure of nearly everything appears distressingly real. We also bear the weight of our own desires and fantasies, the lingering ache of unresolved wounds, the expectations projected upon us by others, and the relentless pressure for success imposed by Western culture.

‘Come to me … and I will give you rest.’ Can we truly grasp the fulness of Christ’s promise? Do we remember that Christ has stretched out his arms upon the cross to embrace the whole world and shoulder its burdens? Far too often, we attempt to battle anxiety by ourselves, to prove our strength and capabilities. Sometimes we fail to consider God’s help, feeling unworthy of it, and thus we remain, as George Herbert poetically described, ‘broken in pieces all asunder … tortured in the space betwixt this world and that of grace’.

In keeping with my Romanian heritage, I occasionally delve into the writings of the fourth-century Desert Mothers and Fathers, highly esteemed by the Eastern Churches. They sought the promised rest of Christ amidst the solitude of the Egyptian desert, endeavouring to pick up the broken pieces of their lives. Their stories shed light on Paul’s inner struggle, portraying with realism, honesty, and even humour the intricate and sometimes conflicting voices that resounded within the depths of their souls. They sought wholeness and refreshment but discovered brokenness. In that vast nothingness, they understood that burdens and struggles are a necessary part of Christian maturity. They acknowledged and accepted their limitations, wounds and inner demons and so they learned a spirituality of imperfection, failure and frailty.

The Desert Mothers and Fathers likely found less astonishment than we do in what Christ offers in exchange for our burdens: ‘Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me’, he says; ‘you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’

A charlatan might have promised a life free from burdens, a weightless existence teetering on the edge of inconsistency. A tyrant might have imposed his yoke through punishment and coercion. Yet, Jesus, neither a charlatan nor a tyrant, offers a yoke that is light. Instead of weighing us down, it provides relief; instead of crushing us, it lends support. The yoke he offers represents his teaching, his path of discipleship, which is not burdensome but life-giving.

What an extraordinary image this is! A younger and more inexperienced ox would be yoked to a mature one. The seasoned ox, well-versed in obeying the instructions of the driver, would guide and mentor the younger one until it learned how to perform the expected work. In his illustration, we can discern that Jesus calls us to walk alongside him, to be guided by him as we learn to recognize and obey the will of the Father.

Writing in the second century, the Christian apologist and philosopher Justin Martyr referred to Jesus's time working as a carpenter. Among the various items Jesus crafted, he would also have constructed yokes. As a skilled carpenter, Jesus would have meticulously made these yokes to ensure a perfect fit. They would not chafe or cause discomfort to the animals but instead provide genuine assistance, enabling the animals to bear their burdens and work together efficiently as a team.

In this same manner, Jesus extends an invitation for us to take up a yoke crafted just for us by him, who truly understands the nature of bearing burdens. He knows each of us intimately, recognises our unique gifts and needs. He does not want us to become weary or overwhelmed. And there's even more: he offers himself as our partner within the yoke, ready to assist us in bearing, pulling and carrying whatever tasks we are called to fulfill.

Taking upon ourselves the yoke of Jesus signifies being united with the one through whom God's kingdom of justice, mercy and compassion is breaking into this world. It is in this union that we discover the rest our souls yearn for. Jesus says, 'Take your place alongside me in the gentle and humble work of transforming hearts and souls, of ushering in the Kingdom of God. Yet do not fret. If you align your pace with mine, no matter what happens, the burden will be light.'

To be yoked to Jesus entails walking the path he walked and perceiving the world through his eyes. He will instruct us on how to shift our focus away from ourselves, helping others carry their burdens rather than placing our own upon them, giving freedom instead of threatening it.

If we accept Jesus's yoke, we will relinquish the weighty burdens of failure, anxiety, loneliness, of dissatisfaction. Instead, we will take up a different one, that is shared with Christ and his people. We will walk side by side with the blessed ones, the poor in spirit, the meek, the peacemakers, the persecuted. The burden will not be insignificant. But it will not crush us, for it is shared with the One who brings life out of death.

If we heed the call to discipleship, and willingly bear Christ's yoke, where will it lead us? All I know is that this will be a path of boundless mercy, where we can find true rest for our souls, because 'Christ is the journey and the journey's end' (Boethius).

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

7th Sunday after Trinity – 23rd July 2023

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

In recent weeks, we have been starkly reminded of the consequences of climate change. The world has experienced the hottest day since records began. Hundreds of wildfires in Canada have blanketed New York City in smoke, which has even reached Europe. The sea temperature off Nice has been steadily rising and is now approaching 30°C. In southern Europe, devastating storms and wildfires have left communities and ecosystems in distress. The forecasted human toll is, perhaps, the most distressing aspect: it is estimated that by the year 2050, some 25 million people will become involuntary migrants due to climate change.

Proofs of global climate change are visible all around the globe: exposed glacier stones in the Alps, bleached corals, dried up rivers and lakes, withered crops, an ever-growing number of species on the brink of extinction. This unequivocal evidence for climate change cannot but lead into soul-deep lament.

In recent times, the topics of sustainability, green initiatives, and climate change have taken centre stage in the conversations of many politicians, governments, and businesses, eager to showcase their commitment to environmental responsibility and consciousness. However, it appears that the Christian community has been somewhat slow in fully embracing and prioritizing these critical issues. This raises questions about whether we have been selectively reading and meditating our Scriptures.

In this morning's passage from his Letter to the Romans, Paul vividly depicts the natural world - the creation - as 'subjected to futility', in 'bondage to decay', and 'groaning in pain'. It's intriguing to consider what Paul might have been

contemplating two thousand years ago when using such stark language, that resonates with us today. One thing is certain: he acknowledges a profound cosmic suffering. What I find remarkable is Paul's insight that creation is impacted by human sin, as he points out that it suffers "by the will of the one who subjected it."

What explains our abuse (or, at least, neglect) of the natural world over the last few centuries? It is, perhaps, a view that we, human beings, are not merely a part of creation, but made in God's image, and, as such, entitled to exercise unlimited dominion over nature and reshape it as we see fit, without being held to account.

Thankfully, not everybody subscribes to this belief. Eight-hundred years ago, Francis of Assisi had a profound sense of fraternity with the natural world, that continues to inspire many people today: "Praise to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs," he wrote in his Canticle of the Creatures, on which our first hymn was based.

Our Sister Earth now cries out to us, burdened by the violence we have inflicted upon her through our reckless and irresponsible use and abuse of the gifts bestowed upon her by God. Our duty of care and protection has been dormant.

'While everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away,' Jesus tells his disciples in the Gospel parable. The sleep of reason produces monsters, commented the Spanish painter Goya in response to the societal ills of his time. Indeed, when humankind fails to exercise reason and mindfulness, we unwittingly sow weeds of futility and discord in the fertile field that God has so carefully planted.

Undeniably, the parable of the wheat and the weeds shared by Jesus with his disciples paints a stark and realistic picture of the world we inhabit: elements of good and bad, construction and destruction, intertwine inextricably. Like an inseparable thread, the helpful and the harmful are woven together, intermingling in the very fabric of our existence.

Scientific and technological progress is a good thing, no doubt. But what about its consequences? Just think about 'the Great Pacific garbage patch', an alarming expanse of plastic and debris, covering an estimated surface area three times the size of France. Or the nearly 130 million space debris pieces orbiting our Earth. And let's not forget how humanity has pumped so much ground water from the earth that it has tilted the axis on which our planet rotates. What have we done?

What are we doing to the Universe, to God's creation? Do we realise we're all in this together, that our roots are inexorably tangled?

Paul's portrayal of our human condition and its impact on creation is stark and unvarnished. With the stewardship of Earth's precious natural resources that God has entrusted to humanity comes great responsibility: God will hold us accountable for our interaction with and management of the natural world. However, Paul radiates a confident hope: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God... in hope that it will be itself set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God..." God's plan for redemption extends far beyond individual souls or even the redemption of a new community; it encompasses all of creation.

The ultimate destiny of the universe is one of liberation, freedom, adoption, and redemption. Our revelation as children of God, that the creation awaits, comes alive when we actively engage with the world, following in the footsteps of Christ. Just as he served and cared for others, we, too, must seek to alleviate the groaning of God's creation, working towards its restoration. This means not only that we should refrain from actions that contribute to the decay of nature and add to its groaning. Instead, we are called to prayer and action, working towards the liberation of creation from its bondage and eagerly anticipating the arrival of the new creation.

What we truly need is a transformative change within ourselves. It starts with acknowledging that humanity is a unified global community dwelling together in a shared home. We can no longer afford to make decisions that solely serve the interests of a select few countries or individuals within a nation. The earth is our collective good. Indeed, a sense of fraternity should exclude nothing and no one.

In his encyclical letter titled *Laudato si*, inspired by the opening words of Francis of Assisi's canticle, Pope Francis speaks to "all people of good will" while offering particular guidance to Christians. What we need, he says, is an ecological conversion, whereby "the effects of our encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in our relationship with the world around us. Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience."

As Christians, hope should course through our very being. We have experienced first-hand the transformative power of God. This knowledge instils in us the certainty that change / conversion is not only possible but attainable. At the end, the weeds will not ruin the harvest - today's parable brings us this comfort.

We are a people of resurrection, believing in God's redeeming grace - so we can view our mistakes, not as irreversible wrong turns, but as a part of a necessary process God is working both in us and in the world. As people of resurrection, our lives are marked by the hope that God's redemptive purposes for all the creation cannot be thwarted.

With this hope, let us always sow seeds of peace, justice, love, pardon, truth, light, and joy.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

The Transfiguration of Our Lord – 6th August 2023

Zoom service

Canon David Pickering

And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Luke 8.29

This morning we celebrate the feast of the Transfiguration of Our Lord, with Luke's account of this strange, mesmerising event. The Transfiguration is closely recorded in the first three gospels, and as today's New Testament reading from the Second Letter of Peter recalls: ***we were with him on the holy mountain***. Our modern three- year cycle of Gospel readings allows us to hear consecutively the three accounts of the Transfiguration on the Sundays before Lent. Each evangelist sees the Transfiguration as a prelude leading up to Jesus's passion and crucifixion. And in our annual lectionary it provides a fitting anticipation for our observance of Lent.

But this morning we observe a celebration of the Transfiguration on this day, as the Church has done for well over a thousand years. In the Eastern Church its observance has been recorded since the sixth century. But, in this era dominated by science, what are we to make of it? Here are a few of my own thoughts.

Until a couple of weeks ago I had never come across a church dedicated to the Transfiguration. Then came the news from Ukraine: the Cathedral of the Transfiguration in Odesa had been bombed.

The story of the Transfiguration stands unique in the Gospel Story, the only time when Jesus is revealed or witnessed in his glory. All three Synoptic Gospels tell similar stories, but each has its own subtle differences. All three evangelists set the event just after Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah, and Jesus's prediction about his imminent sufferings, crucifixion and resurrection. All three agree that Peter, James and John saw the two key characters of the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah with Jesus, and that there was a voice declaring

similar words to those at Jesus's baptism, declaring him as God's chosen, or beloved son, but adding the words, "listen to Him".

It's perhaps inconsequential that in Luke's account today, he places the Transfiguration eight days after Jesus's previous words, whereas Matthew and Mark state six days. But a greater difference is this: ***And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.*** Luke precisely describes what happened, whereas Mark and Matthew say Jesus was ***transfigured***. The word they used puzzled me in my student days. In my late teens I read a famous short book by Frank Kafka, *Metamorphosis*. It tells the story of a young man who wakes up one morning to find himself transformed into a huge insect, *a monstrous vermin.* When I came to the Transfiguration in our Synoptic Gospels course, I was shocked when I discovered that the Greek word used by Matthew and Mark to describe what happened was *metemorphothe.* Our reading this morning from Luke, like the other two evangelists, describes the changed outward appearance of Jesus, in his face and clothing, but omits the word *metemorphothe.*

There are only two other occasions where this strange word is used in New Testament Greek: 2 Corinthians 3.18 and Romans 12.2. But if we look closely at St. Paul's meaning in those passages, it's clear that he's referring to inward and spiritual transformation. And it's the 2 Corinthians quote that catches my eye. Beginning from verse 17, ***Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed*** *(metemorphothe)* ***into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord.***

Glory! That is what the Transfiguration is all about: the glory of God. St Luke is the one to record that Moses and Elijah appeared in glory talking with Jesus in the glory of his Transfiguration. This feast of the Transfiguration of Our Lord is a celebration of the glory of God seen in Jesus. It sheds light on what the word *glory* should mean for us as we use it so much in our worship and prayers. So here are a couple of few brief thoughts.

According to my ancient Biblical Concordance of the Authorised Version of the Bible the word 'glory' occurs around four hundred times, in one form or another. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word is usually *kabob,* which means *weight, heaviness, honour*. In New Testament Greek this becomes *doxa,* with the simple meaning of 'glory'. So at the end of the psalms we always add the *doxology - Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as was in the beginning*

is now and shall be for ever. Amen. This familiar short prayer tells us some important things about *glory*.

The glory, the weight, or heaviness, which can also mean wholeness, fullness, completeness, is recognised and acknowledged as the being of the one God. Known in the loving creator and sustainer of all that is, who we happen to call Father. But why not Mother, as the Archbishop of York indicated recently, where people may have had difficult fatherhood experiences. At the same time God is recognised in that one Being made known to us in personal human terms through the saving life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This one God is alive in each and every one of us through the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit and whenever we experience the fruits of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity or goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self control (forgive the repetition of one of my favourite themes!), there, even in the smallest manner, can be found a part of the glory of God.

Yet we need to recognise that there's a key factor in seeing, acknowledging and revealing the glory of God. ***And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed.*** All three evangelists agree that is was because Jesus was praying that the glory of his transfiguration took place. If it was the case for Jesus, then for us, even more so, it can only be through our prayer and worship that we can experience something of the fullness of the glory of God.

Today also marks another important event, though it's one from our modern era and perhaps in our thoughts particularly with the launch of the film *Oppenheimer*. On this day in 1945, a single bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, instantly turning that city and its people into irradiated ashes. On this day, our continent finds itself again at war, this in a context where Russia possesses a total of nearly 6000 nuclear warheads, the largest stockpile of nuclear warheads in the world. The second-largest stockpile is the United States': nearly 5,500 warheads. Humanity prides itself on its progress - but really, how far have we come? How far can we be so removed from the wholeness and glory of God?

But the central event in our faith, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is the revelation that the glory of God does and will win through in the end. We trust in the goodness of God and in his glorious triumph.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

The Transfiguration of Our Lord – 6th August 2023

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

Today, the 6th of August, across the Christian world, the Church is celebrating the Transfiguration of Our Lord. It's an important festival, because it speaks deeply about the things of our faith. It's rare for this day to fall on a Sunday, which is why we get to celebrate the Transfiguration twice this year. One of the Gospel accounts of the Transfiguration is always set as the reading for the Sunday before Lent begins. That's the time of year at which we usually celebrate it, as we did in February.

The story of the Transfiguration appears in each of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Today we heard Luke's version, which has a slightly different focus from the other two. Matthew and Mark dwell upon the outward glory of which the disciples become aware. Luke, the physician, focuses more on what is going on inwardly, within Jesus himself.

Luke emphasises the parallels between this story - of Jesus with Peter, James and John on the mountain - and the story that will unfold in the Garden of Gethsemane, when the four of them are together again on the night before the crucifixion. In Luke's 'camerawork', we are shown Jesus withdrawing to a place

with the three others to pray. We are told that the three friends were heavy with sleep, just as they will be in Gethsemane, as Jesus's mind turns to the 'departure' he is to accomplish in Jerusalem. Eight days earlier, Luke tells us, Jesus had first predicted to his disciples his suffering and death. Luke's description of the event on the mountain doesn't actually use the word 'transfiguration', in contrast to Matthew and Mark. It simply says that the appearance of Jesus's face changed, that it became 'other', different. That's a phrase that might also be used of a face marred with sweat falling down 'like great drops of blood', which Luke alone records happening in Gethsemane.

Luke seems to be suggesting that, at this point in the Gospel narrative, Jesus is facing a crisis, coming to terms with the realisation of what he will have to undergo in Jerusalem, and that his withdrawal to pray is to be seen in that context. Jesus's prayer is rewarded not only by a sense of the presence of those who have trodden the road of faith, but also the assurance of the Father's love and presence with him: 'This is my Son, my Chosen'.

The disciples see something more. 'Since they had stayed awake', it says (in contrast to their exhausted sleep in the Garden), 'they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him'. They are brought to the understanding that what they are living through is what the whole history of Israel has been leading up to. This is the significance of the reference to Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets. The defining event of the history of Israel was the Exodus, the liberation of the people from slavery in Egypt. The Greek word '*exodos*', meaning 'departure', is used by Luke in the Transfiguration narrative – the 'exodus' Jesus will accomplish in Jerusalem by his suffering and death, freeing the whole world from death in the process.

I wonder if there's another dimension to Luke's focus, a dimension that as a physician he will have been used to. One of the most mysterious things about human suffering is that it can, on occasion, trigger an experience that might best be described as transfiguration. Sometimes the heat of the battle can bring our whole life into focus and lead us to appreciate things we would never have appreciated fully otherwise. Relationships that we have taken for granted can become luminous. Our apprehension of the beauty of creation can become almost overwhelming, and our whole understanding of what it means to live and to die acquire a clarity that dazzles. It's as if our very battle with suffering brings us closer to God, something that is sometimes more apparent to others than to ourselves. If you have ever journeyed alongside someone suffering from a terminal illness, you may know what that's about.

Perhaps this being close to God in our toughest moments should not surprise us, because we have to do with a God who suffered, and who suffers with us. I suspect it's part of what Luke was alluding to in these verses. For, please God, it is in our Gethsemanes and Calvaries that we will find him, somehow discovering that we are held in an embrace beyond our understanding. Even if we are not able to feel it ourselves, others may see it going on.

Later this year a statue will be revealed again in the sanctuary of Notre-Dame de Paris, when the first public Mass is celebrated there after the devastating fire of 2018. The statue is a Pietà, made of white marble. A portrait in stone of Our Lady, Notre Dame, cradling the dead Christ. On her face is a look of utter anguish, and from her mouth there comes a silent scream. All the pain, heartache and desolation of the human condition are there. Yet if you stand

back from the statue, you will notice that on either side are two small figures – two angels, sorrowful but determined. They do not touch her, yet they hold her between them, silently watching, willing her on. You only notice them if you stand back from the pain at the centre of the statue. The two figures are a reminder that we are held in the divine embrace even through the worst that can happen to us. A reminder that, in the words of our Epistle last week, nothing can separate us from the love of God.

The story of the Transfiguration shows the glory breaking through, the promise that in Jesus suffering and death do not have the last word. The road to Jerusalem leads to the Cross, but what Jesus does when he reaches that place is to transfigure it, turning an instrument of torture into a place of redemption. That's what the disciples glimpsed on the mountain top, even if they did not yet understand it. They would do so later, after the resurrection. For what they had seen was a prefiguring of Easter, which is why the story of the Transfiguration is always set as the Gospel reading for the Sunday before Lent.

As I have said to you before, I believe that this understanding of transfiguration is one of the most important things about religious faith. However much faith may be mixed with questioning and doubt, it can make a difference to how we respond to the things that happen to us, both good and bad. It does not protect us from hurt or tragedy, but it does give us a resource to grapple with them. It takes prayer, alertness, patience and trust to encounter transfiguration. But when we do, it is like - as the second Epistle of Peter puts it - 'a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in [our] hearts'.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 10th Sunday after Trinity – 13th August 2023

All Saints' Marseille

Christine Portman, Reader

Breathe through the earthquake, wind and fire, O still, small voice of calm! What a wonderful climax to that hymn! We can imagine ourselves with Elijah, at the mouth of the cave, at last in solitude and silence, able to hear God's voice again. But the background to this morning's Old Testament reading is perhaps less well-known.

Queen Jezebel promoted the worship of Baal. On her orders, many of God's prophets had been killed. But Elijah, the last faithful prophet fought back. On Mount Sinai he challenged the prophets of Baal to make their god bring down fire and burn a sacrificed bull. Yet for all their ranting and raving, the pyre remained unlit. Meanwhile, Elijah built an altar, covered it with wood, and topped the pile with the bull. He then dug an enormous pit, filled it with water and called down fire in the name of the Lord. Everything is incinerated, even the stones!

Another bloody Old Testament episode follows: Elijah rounds up the hundreds of false prophets and has them put to the sword. Jezebel is infuriated, so he flees to the wilderness to save his skin. Exhausted and ashamed: *He asked that he might die: 'It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.' Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep.*

So this is the context of today's reading: after all the high drama comes the heart of the story. Despite his victory on Mount Carmel, Elijah has lost touch with himself, with his purpose and even with God. After taking the lives of hundreds of men, he recognizes that he is '*no better than (his) ancestors.'* Elijah may be exhausted and depressed, but God has not lost touch with him. *Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, 'Get up and eat.' He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again.* Angels again wake and encourage him on his way to Mount

Horeb where at last, he will be able to hear God's voice again. That voice doesn't come in a mighty and dramatic way. Yes, *there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.*

Perhaps, like me, you prefer the old Kings James version here: *And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.* So often it's not in noise and spectacle that we meet with God, but in stillness and quiet. It can be very difficult to hear God when there's a great deal going on in our lives and we don't take time to step away.

And that is why, in today's gospel reading, Jesus had gone up into the mountain to pray. *Alone.* In chapter 14 he has learned about the beheading of John and has tried to get away to *a deserted place by himself. But the crowds followed him* and because *he had compassion for them… he cured the sick.* This is followed by the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus continues to give and give again, but he knows that time for prayer is vital. He has to reconnect with his Father in silence and solitude, away not only from the crowds, but also his disciples. David often reminds me of two famous sayings of Herbert Kelly, the founder of The Society of the Sacred Mission: *He who cannot keep silence is not content with God,* and *God speaks most often in silence*.

In todays' reading the contrast between Jesus and his disciples is stark: *When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.* After a night alone, early in the morning, Jesus calmly *came walking towards them on the lake. But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear.* In Jesus, in a situation where he might well be afraid, we see calm confidence - whilst on the boat panic and terror prevail. His voice seeks to calm them: *'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'*

Jesus offers us, as he offered his disciples, strength and confidence – qualities they would need to carry on his work after his Ascension. Like them, we have a gospel to proclaim. At the end of our service we'll sing *Go forth and tell! God's love embraces all; he will in grace respond to all who call: how shall they call if they have never heard the gracious invitation of his word?*

Like Peter, we may want to share Jesus' Good News, but then have doubts and lose confidence in our ability to follow his call. *As soon as Peter noticed the*

strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt? We may doubt, but he will always be there, reaching out his hand to save us.

Which is the message of St Paul to the Romans in today's New Testament reading: For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' There is no reason to be afraid, for *the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.* Like Peter, we have heard *the gracious invitation of his word,* but unless we follow Jesus' example of prayer and *call on* the Lord, it's all too easy to become disconnected, sidetracked by the demands of busy lives.

The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart says Saint Paul, and we are called to bring that word to others. But, he continues *how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!*'

Some Anglicans feel decidedly uncomfortable with the idea of evangelism. They often imagine that other people won't find their feet very beautiful if they start to talk about religion. It certainly doesn't feel very British. Herbert Kelly again had some words of wisdom about this. He *often stated that God and religion were not the same, challenging his own students to focus on issues of Faith and practical evangelism rather than the technicalities of church doctrine and administration.* Practical evangelism is not concerned with forcing one's ideas on others. It's about living out the Gospel in faith, through lives that follow Jesus' way.

In our prayers, we reach out to Jesus who is always there offering his outstretched hand. We have had the *gracious invitation,* so let's pray for the confidence to be the feet that bring his Good News to others. We know what that Good News is. *It is near us, written on our lips and in our heart.*

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 10th Sunday after Trinity – 13th August 2023

Eglise du Sacré-Coeur, Oppède

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

How are we to read the miracle stories? One thing we shouldn't do is spend too much time worrying about 'what really happened' and whether we can believe in them literally. It's worth recalling that the Gospels were written some decades after Jesus's ministry, when the eye witnesses were at the end of their lives and people realised that the story of Jesus, and its significance for humanity, needed to be written down.

In order to read the miracles well, we must appreciate that whatever history lies behind them, they were written as what has been described as 'literary creations with a theological purpose'.[1] At least three of the Gospels are by Jewish authors, who would have known the literary technique of *Haggadah* (which means 'narrative'). This was a creative type of theological writing in the Jewish tradition that started with a text from Scripture and meditated on it freely. This is why the miracle stories often carry echoes of Old Testament texts, meditating on how prophecies were being fulfilled, writing new narratives full of symbol and allegory that applied the truths and meanings from the scriptural

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

past to their present experience. Jesus had changed how the writers felt about the world, and they wanted others to feel it too.

Incidentally, the Lectionary – the three year cycle of readings which churches use on Sundays – attempts to do something like this as well. It pairs up an Old Testament reading with the Gospel, hoping that people will hear resonances. Today we heard part of the story of Elijah's struggle to persuade the people of Israel not to forsake God and resort to pagan worship. Exhausted by his ministry, Elijah re-connects with God on a mountain, as Moses had done before him. Jesus does the same, at the beginning of our Gospel reading, going up a mountain to be alone with God. Like Elijah in his time, Jesus is trying to persuade his contemporaries back to God, not by following the narrow religiosity of the scribes and Pharisees but by focussing on love of God and neighbour. Matthew's Gospel emphasises throughout how Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, fulfilling the Law and the Prophets, standing in the shoes of Moses and Elijah but exceeding all that they had done.

We do a similar thing when choosing hymns, if possible finding ones that echo our readings for the day. p

So how does this use of resonances work in practice within the miracle stories? Matthew's Gospel includes two miracles involving the sea: the one in which Jesus calms the wind and the waves; and the one today where he walks towards the disciples on the water and tells them not to be afraid.

In the Old Testament, the sea was a symbol of chaos and evil, over which the Spirit of God moved at the beginning of creation. The prophets and psalmists,

writing at times of distress and persecution, would often recall what God had done for his people in the past, asking him to show his power in the present. In Psalm 77 we read: 'Your way was through the sea, your path through the mighty waters; yet your footprints were unseen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron'. The writers recall not only God ruling over the waters of chaos in creation, but also the Exodus in which his people were led to freedom.

In Matthew's Gospel, we are being shown that here is the long-awaited Messiah, who will lead God's people once more to freedom, facing down the powers of chaos and evil. Coming straight after the feeding of the five thousand, with its echo of Moses feeding the Israelites in the desert, here is Jesus – again, like Moses – walking through the sea, leading his people to freedom. Yet Matthew is also saying that this is *more* than a new Moses. In the English translation the words are: 'Take heart: it is I; do not be afraid', but in the original Greek it says: 'Take heart: I AM' (*ego eimi*, the divine name revealed to Moses). Matthew is pointing to Jesus's intimate connection with God, the one who when asked his name replied 'I AM who I AM', the source and end of all that is. When Jesus gets into the boat with them, the astonished disciples say: 'Truly you are the Son of God'. We will hear those words again at the end of the story, spoken by the centurion at the foot of the Cross.

Although the miracle of Jesus walking on the water also appears in Mark and John, Matthew's account adds the scene of Peter getting out of the boat to walk towards Jesus - starting to walk, then noticing the strength of the wind and feeling his courage fail. How easy it is to identify with Peter. We have all known times when we felt confident, and other times when disaster or danger has

brought us up short and we have felt very small and alone, buffeted by a storm and starting to sink. It's a very human story.

We tend to think of Peter's attempt to walk on water in terms of impetuousness and failure. And he receives a rebuke: 'You of little faith.' Matthew certainly records Jesus on several occasions challenging the disciples for being of 'little faith'. But elsewhere we see him encouraging them that to <u>have</u> 'a little faith', even as small as a mustard seed, is enough to move mountains. Perhaps, therefore, the rebuke is a gentle one. For Jesus doesn't say to Peter: 'why did you think you could walk on water?' but 'why did you <u>doubt</u> that you could?'

Jesus knows Peter better than Peter knows himself. From the beginning he tells him he is the rock on which he will build his church. Yet he knows that Peter is prey to the fears that affect all of us when the going gets difficult. He foretells the denial in the courtyard of the high priest. But Jesus knows, too, that Peter is capable of more, and better, than what happened in the courtyard. At the lakeside after the resurrection he restores him with the forgiveness that only Christ can give: 'Feed my sheep'.

Perhaps the point of Matthew's addition to the story is that discipleship is not about running away from difficulty - huddled in the boat with the other disciples - but walking towards it. This is what Christ wants us to do, loving our neighbour unconditionally and doing our part to build his church on the rock that Peter proved to be. We mustn't feel failures if we panic and stumble. It is not easy to hold on to courage in a storm. But this miracle story assures us that Christ will be there to catch us when we fall. The words that Jesus says, even before Peter

steps out of the boat, are for all of us, and for all time: 'Take heart; do not be afraid: I AM.'

This story is still powerful. Even if our culture no longer thinks of the sea in terms of chaos or evil, the notion of the storm is still a powerful image for the emotional, mental or spiritual turmoil we all experience at times. Peter did stumble, losing heart and calling out to Jesus to save him, but ultimately he found himself held by Christ.

Last week, at the *Journées Mondiales de la Jeunesse* in Lisbon, Pope Francis preached to over a million young Catholic pilgrims. Young people concerned for their future, preoccupied by a world of increasing violence and economic turmoil, set against a background of the climate emergency. The words Pope Francis said to them were the very words of Jesus: 'Do not be afraid.'

They are the same words which, five hundred years before Christ, the prophet Isaiah wrote: 'Thus says the Lord …: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.' (Isaiah 43.1)

The words of Jesus – Emmanuel, 'God with us' - can still bring calm to our storms if we hold on to the assurance that he 'is who he is': 'Take heart, do not be afraid: I AM.' May it be so for us, in our times of turmoil. That's what the Gospel writers wanted us to know.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 11th Sunday after Trinity – 20th August 2023

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

Jesus's encounter with the Canaanite woman is one of those occasions when it would be very helpful to know the tone of his voice. Ironic? Playful? Distracted? Worn down? Any or all of those might have applied in our Gospel reading this morning. People have often puzzled over how to approach this text. To twenty-first century ears, hearing Jesus apparently refer to another ethnoreligious group as 'dogs' is, to say the least, uncomfortable.

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

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

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

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

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

What does this passage say to us today? For one thing it reminds us that it is what goes on in our hearts that matters, and that this will affect our relationships and how we live out our faith. It also reminds us that wherever we

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

The late Archbishop Desmond Tutu used to preach a sermon in which he urged the Church to adopt a radical inclusiveness, especially when fear of difference might tempt it to do otherwise. Tutu would stand in the pulpit and say: 'Christ did not say "I will draw *some* people to myself", but all, All, ALL.' Religious leaders in every time and place need to ask themselves: who are we excluding, and why? For God's love knows no boundaries, and in the end breaks down all barriers. If we are not preaching that, what *are* we preaching?

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

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 12th Sunday after Trinity – 27th August 2023

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

On the road from Galilee to Jerusalem, at Caesarea Philippi, a crossroads of world religions, bustling commerce and intricate culture, Jesus asks of those around him one of his poignant questions, which the Gospels have recorded: "Who do you say that I am?" Good question, striking at the core of his disciples' relationship with him. However, the path to an answer is far from being an easy one, and Jesus must know this: he initiates a safer query with his followers: "Who do <u>others</u> say that I am?"

The disciples must have exhaled sights of relief, as they hastened to provide their insight: "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." That this question was raised is significant: it hints at the earliest believers' preoccupation with the enigma of Jesus' identity – raising the question of who he truly was.

From Jesus' time until the present day, the question hasn't yielded clarity, but rather stirred up debates. How does the 21st century perceive Jesus? Some liken him to impactful moral and political leaders like Gandhi or Martin Luther King, Jr. Others view him as a revered spiritual teacher in the company of Buddha, Confucius, or Lao-tzu. There are those who label him as a political revolutionary and align him with their cause, while some see him as a visionary dreamer. He has also been identified as a socialist by some, and conversely, many conservatives or nationalists eagerly embrace him as one of their own.

Even among scholars, consensus about Jesus' identity is elusive, leading to a bewildering array of conflicting viewpoints Was Jesus a humble cynic, a champion of economic equality, a liberating force in politics, a healing figure in

the counterculture, an apocalyptic prophet, or a messianic figure within Judaism?

Be it in popular discourse or academic circles, nobody has an interpretive monopoly on Jesus. We tend to shape his image according to our individual inclinations, influenced by our era, location, purpose, and culture. We project our values onto Jesus and then utilize this constructed version of him to validate our ideals. Various portrayals of Jesus emerge—be it the European colonizers' Jesus, the Jesus conceptualized by German intellectuals or the black Jesus of Central America, or even the Jesus depicted in stage performances, music, and films like Andrew Lloyd Webber's iconic "Jesus Christ Superstar".

What's intriguing is that Jesus neither affirms nor refutes any of the disciples' answers. He listens, allowing them to share all they believe they know. As if to say: the faith's journey starts with acknowledging what we have heard, assessing inherited beliefs, and echoing the convictions passed down to us. Yet, these answers demand little from us; they are safe choices. They tether us to history and tradition. But they lack commitment, passion, and personal investment. However, a faith built on hearsay is insufficient. Eventually, the question of Jesus' identity must become a personal one. So Jesus persists in probing, asking. "But who do <u>you</u> say that I am?"

Simon Peter steps forward and confidently responds: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." It is a flawless answer, which encapsulates the entire gospel narrative.

This confession marks a pivotal shift in the narrative of Matthew, signifying the arrival of God's Messiah. The visions of the prophets of old are crystallised in the person and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Founded on this "rock" of Peter's resolute testimony, Jesus affirms his intent to build his church.

Through God's grace, Peter, the early confessor and later denier, identifies Jesus as Messiah, the one who revealed God and his Way of love and justice. However, the full significance of this revelation remains to be unveiled. Peter's declaration signifies only the start of his quest to understand Jesus' identity, not its culmination. More learning awaits, a plethora of questions and answers for him to grow into. Patience is required, as well as living with unsolved queries. Peter's journey involves discerning what recognising Jesus as the Christ means for his own identity and for his life in the world.

“Who do you say that I am?” Naturally, each of us must personally respond to this query. It’s a question to contemplate over a lifetime, encompassing numerous layers. What narratives about Jesus have been handed down to us? Which perceptions of him do we need to release? What assumptions do we cling to merely because they are familiar, secure, or easy? Why do we sometimes shy away from responding? This is a question with weighty implications.

“Who do you say that I am?” Perhaps Jesus’ question isn’t solely about certainty, but about exploration, imagination, potential. It invites us to genuinely consider the possibility of perceiving from a different perspective. A chance to transcend popular cultural depictions, religious structures, and academic interpretations, and embrace the unconventional Jesus of Nazareth.

While we may confidently proclaim daily, like Peter, that Jesus is the "Messiah, the Son of the living God," true impact lies in embodying this belief. It's not merely a personal matter; it's about translating our response into actions that resonate in the world. The way we embody our hope in the Messiah is as crucial as the words we profess, no matter their accuracy or eloquence.

We manifest our response by loving one another as Christ loves us – offering compassion, forgiveness, hospitality, justice, and healing to a world in need. It's in our dedication to peacekeeping and nurturing hope that we truly live out our answer.

What Peter grasps in Caesarea Philippi, at the crossroads, is that Jesus's presence is potent in questions, as it is in answers, if not more so. Embracing the unresolved doesn't negate Jesus's sovereignty. Instead, it allows him to penetrate our hearts more profoundly than impersonal assertions ever could. Live with the questions. That is Jesus’ invitation, and he makes it over and over again to each one of us, in love. May we accept this invitation, so that Christ becomes our living reality, ever fresh, ever real, ever shining in our life.

Amen.

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

3rd September 2023
13th Sunday after Trinity

Reflection

Some of the central words from this morning's Gospel, ***Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'*** *(Matthew 16.24)*

What a challenge! I'm sure we all sincerely wish to be followers of Jesus. That's probably why we've taken the trouble to join this morning's service. Turning up for worship can often be a challenge. This morning I've had a forty minute drive to be here at the home of Jane and Garry for our Zoom service, but even getting online can sometimes itself be a technical challenge! But what about the challenge, the triple challenge we have in our text? We are taking part in this worship this morning because we are followers of Jesus. So to be true to ourselves we need to have some idea what we mean by self-denial, taking up our cross, and how we might follow Jesus, probably into the unknown!

Denial of self can so easily be misunderstood. For Lent, it's traditional to give up certain luxuries of life as acts of self-denial. But that is all they are, simple individual acts. What Jesus is calling for here is a whole life attitude. Again this is not a call to some kind of ascetic life of self-chosen or self-inflicted sufferings. Rather self-denial is the denial of the selfish self and in its place, putting the needs of others first. We see this in today's passage from Paul's Letter to the Romans. It begins, ***Let love be genuine***; ***hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good.*** These words set the tone for the rest of the text. It concerns our relationships with others, no matter who they are, and I recommend a reflective read through the whole passage.

To follow Jesus Christ is to be always aware and open to the needs of others, and consideration of what we may be able to do for them. And even if that is beyond our means, abilities or influence, we can always pray for them. We are sisters and brothers in Christ with every other human being on this planet, we have a duty of wellbeing to their wholeness of life. In our troubled and confusing world this takes a real effort, and cannot be achieved without the grace of God.

Yet there are times and situations where we can do something. However, it may be costly, difficult or troublesome. This is where we have to take up our cross in following Jesus Christ. The whole of the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah is about the cross he had to bear to proclaim God's message. We hear the desperation of this in today's Old Testament reading. To quote just two verses, ***In your forbearance do not take me away; know that on your account I suffer insult … Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable refusing to be healed?*** Again I recommend a re-reading of the whole passage, or in fact, any part of Jeremiah. But today's passage ends on a positive note, ***And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, says the Lord.*** Here, in the midst of Jeremiah's cross, he finds his resurrection.

We may have many crosses to bear every day of our lives, but for the Christian the hope of the resurrection always accompanies the cross. Some years ago, in my last parish in England, I was talking with our local American Methodist Minister as we came out of the village Roman Catholic Church. We had just completed the round the village Holy Week Stations of the Cross, which had ended at Saint Michael and All Angels. His rather cynical comment was, ***The trouble with Roman Catholics, they forget to take Jesus down from the Cross. The crucifixion ended in the resurrection.*** I understood his point, even though it might have been rather uncharitably expressed. A crucifix with the figure of Christ may be a symbol of his death on the cross, and needs our attention and devotion, but a plain cross is a symbol of his resurrection. Without the resurrection, Jesus Christ's death on the cross is just another capital execution. Despite all the crosses we may have to face day by day there must always be the confident hope of the resurrection, even if that victory is not realised in our experience or time.

This morning's Gospel passage began with one of Jesus's predictions of his coming passion, death ***and*** resurrection. To follow Jesus is to have a resurrection faith, despite the crosses of our daily lives and the world around us. To be a resurrection person. In the challenge to follow Jesus, he now asks for an attachment to himself as a person, and not just the acceptance of his message. Through our baptism we are incorporated into the body of Christ, the Church, and this is renewed in our prayers and in our communal worship.

In our communion at this Zoom Eucharist, whether it be sacramental or spiritual, we renew our attachment or incorporation into following and being Jesus Christ in our daily lives during the coming week. There will be crosses to bear, especially of self-denial. But we go forward with a resurrection faith.

Amen.

Canon David Pickering

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

10th September 2023
14th Sunday after Trinity

Reflection

What church wouldn't aspire to be renowned as a community where, in the words of the Psalmist, it is good and pleasant to be, for sisters and brothers to dwell in unity? What church wouldn't long to be described as the Christian apologist Tertullian spoke of his community in the third century: "Our care and love for one another have become our distinctive sign"?

Among the gifts bestowed upon us by Christ is the gift of community: the place where we can share our sorrows and joys, seek consolation in times of sadness, celebrate moments of happiness. It is a place - our way of existence - where we recognise, and are recognised by God's love, which beckons us to reach beyond ourselves, to be woven together into one Body. Christian community is a blessing, but it's not always smooth sailing. Being part of a community, especially when conflict arises, can be a formidable test of faith.

Conflict is an all-too-human experience, an element inherent in the fabric of our relationships. Churches are not exempt from this reality. Missteps occur, disputes arise, tempers flare, people get hurt. This is not an indication of a corrupt Church, but rather a reflection of the humanity within it. An inclination to conflict seems to be ingrained in our nature, a reality that even the Scriptures acknowledge. Even in Paradise discord found a foothold. Genesis brims with stories of feuds within the Patriarchs' families, while the Torah lays down conflict guidelines for addressing conflicts within Israel, a community bound not only by their national identity but also by their faith.

We don't experience our world as a place where people effortlessly come together in agreement and harmony. Rather, it often unfolds as a stage for competition, confrontation, conflict. As a Christian community, should we not strive to live differently? Shouldn't our

Christian identity prompt us to foster harmony by dealing with disagreements and conflicts with grace and compassion?

Conflict in church context in not a novel phenomenon. A cursory glance at the New Testament reveals ample evidence of discord within the earliest Christian communities.

Conflict within the church is not a novel phenomenon; it has existed since the early days of the disciples following Christ's resurrection. Conflict can take many forms, often evoking emotions such as fear, anger, guilt, and a reluctance to engage in open dialogue. Even within the most prayerful communities, conflict can escalate, transforming from a mere issue to resolve into an intractable struggle, with individuals becoming the focal point, and the very essence of the community becoming compromised.

Churches and other Christian communities often grapple with the complexities of conflict resolution. While Jesus' teachings emphasise peace-making and reconciliation, they sometimes remain weakly embedded in the cultural fabric of Christian communities. So, when disagreements and tensions arise, Christians can find themselves in troubled waters. The central question for churches is not how to entirely eliminate conflict, but rather how to handle it in a way that aligns with their values.

Those who relish structured approaches and clarity can only rejoice in the four-step conflict management tutorial that Jesus offers in today's Gospel passage: When there is sin or wrongdoing, confront it directly, face-to-face. If this doesn't yield, involve another party in the conversation. Should this also fail, bringing the matter before the entire community is the next step. If, even then, the conflict persists, treat the wrongdoer as you would a Gentile or a tax collector.

I always prefer to understand an algorithm before I apply it, so allow me to have a closer look at Jesus' guidelines. In essence, Jesus lays out a framework for engagement that is underpinned by the principles of love and respect. It all begins with a courageous act: the risk of engaging in honest conversation, to "go and point out the fault". We must not perceive this confrontation as a catastrophe, a last resort, but as a moment of truth, driven by love. Our aim should be genuine healing rather than the mere illusion of harmony.

Honest engagement is crucial, and so are discretion, kindness, and care, according to Jesus. We are called to protect the dignity of those involved, particularly in our culture marked by the tendency to revel in the downfall of others. We must remember our own fragility and susceptibility to error.

In his wisdom, Jesus acknowledges that a one-on-one conversation will always suffice. In such cases, we are encouraged to enlist the involvement of others, not to spread gossip or exacerbate the conflict but to ensure that the truth prevails as we work toward reconciliation.

“If the member refuses to listen, tell it to the church.” This particular principle may be the most challenging for us to accept, and it may even offend some among us. History offers grim reminders of self-criticism sessions and denunciation rallies, where individuals accused of being 'public enemies' were exposed and humiliated, often by those with whom they were closely associated.

However, the scriptures portray the church as an interdependent body, with each component reliant upon the others. Within this body, says St Paul, love for one another is a debt that can never be settled. When conflicts emerge within our midst, the stakes extend beyond individual emotions or personal liberty; they encompass the overall health and well-being of the entire body. Jesus goes so far as to assert that God's presence among us hinges upon the wholeness and vitality of the beloved community: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." It is within our unity, our interconnectedness, that God pledges His presence.

“If the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” At first glance, this instruction may appear to give license to shun or “cancel” those with whom we experience deep conflict, ostracizing them as troublemakers or, at least, reducing them to silence. Indeed, history reveals instances when the church has taken such actions. However, remember how Jesus treated Gentiles and tax collectors, such as Zacchaeus, or the Roman centurion’s servant, or the Samaritan woman at the well, or the Canaanite woman and her sick daughter. Each time, Jesus extended love, care, healing, hope, and compassion to outsiders. Therefore, even as we acknowledge and lament the brokenness, even as we recognize that an insider has become an "outsider," we are called to extend care and hold open the possibility of reconciliation and renewal.

Jesus doesn’t merely present a radically distinct path to approach conflict, but also inspiration on how to build a countercultural community, where leaders serve, where the weak are nurtured and not cast aside, where those who have lost their way are sought and restored, where mercy and forgiveness are cultivated as precious virtues. It sets a high standard for genuine community – it requires Christ’s real presence.

Undeniably, genuine community is challenging. It demands courage and a willingness to stand by one another, bear with one another. Yet it is also powerful – it bears witness to the profound transformation and healing that Christ’s presence can bring about. It may be demanding work, but it is work that is unequivocally worth undertaking—always and without exception.

Amen.

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

Sermon for Sunday 10th September 2023

Garry and I recently watched a film called “Mrs Caldicot’s Cabbage War, starring Pauline Collins and John Alderton. It was about a lady who had been married to a controlling, bully of a man for 40 years without ever standing up to him. She stayed at home, missing out on all that life could offer, whilst he had a very busy and enjoyable life playing golf, going to cricket matches, a wide circle of friends – until one day he got hit on the head by a fast cricket ball and died. Far from being upset it was an enormous relief to his wife, who promptly cut off all the heads of his prize chrysanthemums, sawed up his golf clubs and took the scissors to his straw hat. Her equally controlling and greedy son promptly decided she’d lost her marbles and put her into a care home where the residents were kept sedated lest they become a bother to the staff. Mrs Caldicot leads a revolt amongst the inmates – not least by refusing to eat cabbage every day – and it all ends happily ever after as she highlights the plight of care home residents on national TV and takes over the running of the care home. She turned her life, and that of her friends, around, by having the courage to speak out.

All too often, when faced with some-one more assertive than themselves, people don’t speak out. They end up being controlled, miserable and resentful, and worse. It’s easier to go along with a bossy person, just for a quiet life. Most people hate conflict, hate having to be assertive. Jesus knows this, he knows how hard it is to speak up, when he tells his disciples how to handle conflict amongst the believers. He tells them to face the person who has wronged them and talk about it – nip it in the bud before resentment and antagonism set in. To Jesus, the most important commandments are to love God, and each other. You can’t easily love some-one else when the relationship has broken down with bad feeling. You can’t do God’s work when you don’t get on with your colleagues. Nowadays we call it being assertive – stating your needs and perceptions calmly and sorting out difficult issues, having the courage to challenge something that you feel is wrong or uncomfortable. It’s not easy – just look at the news every day when we hear about abuse by those with more power than others, whether it be a football manager kissing one of his players or a nation’s leader taking his country to war.

It’s 60 years since Dr Martin Luther King made his famous speech “I have a dream” in front of a quarter of a million people who had marched to Washington to protest about racial discrimination and segregation. It was a powerful speech and well worth reading the whole of it. In it he says” Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity. But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. So we have come here today to dramatize a

shameful condition. In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of colour are concerned. "

So far so rousing – but he goes on to say" In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. The marvellous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny. They have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone."

He had a dream - "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character."

That struggle is still going on in America and across the world– but progress has been made – perhaps more than ever Dr King could have dreamed of. But to achieve that dream for millions of people meant ordinary people speaking out and challenging what was wrong, of challenging the people who were sinning against them, despite the hardships involved.

Jesus himself faced up to what was wrong in the world, and wants his followers to do the same, no matter how hard it is to say to someone face to face, that you disagree. Conflict is hard to handle, but hugely damaging if left unchallenged. It's easier to pretend there isn't problem, or avoid the person, to paper over the cracks. But we've been given a blue print on what to do – firstly, go and see the person (after prayer and with humility) and get their side of the story. There may be truth in what they say which we have to recognise. They may not even realise the effect their words or actions have had. Openness and honesty on both sides can make for reconciliation and a better relationship . But if it doesn't work, and after due thought and prayer, we still think that there is a wrong to be settled, Jesus says take one or two others along as witnesses in case the person involved refuses to see the wrong in what they have done. Sometimes it takes more than one person to present a case well.

But if that doesn't work, then Jesus says take your dispute to the whole church or community – get it out into the open. This will be the third attempt at reconciliation – and if that doesn't work and the person involved in still refuses to accept their behaviour or actions aren't acceptable, then they are to be treated as an outcast. The evil they are doing should be expelled

from the community. That's a big step – one which many churches and clergy find hard to do – but necessary, not only to protect the vulnerable but to send a message to all, that sin and evil actions will not be tolerated.

There's a twist to the tail here – when Jesus says treat them as pagans or corrupt tax collectors, he is talking about the very people he came to save, with whom he spent a lot of time.

Paul backs this up, emphasising in his letter to the Romans that love is the most important thing of all – love does no wrong to others so love fulfils the requirements of God's law. In his time, light and daytime were associated with good, and darkness and nighttime with evil. He urges us all to live in the daylight and live decent lives, loving one another, for all to see – to lead by example.

Sometimes love is difficult – but to truly love someone means not flinching from being open and honest with them and tackling conflict before it destroys all love.

Jane Quarmby

Church warden and Reader

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

17th September 2023
15th Sunday after Trinity

Reflection

"I don't know if there is a sphere of life that will not be positively impacted by being more forgiving," says an American psychologist. Indeed, forgiveness is a topic that has garnered increasing attention in recent years, with a growing body of social science research highlighting its myriad benefits. It has been listed as one of the character strengths that make for a good life and that contribute to human wellbeing, from improved mental health to enhanced relationships.

Researchers have even developed tools like the Forgiveness Likelihood Scale to measure our propensity to forgive in various situations.

In our Gospel passage today, we see Peter approaching Jesus with a question, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Peter seems to have his own Forgiveness Likelihood Scale in mind, seeking a quantifiable limit to forgiveness. However, Jesus responds with a staggering, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times."

Peter's question is natural, for we have all experienced the pain of being wronged repeatedly, the sting of consistent affronts. Yet, Jesus' response transcends human scales; he implies that his disciples should embrace a limitless, measureless act of grace.

This is because God operates with extravagant mathematics. In God's economy, one sheep holds greater value than ninety-nine, a widow's small coin surpasses large contributions, and meagre provisions of five loaves and two fish can feed thousands with abundance left over. Similarly, God's forgiveness is mathematically extravagant.

Consider Jesus' parable of the king who forgives a massive debt from a lowly servant, only to have that extravagantly forgiven servant refuse to extend the same grace to a fellow servant in debt. This hyperbole is like a mirror that Christ holds up before us so that we can see our lack of willingness to forgive and compare it with God's boundless mercy.

The Scriptures consistently emphasize the obligation of offering forgiveness repeatedly. Leviticus instructs, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev 19.18). These exhortation follows on from the chronicles of the Patriarchs, which reveal that discord was more common than harmony. But accounts of forgiveness and reconciliation, such as the one between Joseph and his brothers, often culminate in the restoration of fractured relationships.

Yet Scriptures acknowledge that forgiveness transcends the interpersonal; it reaches into the relationship between humanity and God, who, in the word of the Psalmist, is "full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and of great kindness."

So let us not reduce forgiveness to a mere moment of apology and absolution. It is a process infused with grace. Joseph acknowledges his ability to forgive as being God's grace, not his own merit. In contrast, the servant in Jesus' parable, despite being offered an unheard-of outpouring of grace, fails to grasp the power of forgiveness. His refusal to extend this grace to a fellow servant draws him back into a world of debt-keeping and vengeance.

Forgiveness in God's kingdom, points Jesus, is generous beyond limits. Offenders shouldn't be forgiven seven times – already a perfect number – but seventy-seven times, that is, forgiveness should be ingrained in our lives, our default mode, because we are a forgiven people, generously forgiven by God. When we stand in this abundant grace bestowed upon us, our response can only be to pay this wealth of God's forgiveness forward.

So, what does forgiveness that keeps no score entail? Does it imply turning a blind eye to evil and injustice? Certainly not. Today's passage should be considered alongside last Sunday's Gospel reading: the community has a responsibility to confront wrongdoers, support victims, and speak the truth in love.

Forgiveness does not entail ignoring offenses, dismissing the pain of wounds, or advocating for amnesia concerning past injustices. Forgiveness is not about avoiding change or assuming that God's mercy implies indifference to injustice. Instead, forgiveness begins with acknowledging of wrongdoing, recognition of harm. Forgiveness shouldn't lead to passive acceptance or unexamined complicity. - we have a duty to confront systemic evils. We must heed the words of theologian and anti-Nazi dissident Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who cautioned against allowing forgiveness to degenerate into "cheap grace" – that is, forgiveness without the requirement of repentance. Forgiveness should trigger the arduous work of repentance and transformation.

Furthermore, forgiveness should not be conflated with healing or reconciliation. Healing has its own timeframe, and reconciliation may not always be possible. In this sense, forgiveness is not an end; it turns our eyes toward the future. God is present in our story, so we can rest assured that our hurts will not end in brokenness. The journey will unfurl with another chapter, a different path, another grace. From God's abundance, forgiveness can flow through us.

The intricacies of forgiveness extend beyond the frequency or extent of its application. Inherently boundless and immeasurable, forgiveness is part and parcel of God's Kingdom – so it is not an optional item in our "package" as Christ's disciples. Does that make it all the more easy to forgive? Honesty compels us to acknowledge otherwise. Those grappling with forgiveness for reason of circumstance, history, or trauma should not perceive themselves as less spiritually inclined than those who do not. The heartening news is that one can cultivate greater forgiveness. Like any skill, it thrives with dedication and practice. Every good teacher would underscore that practice is very much part of the learning and developing process - Jesus, in his teachings, makes clear that practicing forgiveness is not discretionary – seven times, seventy-seven times ...

Forgiveness may indeed be considered a character strength and virtue. It likely plays a significant part in leading us to more fulfilled and happier lives. It's quite probable that many score higher on Forgiveness Likelihood Scales than I do. Yet, as Jesus reminds us, we all are debtors who receive our Heavenly Father's mercy freely and graciously. Thus, we can take up the hard work of forgiveness for the sake of our world.

May we always pay forward God's healing grace and forgiveness, until justice reigns.

Amen.

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 16th Sunday after Trinity – 24th September 2023

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

It's a beautiful, if also puzzling, story. And, as ever with Jesus's parables, it has different layers of meaning. Usually known as the parable of the workers in the vineyard, it's sometimes also called the parable of the compassionate employer. It depends where you put the focus – on the workers or the employer. On the behaviour of humanity, or the nature of God.

Some of us might identify with the workers, especially those who have worked all day and think they should receive more as a result. But perhaps we need reminding just how precarious were the lives of all standing in the marketplace. These were day labourers, with no steady work, no certainty they would be able to put food on the table that evening. It's a reality for countless millions, including in this city. Something most of us never have to face: a fragile existence, unnoticed by society and an endless, grinding source of anxiety. And it's here that Jesus sets this parable about the kingdom of God.

The story contains surprises. Some of the workers are hired at the beginning of the day, accepting the offer of the standard daily wage. Later, the employer goes back to the marketplace to hire more, this time not mentioning a wage,

simply saying 'I will pay you what is right' (or 'just'). What is the vineyard owner doing? Wouldn't an efficient employer know how many people he needed for the day's tasks and hire them all at the beginning? This one goes back every three hours.

Why? Out of compassion. He takes the ones he needs at the beginning of the day, hoping others would be hired by other employers. But something in his nature makes him return. Three times he takes on more, saying he will pay them what is 'just'. Right at the end of the day, he hires those who are left – the least employable, facing the humiliation of having to go home empty-handed. It would have been easy for him to give them money, but instead he upholds their dignity by giving them work for which they will be paid.

And then the bombshell: everyone gets paid the same. 'Whoa!' say the ones hired first. Like the prodigal's elder brother. 'That's not fair. You have made them equal to <u>us</u>.'

There's another surprise. It turns out the employer has a manager, someone to deal with the running of the vineyard. But it's not the manager who walks back and forth to the marketplace. It's the owner himself. Why?

In his commentary on this parable, the theologian Kenneth Bailey paraphrases the employer's response to the twelve-hour workers like this:

> 'You who are doing the shouting! Justice is served. I have given you what I agreed to pay you. … I *chose* to pay these men a living wage. You will be able to go home to your wives and children and … announce that you

found work and have a full day's pay. I want these others to be able to [do the same].

So you worked through the heat of the day? … And what do you think I was doing during the heat of the day? … I was on the road to and from the market – [showing] compassion to others who, like you, are in need … I could have sent my manager. I didn't. I went myself, to … help alleviate their suffering. Why are you jealous of them and angry at me? …

On what basis should the grace I show others irritate you? … You want to take more for yourselves. I have chosen to give more of myself. You want to be richer at the end of the day. I have chosen to be poorer at the end of the day. Don't try to control me. Take your just wage and [go].'[1]

It's a punchy rendition.

Let's look at the layers of meaning in the story. The workers who complain have, traditionally, been identified with the Pharisees, whose preoccupation was defining and observing the religious laws. Critical of Jesus for welcoming those who were not keeping the law, making them equal with the law-keepers. 'Whoa! You can't make them equal to <u>us</u>.'

But Jesus says yes, I can. And God does. And, moreover, it's not the law-keepers who will be first into the kingdom of God, but the publicans and sex workers. And, what's more, God goes out to find them. His compassion takes him to the outcast, the excluded, incarnating his concern in costly love, loved in return. At one level in this story, Jesus is describing his own ministry. A ministry of self-

[1] *Jesus through Middle Eastern eyes* (2008), p 361.

giving, compassion, mercy and justice. Going out to meet those in need of love, again and again. Dying in the cause of love. Here, incarnation and atonement are met in a single parable. The whole of the Gospel is here.

There's also a layer of meaning in this story for the church. Some suggest that the twelve-hour complainers represent those who not only obey the will of God, but would also seek to dictate the will of God to others. These are not denied their promised rights. But they are reminded, in no uncertain terms, to leave God to decide to whom God will be generous.

There's another layer of meaning for us, in our personal lives. The complainers are encouraged to be satisfied with what they have received. It's a thing we are not good at. We spend too much of our time comparing ourselves with others. Jesus reminds us that it all depends where we put the focus. On our sense of human scarcity, or on our sense of God's abundance – of the grace that is freely given, not earned. God's gifts are of such nature that to ask for more than someone else has of them is, in the end, absurd. How much forgiveness, how much eternal life, do we need?

Last Thursday was, apparently, World Gratitude Day. During the week I came across an article about 'appreciative living'. Articles like this tend to say similar things: that we should be intentional about our gratitude, focus on the present moment rather than be burdened by regrets about the past or anxiety about the future. The advice is all good, much of it found in the Gospels. But this article was different. What caught my attention was that it referred to the importance for us as humans of engaging in a 'ritual act of appreciation'. That's actually

what we do when we come to church (though the article didn't say that). Eucharist means giving thanks.

In this service we begin by admitting we are not worthy of the generosity of God, and we are assured of God's forgiveness. We hear extracts from the story of humanity's healing (which is one of the meanings of the word 'salvation'), before we share peace with one another, setting aside any differences that have divided us. We then re-enact Jesus's supreme gesture of love at the Last Supper, reminding us how he lives in us and we in him. And at the end we give thanks, before being sent out to become what we have received, the body of Christ in the world, taking the risk of love, love of God and neighbour.

In every Eucharist we meet God in Christ, given for us. And we 'take what is ours and go'. Who knows where it might lead?

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 18th Sunday after Trinity – 8th October 2023

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

At this time of the year, as we find ourselves amidst the harvest season and the culmination of the Church's Season of Creation, it feels rather fitting that the Lectionary has recently offered us several agriculture-themed parables. Yet, for us 21st-century city residents, making a connection with the farming and agricultural metaphors abundant in the Scriptures can be challenging. We may need to delve into their symbolism, but that only means we can discover deeper layers of meaning. However, as we are nestled in the sun-soaked landscape of southern France, where vineyards effortlessly merge with the scenery, the vineyard imagery in today's readings strikes a chord.

For anyone who has ever imagined themselves as a winegrower, even on the smallest of scales, a vineyard is a dream of abundance. Simplicity, domestic tranquility, liberation from fear and want – that is what the first American president, George Washington, had read in the prophetic words of Micah: *"every man will sit under his vine and under his fig tree and none shall make him afraid."* (Micah 4.4) Indeed, in the biblical tradition, a vineyard stands as a symbol of prosperity, hope and peace – and of God's faithful generosity. As the Book of Genesis relates, after the devastation of the flood, Noah "became a husbandman and planted a vineyard" (9.20). Alongside the rainbow, the vine is one of the signs of the universal covenant between God and humankind, one of the fruits of the restoration of cosmic order and natural fertility.

From Noah's story to the last pages of the Book of Revelation, in which John depicts an angel throwing the vintage of the earth into "the great winepress of the wrath of God" (Revelation 14.19), the vineyard never ceases to appear as a witness to divine mercy and grace, but also to the Creator's judgement. It is within this dichotomy of mercy and judgement that we find the essence of our readings today.

We began with the prophet Isaiah's "Song of the Vine", a little masterpiece of Jewish poetry. There is no doubt that the poem held familiarity for Jesus' listeners and that they grasped its essence - that Israel is the vine and God, the vinedresser. God tends the vineyard with boundless love and patiently awaits its fruits - a touching allegory of God's covenant with his people and of his divine plan of salvation.

It is clear that Jesus intends for his listeners to hear his parable against the background of Isaiah's Song. However, Jesus, in a reframing of Isaiah's narrative, redirects the focus from the vineyard itself to the tenants, who, obstinately, withhold the produce rightfully owed to the vineyard owner.

In the early days of the Church, interpreting this parable must have appeared rather straightforward: God would have been seen as the landowner and the temple leaders as the tenants who were illicitly withholding the rightful fruits of God's covenant with Israel. Jesus is the Son, whose mission is violently repudiated by his Father's tenants. Naturally, we can discern in the Son's rejection and his violent death outside the vineyard a prefiguration of Christ's Passion and crucifixion beyond the confines of Jerusalem's walls.

Where should we place ourselves in this story? It is very tempting to comfortably stand behind Jesus, pointing accusatory fingers at his opponents. The true challenge is to imagine ourselves in their shoes, to look introspectively at ourselves, and courageously allow us to be confronted by what Jesus has to say. How faithful are we in our tending of the Vineyard, God's Kingdom?

What the tenants in the story fail to grasp — or perhaps consciously choose to disregard — is their role as stewards rather than proprietors of the vineyard. When the landowner rightfully seeks his share of the harvest, the tenants take offence, behaving as though the vineyard is exclusively their own, and the landowner is unjust for asserting any claim. Somewhere along the way, the tenants have lost sight of their purpose, their calling, and their position in relation to both the land and its owner. They possess nothing. Their vocation is not one of ownership but rather of caring, tending, preserving, cultivating, and protecting — on behalf of the Owner.

Have we not, much like the tenants in the parable, deluded ourselves into believing that the Earth and everything within it is our rightful possession, when, in reality, we are destined to be stewards alone? Have we not, much like those tenants, assumed God's absence, apathy, or disinterest in the vineyard — and felt free to amass the Earth's abundance solely for our selfish convenience, gain,

and comfort? Have we not, much like those tenants, disregarded and even scorned the numerous messengers who have questioned our faithfulness and cautioned us about the consequences of our voracious exploitation of the planet? Don't we take part in big and small ways in the rejection of the Son: through neglect of those in need, dismissal of the marginalised, indifference toward migrants? Aren't we swift in choosing which teachings of Christ to embrace – because they sit comfortably with us – and which to discard? This is also participation in his rejection. Our tendency to condemn the transgressions of others while remaining blind to our own – this is also rejection of the grace and forgiveness offered in the person of Jesus.

In dismissing God, humanity convinces itself that it can act without constraints and declares itself as the ultimate arbiter of its actions. Yet, when we remove God from our horizons, do we truly find greater happiness? Do we genuinely attain more freedom? Can those who assert themselves as the exclusive masters of their destiny and the sole rulers of the world truly construct a society where freedom, justice, and peace prevail? On the contrary, the daily narrative abundantly illustrates that the capricious exercise of power, self-centered agendas, injustice, exploitation, and the pervasive presence of violence continue to spread.

You and I are here due to God's boundless generosity and vigilant care. God not only planted the vineyard but also erected the fence to protect it, installed the wine press, and raised the watchtower. Everything we need has been graciously provided by God. This vineyard belongs to God; it is a gift to us. The good news is that, in spite of our rejection, failings, judgments, and even our propensity for self-righteousness, in spite of all our flaws, Christ comes to us to proclaim that God will never abandon the vineyard but will entrust it to those who want to faithfully produce the fruit of the Kingdom.

Let us fervently pray to be among these vinedressers who, grafted onto Christ, the true vine, bear fruit that leads to eternal life.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 19th Sunday after Trinity – 15th October 2023

St Luke the Evangelist

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

'Only Luke is with me', wrote the apostle Paul in his Second Letter to Timothy, noting how his friend was now his only companion in prison. Luke, whose feast day is this coming Wednesday, is believed to be the author of two books which make up around half of the New Testament – the Gospel which bears his name and the Acts of the Apostles. In Paul's Letter to the Colossians (4.14) he describes him as 'our beloved Luke, the physician', which is why St Luke is the patron saint of physicians and surgeons. It's a time of year when we are called to reflect on the nature of healing and wholeness.

'Only Luke is with me.' Some would say the most important word in that sentence is 'with'. When we are unwell, in body, mind or spirit, to have a friend or family member alongside us is one of the most important things in the world. 'With' is a word that speaks of Incarnation – Emmanuel, 'God with us'. In his poem *The Word*, the priest-poet R S Thomas wrote:

> 'A pen appeared, and the god said:
> "Write what it is to be
> man." And my hand hovered
> long over the bare page,

until … I spelled out
the word ‘lonely’. And my hand moved
to erase it; but the voices
of all those waiting at life’s
window cried out loud: ‘It is true.’

‘Only Luke is with me.’ Being the one who stays, who does not let go, is one of the most important things we can do to promote healing in another person. One thing a church community can do is be alert to those who are on their own, making sure they are not forgotten when they are unwell. Remembering too that people may be feeling unwell without it showing.

Healing and wholeness. Is there a difference? Healing has been defined as ‘the process of becoming healthy again’; wholeness as ‘the quality of being whole or complete’. ‘Wholeness’ was a hallmark of the good news which Jesus taught and, through his actions, revealed. ‘Wholeness’ is a word we rarely find outside the New Testament, yet in the older translations it is often found in Jesus’s speech: ‘Your faith has made you whole.’ (The modern translations say ‘your faith has made you well’.)

Luke, the physician, records the stories of healing by Jesus - and, in the Acts of the Apostles, by Peter, Paul and others - with a combination of awe and a sense that these events were bringing people close to the heart of God. There is something about ‘wholeness’ that stands counter to all that afflicts us as humans, in particular the sense of disintegration we feel when what matters most to us is in danger: our health or the health of those we love, our mental wellbeing, our sense of identity or purpose, the things we devote our lives to, our trust in the state of the world. It is good to pray for wholeness, and to search

for it through Christ in what the Collect calls 'the changes and chances of this fleeting world'.

Healing at its fullest addresses the whole person – when it is, literally, 'holistic'. We all have deep needs, for forgiveness, reassurance and reconciliation as well as right balance in our bodies. In short, to be made whole, even if we cannot be cured of a particular disease. In her book *Sharing the Darkness*, the spiritual writer Sheila Cassidy reflects on her work as a hospice doctor specialising in palliative care. She writes about a young woman named Joy who was admitted to the hospice with terminal cancer, aged 32. Sheila Cassidy recalls the moment when Joy asked her if she was going to die: 'I do not recall exactly how it went, except that I spoke gently and truthfully, responding as sensitively as I was able to her questions, overt and hidden. When I had finished, there was a bond between us that was never broken – an indefinable link between two people facing the unknown. I was completely spent.' That's what 'being with' can do to you. 'Only Luke is with me.'

After Joy died, Sheila Cassidy reflected on the brief but intense journey they had shared: 'If one is going to talk about 'healing' in cancer care, I think one could say that Joy was 'healed'. She was healed of the anger and the bitterness, … the discontent with her very cruel situation. Not only was she healed, but she grew, spiritually and humanly, in a way which amazed us all. I have no doubt that this was the work of God.'[1]

Later we will pray by name for those known to us who are in need of healing at present. At its simplest, prayer means 'giving loving attention'. But what are

[1] *Sharing the Darkness* (1988), p. 76.

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

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

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

Sometimes we pray all three of those prayers. But whatever we do, let us do it for those we love, be present to them now in heart and mind, for it is so much better than to feel helpless and do nothing. And let us pray that, whatever the

outcome of their current ordeal, they may be ‘made whole’. And have someone, like Luke, alongside.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 22nd October 2023

20th Sunday after Trinity

All Saints' Marseille/Aix-en-Provence

Jane Quarmby, Licensed Lay Minister

Death and Taxes - the two definites in life. In the affluent Western world, the majority of us will pay taxes at some point, levied by governments that we elect, on manifestos promising education for our children, health care, good transport links, law and order and still, sadly, defence of our countries.

But imagine if we were suddenly invaded by a foreign country with a different language, pagan religion, different clothes, different systems and brutal enforcement of their laws? And they made us pay for the privilege of having them take over with protest dealt with by torture and public deaths? Taxes aren't popular now – especially when they keep increasing, but in the time of Jesus this scenario was real. In his childhood, there had been a rebellion against the occupying Roman rule which had been dealt with by mass crucifixions – dead and dying rebels nailed up for excruciating deaths for all to see – and warn against any more rebellion.

That's part of the background against which our gospel reading is set today. This unholy and unlikely coming together of the Pharisees and the Herodians shows how many different factions Jesus had upset. He's in Jerusalem for the final week of his life. He's been welcomed into the city like royalty with crowds of excited people putting down their cloaks for him to ride on, waving branches and singing songs of welcome to Jesus as the Son of David. If anything was going to attract the dubious and threatening attention of the Roman occupier and their puppet government of Herod, having Jesus ride in triumph into the city was probably the best possible way. To throw down your cloak was a mark of complete loyalty to a King. So the Herodians, the political party supporting Herod, would have reacted fiercely.

Jesus went into the Temple and threw out all the people buying and selling, turning their tables upside down. For a brief moment he interrupted the life of the Temple where people went to pray and make sacrifices to God. Later that same week the blind and the lame came to the Temple and he healed them. He taught there – and the authorities questioned "who gave you the right to do this?" He gave several parables recorded by Matthew - of the two sons being asked to work in the vineyard, the wicked tenants, and the wedding feast to which the invitees couldn't be bothered to go – all showing that the religious leaders were leading their people away from God instead of towards Him. He showed a different way of living, like his Sermon on the Mount. The Temple had become the focus of the rebellious movement in Jerusalem, the people being led by their religious leaders, into violence and revolt. So he angered the chief priests by his actions and his words – God's house was being used in ways that weren't acceptable to God.

So Jesus has now upset both the religious and the secular authorities. And so they put aside their differences and work out how to catch him out and destroy his influence over the people who flock to him to be healed and hear him teach. First the flattery – "we know you are truthful and you teach God's way truthfully". (In that case why didn't they listen? What was their problem?)

Then comes the killer question – or so they think. "Is it lawful to pay tribute to the Emperor?" If he answers yes, he falls foul of the people who are thinking he is the Messiah, come to free them from the Roman occupation. If he answers no, then the Roman authorities, with the Herodians standing there as witnesses, will get him as a rebel. And either way both sides win.

So he doesn't answer yes or no. Instead he calls them hypocrites – meaning actors. He knows full well what they are up to and asks for a coin. He doesn't have one in his pocket but someone does and hands it over. It was forbidden for the Jews to have an image of a person on a coin and Roman coins, the ones used to pay the taxes, had the image of Caesar on them, with the words "Son of God" around the edge. No faithful Jew would be able to touch such a coin without a shudder of disgust and horror. But one of his questioners just happens to have one.

And Jesus asks whose image it is on the coin, and whose inscription. Perhaps it's dawning on his questioners that they have been outwitted as they answer The Emperor's. Well then, comes the reply – better give to the Emperor what is his – and give to God what is God's.

He's not saying don't pay the taxes – he knows that to do so will lead to rebellion and bloodshed which he has been warning these obstinate people about for so long, but most importantly he is saying give to God what is God's. He is there not to overthrow the Romans but to bring God's people back to Him. If they were to live as God wants them to, as Jesus has been showing them and teaching them, there would be no aggression, no invasions, no war and violence, greed and exploitation, the poor and the needy trampled underfoot by the more powerful. Instead lives lived in peace and security, where everyone looked out for those in need.

The Bible says that we are made in God's image. So when Jesus says give the Emperor's image to the Emperor, he is also saying – and give God's image to God. i.e. us – he urged those around him to give themselves to God.

We were recently invited to the 90th birthday celebrations of a dear friend of many years' standing. He has a large and close-knit family and many friends, so it must have been around 60 of us who toasted a long life well lived. But what gift do you give a 90 year old who has all he wants and is more intent on providing for his loved ones now than himself?

In much the same way, what can we possibly give to our God, who as Isaiah says can do everything and anything, who has created the light and the dark?

When we look around us in the world today, we see just as much to worry about as Jesus did 2000 years ago. The New York Times recently reported JP Morgan Chase's Chief Executive, Jamie Dimon, saying in reaction to the conflict in Israel and Gaza: "This may be the most dangerous time the world has seen in decades", warning of "far-reaching impacts on energy and food markets, global trade and geopolitical relationships". But what can we do about it?

Perhaps Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians can give us a clue. He's worried about them as he couldn't spend much time with them and has left them leaderless and persecuted because of their new found faith. To his relief they are flourishing in their faith and their love for one another is growing, setting an example to all around them. He goes on to say that his prayer for them is "asking God to enable you to live a life worthy of his call. May he give you the power to accomplish all the good things your faith prompts you to do. Then the name of our Lord Jesus will be honoured because of the way you live…."

So let us too live our lives as God would have us live and as Jesus taught us. We are all in God's image and what more can we give to our Creator than ourselves

– our lives lived well and with care for others and our planet. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – Last Sunday after Trinity – 29th October 2023

Bible Sunday

Christine Portman, Reader

- There's been no word from him.
- I give you my word.
- She had words with him!
- My word! – Ma parole !

It's a strange *word*, isn't it? So many layers of meaning in there, from astonishment to eagerly awaited news. Sometimes it's a promise, sometimes angry talk. Soon we'll be in Advent, then racing towards Christmas and those thrilling words: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* What do we mean when we talk about the Word made flesh?

Logos - John's Word. In Greek that didn't describe words like those I'm speaking now – those were *rhema*. *Logos* was much weightier: signifying the *constant* word – thought and principle, even explanation or cause. Since then philosophers and theologians have used *logos* when pondering our place in this vast and mysterious creation.

Bible Sunday reaffirms the centrality of the Word to our faith, a faith built on three pillars: Scripture, **Reason and Tradition**. One great strength of Anglicanism lies in our attempts to balance these three aspects of belief. Biblical scholarship and painful experience have shown us that it's very foolish to try to score points by using isolated passages. Scripture gives us essential insights, but it needs to be balanced within reason and tradition. Careful reading, close attention to texts is the key – and this takes time and concentration, the kind of attentiveness we see in today's Old Testament reading.

After 70 years of Babylonian exile, the Jews who had returned to Judah in Palestine were rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. But today's reading is clear: the material building work was only the outward manifestation of what the community was achieving: the foundation of their re-building was inner attentiveness to God's word. We heard how the people remained for hours as they *gathered together in the square***.** The readings were given with interpretation *so that the people understood.* They *wept* when they heard the word of God.

Perhaps, in our world of instant news and reduced attention spans, some might find this rather odd. So many online articles now carry a strap line indicating 'two-minute read' – or even less. This week I discovered what a TL;DR review means: *too long, didn't read*. Have people really lost the capacity or patience to *read, mark, learn and inwardly digest*? Those of us who come to worship certainly hear the scriptures and sometimes we read them out too. But today's Collect asks for more: to mark and inwardly digest. Perhaps you underline in your Bible, maybe use sticky tabs or bend back pages? There are many ways we mark the passages that speak to us. But of course, it's not just the physical marking that is important: it's how we allow scripture to mark us inside.

The priest and poet, Malcolm Guite, has written a beautiful reflection on today's Collect. After marking comes learning, he says, and he recounts this moving story:

Learning by rote, done by itself for no reason probably does no good, but learning by heart can sometimes be a pathway to learning in and through the heart. I will never forget when, as a newly-ordained curate, I was called to the deathbed of a very old lady in one of those dreadful 'care homes' She was suffering equally from dementia and neglect and the nurse told me that she couldn't speak three words of sense together. At a loss as to how to pray I began to recite the 23rd psalm, in the Prayer Book version. Suddenly I became aware of a voice beside me, faint at first but growing stronger. It was the old woman joining in through laboured breath. I had a strong sense that the person speaking these words was not the wandered old lady but the little girl who had learnt them all those years ago. We made it to the end of the psalm together and she died peacefully as I was saying the Gloria. 'I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever' were the last words on her lips.

But how do we *inwardly digest God's word*? Lectio Divina or 'sacred reading' has been integral to monastic Benedictine life from the very start. It's the practice of reading, with meditation, prayer and deep contemplation. Benedict

hoped to increase knowledge of scripture, but it has a much deeper purpose. He intended it to lead to closer communion with God. It's very far from biblical scholarship or theological analysis of texts. Rather he saw it as a means of opening the individual soul to God's living word, the reader meditating upon scripture in the presence of Christ. And Benedict was himself looking back to the traditions of some of the earliest Fathers of the Church like Origen, one of whose students wrote: *'It was like a spark falling in our deepest soul, setting it on fire, making it burst into flame within us. It was, at the same time, a love for the Holy Word, the most beautiful object of all that, by its ineffable beauty attracts all things to itself with irresistible force …'.* We can see this same awakened love and joy in the words of today's psalm: *With my whole heart I seek you, I treasure your word in my heart….. I will not forget your word….* This word continues to live and work in us today.

In recent years, Lectio Divina has been discovered by many Christians outside religious communities. Across different traditions, as people are encouraged to deepen their faith, it's being used to open the richness of scripture's. Readings needn't be long – perhaps one of the previous Sunday's texts, but they demand full attention – a quiet room, worries left behind, time to be with God and his Word.

Readers pray for the grace to be receptive to that Word. Slowly, meditatively reading the passage aloud, they listen for a particular word or phrase to stand out, then sit in silence for a while. After re-reading, they focus on the noticed word or phrase. They consider what God might be saying, what they might want to reply and open themselves to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. After a time of meditation, they read once again, now resting in God's presence, giving thanks for whatever has been revealed.

We shouldn't be surprised by this growth in attentive reading, and it is bearing fruit. The fig tree is putting forth shoots. We can see a growing openness among those who listen to God's word – openness rooted in scriptures that preach one Church, one faith, one Lord. A few weeks back it was a huge pleasure for some of us from All Saints to be invited to join 60,000 others for a great Eucharist. In the vast Marseille stadium, led by Pope Francis, we shared the Body of Christ with fellow Christians, many of them young families. How things are changing!

Jesus said, *Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*. Saint Paul reminds the Colossians: *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.* For it's the word of God that builds the foundation of everlasting life. Today's gospel finishes with Jesus' prediction: *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away*.

Scripture has the power to move and grow our souls. I'll close with more words from Malcolm Guite, his poem, *The Lectern*

Some rise on eagles' wings, this one is plain,
Plain English workmanship in solid oak.
Age gracefully it says, go with the grain.

You walk towards an always open book,
Open as every life to every light,
Open to shade and shadow, day and night,
The changeless witness of your changing pain.
Be still the Lectern says, stand here and read.
Here are your mysteries, your love and fear,
And, running through them all, the slender thread
Of God's strange grace, red as these ribbons, red
As your own blood when reading reads you here
And pierces joint and marrow… So you stand,
The lectern still beneath your trembling hand.

'We are to live on, and be sustained by scripture just as we live on and are sustained by bread, to take it in daily till it becomes transformed into part of the very substance of who we are'.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Last Sunday after Trinity – 29th October 2023

Bible Sunday

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

There's an amusing scene in the American TV political drama series *The West Wing*, in which the (fictitious) President Bartlet responds to a talk show host who has described a loving relationship between two people of the same gender as an 'abomination' – quoting, as justification for his comment, a verse from the Book of Leviticus (18.21). The President replies, quoting other Bible verses which on the face of it prohibit or require things contrary to modern social norms, along with the punishments recommended. The President says:

> 'I'm interested in selling my youngest daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. She's a [second year student at] Georgetown [University], speaks fluent Italian, always cleaned the table when it was her turn. What would a good price for her be?
>
> My chief of staff … insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly says he should be put to death. Am I morally [obliged] to kill him myself or is it okay to call the police?
>
> Here's one that's really important, because we've got a lot of sports fans in this town: touching the skin of a dead pig makes one unclean. Leviticus

11:7. If they promise to wear gloves can the Washington Redskins still play football? …

Does the whole town really have to be together to stone my brother, John, for planting different crops side by side? Can I burn my mother in a small family gathering for wearing garments made from two different threads?

Think about those questions, would you?'

If we read verses from the Bible without bothering to think about the context in which they were written - when they were written, why, by whom and for whom - we slide easily into fundamentalist nonsense.

Last week at Evening Prayer, the Church's Lectionary set the following extract from the First Letter of Paul to Timothy: 'I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray…; also that the women should dress themselves modestly … , not with their hair braided … . I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.'

Believe it or not, there are people in the Church of England who argue that this comment of St Paul, speaking into a particular set of circumstances in a society far removed from our own, justifies their refusal to accept the ministry of women clergy today.

It all comes back to the Bible. How are we to read it? A recent study commissioned by the Church of England suggested that there are no less than

seven different ways in which people might approach a reading of scripture. There isn't time to read all seven to you, so let me give you a sample.

The first way of approaching Scripture identified in the study is this: 'I believe that God loves us enough to have given us a manual for living. … [T]he Bible is truthful, without error, and clear. … We simply need to read it, and obey it. Most of what people mean when they talk about 'interpreting' the Bible is one attempt or another to avoid listening to its plain teaching.'

The second way identified is this: 'I agree that the Bible tells us what we need to know in order to understand God's loving purposes for us. … [But] we need to pay attention to each text's historical context, and … to read them in the context of the Bible's wider message, in order to find a trustworthy framework … for our thought and practice.'

The third way identified is this: 'I think that when we read all the … biblical texts together, we … discover that some of them, taken by themselves, are misleading. Listening to the Bible as a whole means learning to discern what is more central to it, and what is less central – and I think God expects us to make that discernment.'

A further way identified is this: 'I believe the Bible is given to us for the one purpose of teaching us about God's love for the world – especially its fulfilment in Jesus. … [T]he answers we give to specific questions will sometimes be quite different from the answers that the biblical authors gave, because we no longer agree with some of the other assumptions they brought to the process – and … we will therefore have to say 'no' to some of their answers.'

And so it goes on. The authors of the study don't say which of the seven approaches they consider is right or wrong; they simply note the differences. Since its foundation, the Church of England has been a broad church, not a narrow sect. Its effective founder, Queen Elizabeth I, famously said that she did not want a 'window onto [people's] souls' – she wasn't interested in what people believed, so long as they came to church to explore the faith. A wise woman.

Someone commented to me this week that it's a pity religion seems to be at the heart of so many of the world's conflicts. It was a sobering reminder. Fundamentalism on all sides seems to be on the increase. A shallow or lazy reading of ancient texts all too easily leads to them being weaponised.

And so, on Bible Sunday, what I would say to you is that it matters how we engage with Scripture. It's not enough to say it is all wonderful, just as it is not enough to say it is all terrible. It takes work, study and prayer to engage properly with the texts we have received, to discern their relevance for our world today, to allow them to guide our thinking and our actions. We need to bring to the process our reason and our lived experience also.

We live in a complex world, full of anger and discord. The disagreements within and between religious faiths are often part of the problem. Sometimes it seems overwhelming, as any look at the current tensions in the Middle East will show. Churches themselves are at loggerheads too. Reports from the Synod in Rome are that some have walked out in disgust at what they were being asked to discuss. The Church of England's General Synod is due to meet again in three

weeks' time in an atmosphere of undisguised hostility between conservatives and liberals. How are we to resolve such things?

Well, we have one thing that offers us a source of guidance through our quandaries: the person, and personality, of Jesus. If we bring ourselves back to him, to the record of his teaching and ministry, we will find our plumb line. As the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsay, once wrote: 'The central fact of Christianity is not a Book but Person - Jesus Christ, himself described as the Word of God.'[1]

So let us give thanks today for the Word made flesh, who when he was asked what were the most important words in the scriptural texts of his own time, replied: ' "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." [and] "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' (Mark 12.30-31)

That has not changed. Thanks be to God.

Amen.

[1] *The Authority of the Bible*, Peak's Commentary (1963)

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – All Saints' Day - 5th November 2023

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

"I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb." (Rev 7.9) A majestic image, akin to Fra Angelico's depiction in the painting that illustrates our service sheet: the blessed in the court of heaven, bathed in the radiance of God's glory.

As the faithful have done since the earliest centuries of Christianity, we gather today to give thanks for the lives and ministries of the saints, the blessed of God - women and men, young people as well as older ones – who, through both word and deed, bore witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is a day that brims with meaning because of the lives and stories it remembers. The calendar of commemorations of the Church of England offers interesting reading. There one can encounter apostles, evangelists, spiritual writers, philanthropists, martyrs, healers, poets and more, hailing from every time and place. Among them, some are renowned, others less known; some are inspiring, while others are puzzling. Some saints may hold a special place in your heart. Perhaps you bear the name of one of them (like Patrick or Elizabeth or Andrew). Perhaps you seek to emulate their examples in your life and work (such as Nicholas of Myra, the patron saint of sailors; Hildegard of Bingen, a poet and composer; Francis of Assisi, the brother of the Creation; Julian of Norwich, the mystic; the nurse Edith Cavell; Maximilian Kolbe, the martyr …)

However, even if we were to combine the calendars of all Church traditions, they will not add up to that "great multitude that no one can count", for this multitude includes people like our colleagues, or family members, or next-door neighbours, who lived out holiness in ordinary circumstances, often never to be recorded in a Church calendar.

Today we celebrate the saints – be they well known, little known or unknown - because they, in their diverse ways, often extraordinary but at times commonplace, embodied Christ's presence in a world marred by suffering. Theirs were the hands with which Christ could bless the world, as Teresa of Avila once beautifully put it. Their faith has transformed the world.

In both bigger and smaller ways, their lives embodied the essence of Christ's teaching in the Beatitudes. Their faithfulness to Christ led them to care for the sick, uphold justice for the oppressed, welcome the outcast, and show compassion to the vulnerable.

Amid the pervasive and frightening darkness in today's world, when many, understandably, feel overwhelmed and withdraw into helplessness and apathy, we turn once more to the Beatitudes, each of them a meditation on living a life of faith in a world filled with doubt. They are interconnected and deliberately ordered, akin to a ladder, with poverty of spirit as the starting point and with the cross at the summit. To live according to the Beatitudes is to embody a life infused with radical love for God and one's neighbour, as a response to God's abundance and provision in one's own life.

Today, let me dwell on the seventh step of the ladder: "blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." This step cannot be reached without ascending the others. The Hebrew word 'shalom', which we translate as 'peace', signifies more than the absence of hostility or conflict, though this is undoubtedly vital. The word embodies harmony, beauty, unity, virtue, safety, and justice. Therefore being a peacemaker means working for God's vision for his world: striving for justice, wholeness, and harmony in relationships, pursuing the good of others, even if it comes at personal cost. Thus all the saints, whether famous or little-known, were indeed peacemakers.

In 1902, when our church was consecrated, the dedication to 'All Saints' was chosen. It was an inspired choice, and perhaps a prophetic one: it signifies our journey toward becoming a multicultural, multi-ethnic, multidenominational community, committed to hospitality and open to dialogue. This day serves as a reminder of our responsibility to uphold our dedication faithfully, of our calling to be peacemakers.

Choosing to be peacemakers, both in actions and words, is a declaration of our belief that God watches over our individual stories and the larger narratives in

which we find ourselves. It is an affirmation that peace and love are stronger than violence and hatred, regardless of how things may appear in the present.

Some may engage in social or political activism to foster peace. However, for most of us, peacemaking happens in the ordinary contexts of everyday events and relationships. It starts with how we listen to each other, how we speak, how we extend hospitality, how we collaborate with those who differ from us. There is no act too small or insignificant when it comes to working for peace.

For our chaplaincy, All Saints' Day not only reaffirms our connectedness in the Body of Christ that transcends the limitations of time and space, but also serves as a reminder about our collective identity, existence, and mission. It is a day to remember that we are not alone, and that those who came before us bear witness to our journey. It is a day to acknowledge the thread of love running through them all and through us.

It is a day to remind ourselves that holiness of life is not the privilege of a chosen few or the great saints of history - it is God's call and will for each of us. It is at our baptism that we have received God's grace and call to holiness. It is a call to bear witness on earth to the Kingdom of God. It is a call to follow Christ in the pain and brokenness of the world. It is a call to become instruments of God's hospitality and mercy for the afflicted, and channels of God's peace for the world. It is nothing less than a call to transform the world.

May God give us all strength and faithfulness in this calling.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

12th November 2023

Remembrance Sunday

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd James Johnston, Chaplain

Last summer, while I was visiting the south west of France, I was taken to a memorial to the Resistance. On the side of a hill, in quiet countryside, it consists of a small graveyard, beautifully kept, beside a set of farm buildings which in 1944 were home to a group of *maquisards*. On 7th July 1944, the *maquisards* were surprised by a battalion of German soldiers, vastly superior in number and weaponry. After the War, the decision was taken to leave the site as a memorial to the events of that day. 76 white memorial stones lie opposite a collection of charred vehicles, while inside the outbuildings are the remains of the morning on which they died – crockery, cutlery, personal belongings, a pair of spectacles. The scene is frozen in time, all around it a deep silence.

The memorial, known as the Maquis de Meilhan[1], is one of many in France, the best known of its type being the village of Oradour-sur-Glane in the Haute-Vienne, the scene of a massacre which took place a month before the events at Meilhan. Oradour has been left unchanged for succeeding generations to visit and to reflect.

[1] Maquis de Meilhan, Villefranche, Gers.

There are memorials too within the chaplaincy area - streets named after individuals, a *stèle* listing names beside a road, as well as the many war cemeteries large and small where the bodies of millions lie who fell on both sides of the conflict in two World Wars. Here in Marseille, after this service we will go to the other end of the city for our Act of Remembrance at the Commonwealth War Cemetery in Mazargues. There too we will keep silence. Ironically, perhaps, for one thing that is rarest in war is silence.

But the reality of war brings us up short, cutting the words from our chattering mouths. The horror of it, the waste of it, the tragedy. Who would have believed two years ago that we would be gathering again at a time when shells were falling on European soil, while the world looks on, apparently unable to prevent it? And when the guns fall silent, who can tell when they will start again? Yesterday, we marked the Armistice which in 1918 ended the so-called 'war to end all wars'. Yet it is now widely recognised that the Treaty of Versailles which ended that conflict contained the seeds of the next one twenty-one years later, dragging the world into its firestorm.

However remote we may feel from the decisions taken by governments, we need to remember that it is not some external agency that is at work when war breaks out, but a collection of decisions made by fallible human beings just like you and me. Looked at through the lens of history, war may look inevitable, but each person involved in the decisions had agency.

The seeds of war are sown when people start to believe that the 'other' is not like us. The language of 'othering' may begin in quite an ordinary way, with

observations about different habits or cultures. But it can harden into something challenging, aggressive, a cycle of antagonistic utterances that gathers speed until it spills over into action. Thoughts become words, words become deeds. We see it every day on the news. Across democracies, politicians sometimes appear to compete to appeal to the worst in human nature, not the best, giving voters permission not only to think the unthinkable but to say it and, having said it, to act upon it.

What would those who lie beneath the turf of the cemetery in Mazargues have to say if they heard the ugly language of 'othering' we hear now? If we stop to listen to those young men, we might hear these words, written in 1919 but inspired by other words written two and a half thousand years earlier: 'When you go home, tell them of us and say, for your tomorrow we gave our today.'

Two and a half thousand years. Does nothing change? Peace is so fragile, and such very hard work. In his Beatitudes Jesus says 'Blessed are the peacemakers'. Blessed are the ones who go out and do it, not just talk about it. Making peace involves patience, openness, perseverance, having our prejudices and assumptions challenged and then transformed into a new understanding. It involves sacrifice, humility, faith, hope and love. And the constant reminder that it is human beings who make war, and it is human beings who can make peace. The Spanish-American philosopher George Santayana said that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. That is why, on this day, we pause in silence to remember those who gave their lives in two World Wars and other conflicts since, and to honour their sacrifice.

If I had to find a single Bible verse that sums up what that sort of sacrifice involves, I think it would be verse 13 of Chapter 15 of St John's Gospel: 'No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.' Those who go into battle fundamentally do so to defend their country and not to kill the enemy. And in doing so, some lose their lives, sometimes to save their comrades, in acts of extraordinary selflessness and generosity. The fact that we in our generations enjoy a life of relative security, stability and peace is because in two World Wars, and other conflicts since, there have been people who laid down their lives to make our future possible. There is something profoundly Christ-like about that.

In return, our task as Christ's followers is to do all we can to become the ground in which the seeds of peace may grow. The day to day peace-making about which we all have choices each day. Learning to avoid the harmful language that is the soil in which the risk of conflict festers, pushing back on politicians who use the language of hatred of those who are different from us and saying no, not in my name. Remembering daily that the environment in which war breaks out is more ordinary than we think.

On 24th April 1993, a tiny medieval church in London called St Ethelburga's was almost destroyed by a terrorist bomb left in a lorry outside it. The decision was taken to rebuild the church and to open it as a centre for peace and reconciliation. On 7th July 2005, four terrorist bombs were detonated on London's public transport system during the morning rush hour, leaving 56 people dead and 700 injured. Two acts of violence in recent memory, as people went about their ordinary lives.

In the aftermath of the transport bombings, the leader of the St Ethelburga's community wrote a prayer. I will end by inviting us to pray it now, as we ask God to make us into the ground in which peace may grow, this Remembrance Sunday and every day:

God of life,
every act of violence in our world, between myself and another,
destroys a part of your creation.
Stir in my heart a renewed sense of reverence for all life.
Give me the vision to recognise your spirit
in every human being, however they behave towards me.
Make possible the impossible by cultivating in me
the fertile seed of healing love.
May I play my part in breaking the cycle of violence
by realizing that peace begins with me.

Professor Simon Keyes

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 3rd Sunday before Advent – 12th November 2023

Remembrance Sunday

Eglise du Sacré-Coeur, Oppède

Jane Quarmby, Licensed Lay Minister

The last time I preached on Remembrance Sunday, it was 2020, when we were in the first stages of the Covid pandemic, before we knew how our lives would change for a while. We were in lockdown, and I was preaching to a screen, which was a new experience for me – and I suspect, to a lot of my listeners too. We couldn't travel then, we couldn't observe the traditions of Remembrance Sunday in person, or see our families and friends. Today we are much freer in terms of travel and our social lives – we can eat out, visit people, join together in worship, all the things we took for granted pre pandemic and perhaps now value a little more. Or perhaps we've heaved a great sigh of relief and got back to what we always thought of as normal.

But three years on, the world has changed. We may have relegated Covid to the same category as the common cold, but two years ago, Russia invaded Ukraine. War returned to Europe after an absence of seventy years. The world went into an economic recession. A scary thought that Russian tanks could be in France within a day or so. That war is still being slogged out. And then this year war broke out savagely in Gaza, where as many people have been killed in a few short weeks as in two years of the Ukraine/Russian conflict. We are living in perhaps the most dangerous times since the end of the Second World War.

Today we remember those whose lives have been lost not just in the World Wars but in far too many conflicts across the world, as people fight over ideology, land, power, food and freedom. Our chaplain Jamie will be at the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery in Marseille today along with the representatives of the British Consulate and the Royal Navy based in Toulon.

The Mazargues War Cemetery is about six kilometres from the city centre in Marseille and is part of a large cemetery enclosed by high walls. Once you

thread your way through the grounds, you come to another wall with a small door, behind which is the section set apart for the war dead. Immaculately kept, it's more like a park, with rills of water, trees and shrubs – apart from the rows and rows of headstones of men from many nationalities, who died on active service in two world wars. It is quiet and peaceful in that walled garden, but so sad.

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

A third cemetery, much smaller with just 16 memorials, in a village in New Zealand, was just as poignant. 16 men left to fight in both world wars, half a world away, and never came back. Along with their names were pictures of each one, with what they did and where they lived. They were mostly sheep farmers, gardeners, mechanics, and apple growers. And this year whilst in Northumberland, we visited the lovely gardens of Houghton Hall, the home of Earl Grey – of tea fame. There is a small church in the grounds with wonderful cross-stitch kneelers depicting local scenes, contributed by local families. But in the corner of the churchyard are five or six simple crosses – those of French naval personnel who died in the Second World War. A sobering reminder that even here, in remote Northumbria, war still stretched out its tentacles.

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

suffered too – deaths and injuries, loss of homes and possessions, loss of loved ones, loss of freedom when your country is invaded and foreigners take over.

It makes you wonder why humankind never learns. Why have there been wars since the beginnings of our race? Research shows that homo sapiens waged war against the Neanderthal race, which shared 99.7% of their DNA, to the point of extinction. That was 400,000 years ago. War isn't a modern invention; we just have more lethal weapons now than sticks and stones and spears. Our oldest writings are filled with war stories – just look at the Old Testament. It's one battle after another. Humans seem to be hard-wired to fight one another, to kill for territory, food, water, gold. And left unchecked, to do dreadful things to one other and try to wipe each other out. We have only to look at the news today to see the tragedy that is war still being played out.

It's something that Jesus wrestled with too – his people thought he had come to lead them into battle, to fight against the Romans and set them free. His message of peace, of living lives caring for one another and looking after one another, didn't sit well with many. It doesn't today – and it's so easy to forget that violence begets violence. The opposite is true too – the chances are if you smile at someone, they will smile back. Do someone a good turn and they'll remember – and do you a good turn in return.

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

Jesus said in John 15.30: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." He followed through on that saying, laying his own

life down for all of us. It would be poor recompense to waste our lives, so dearly bought by him, and by the countless others who have over the centuries given their lives to save others.

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

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

19th November 2023

Safeguarding Sunday

All Saints' Marseille

Christine Portman, Reader and Safeguarding Officer

So how are you feeling about today being designated Safeguarding Sunday? If you find the subject difficult, you're not alone. In general, we don't like bad news stories. It's uncomfortable to be confronted by other people's pain. Who wants to hear about scandals affecting organisations or people that we love? It's often easier to turn away. But what if I said there may be a silver lining to the cloud that's been hanging over the Church for many years? For this morning's opening hymn, I almost chose *God is working his purpose out.* What if, in the midst all that mess, God is showing his Church a better way to be?

We know only too well how cover-ups happen. From large corporations and governments to public sector organisations like social services and the NHS, when they're threatened, members close ranks. Whistle-blowers who dare to raise their heads above the parapet are severely punished. The Church has been no exception. At the highest levels, incriminating evidence has been withheld from the police for decades. The Church, like so many organisations, has been concerned with safeguarding, yes - but with safeguarding its self-image.

In his book *Falling Upwards*, the Franciscan priest and spiritual director, Richard Rohr, discusses the changes we may go through as we mature, among them, shedding the false personas we create in order to protect ourselves. The self-images we project to the rest of the world are not, as the psalmist says, our *inmost being*; knit together in our mothers' wombs. Rohr reminds readers of the Samaritan woman at the well. Christ tells her: *'those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become*

in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' As a Church, our mission is to help each other to access that life-giving wellspring. So Richard Rohr has an important personal prayer: he asks to have at least one daily humiliation so that he doesn't get dragged into pride. Growing consciousness of who we truly are will bring us closer to our creator, but it can be a painful process as we peel back the layers to discover things that disturb us. In a similar way, our Church may be going through what seems difficult, but is, in fact, a very positive time. As failings have come to light the Church has been learning profound lessons of humility.

Last year more than 3000 churches took part in Safeguarding Sunday. We've learned, like so many caring organisations, the Scouts and care homes to mention just two, people with bad intentions seek us out. We need to be on our guard. We know we're not perfect and there are manipulative people who do all they can to hide their intentions. But we also realise our duty to do everything possible to ensure that we keep our church families safe.

This is so vital because, of all places, a church should be a place where we feel absolutely secure – a refuge where we can open our hearts to God when we feel especially vulnerable. This morning I could have read out the testimony of a church abuse survivor. Her account of what happened is just too harrowing, particularly the attempt to end her own life, so I'll only read what she says about her childhood experience, looking back on it from her adult perspective:

That six-year-old girl is me, a now 42-year-old teacher and mother. On the surface, I look like I've got it all – a nice house, a loving husband, beautiful children, and a career I'm passionate about, but my demons still haunt me every day. The lasting effects of the abuse I suffered will never leave me. The flashbacks, the nightmares, the high anxiety, the lack of self-worth, the emotional hurt, the guilt, the shame, the physical pain – they're all there every day. I have weekly therapy, which allows me to function and enjoy the wonderful things in life I've been blessed with.

Have I lost my faith? No. Do I take my children to church? Sadly, I don't. I feel the Church let me down. I'm not angry with the Church, but I do want to know that the Church has moved forward and that everyone within a church community helps to protect children and prevent abuse. Don't turn a blind eye or assume someone else will act – do something. What would Jesus do? He would have talked, listened, challenged, and stood up for what is right. Reach out and be that voice for that scared six-year-old.

Failure to protect can lead to profound spiritual hurt. And of course, we're not only talking about child abuse. We only have to think of recent revelations about elderly people preyed upon by so-called 'helpful friends' in order to access their bank accounts. So how should we reach out and be the voice that the victim would like to hear? When there's boring administrative stuff to deal with, when Safeguarding Officers ask for checks and ask us to fill in forms, what does our faith tell us? Very early on in the life of the Church, Saint Paul was clear: *Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves (Romans15.1).*

It might feel awkward if, when we volunteer at church, we have to go through a number of checks. We know that doing so won't always unmask potential abusers. But these checks do discover and deter, and online training, learning how and where abuse takes place, helps chaplaincy volunteers to spot the signs, and pick up on potential risks. Training sensitises us to situations we may now see as 'not quite right'. Knowing how to contact the chaplaincy Safeguarding Officer in case of concerns means that we become a safer place for all. We must make every effort to ensure that the 42-year old mother feels her local church is sufficiently safe that she will dare to walk back in, and allow her children to learn about the gospel.

Jesus was clear about the dangers of mission. When he commissioned the twelve apostles he said: *'I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as wise as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard'*. We doves must, of course, be warm and welcoming. St Paul says in Romans 14 that we mustn't *'put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way'.* But as he also warns in 1 Corinthians 8*, 'take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak'*. When we know the risks and put into place all the safeguards we can, we're helping both potential victims and their abusers.

We are, as Paul reminds us, *all one body*. In a short while, as Roxana breaks the Host, we'll say together: *Though we are many, we are one body, because we all share in one bread.* That passage from Corinthians continues: *If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

Just now we sang Jesus' words: *Love one another as I have loved you.* The new commandment reads:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'

This is the bottom line, and when we truly love, we care, and we protect.

Amen.

If you have found any of the content of this sermon upsetting and would like to receive any pastoral care, please don't hesitate to contact one of the ministry team.
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ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

26th November 2023

Christ the King

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

Matthew 's Gospel recounts that Jesus, standing at a crossroads, both in his journey and in the lives of his disciples, asked them: "Who do you say I am?" (Matthew 16.15)

As we have journeyed through this liturgical year of the Church, with Matthew's Gospel as companion, we have grappled, either directly or indirectly, with this question. The Church's foundation rests on the response of Christ's first followers, and our lives as disciples find their roots in our own response.

Across its history, the Church pondered the definitive answer to this question. It recognised that reducing Jesus Christ's identity to a title, or a concise definition, is an elusive task. In 325, the Roman Emperor Constantine convened what we now call the first ecumenical council of the Church, bringing together over 300 bishops, and summoned them to address fierce divisions among Christians, which, at that time, were mostly about how to describe who Jesus Christ is. The council formulated a statement of belief, now known as the Nicene creed, the words of which we use on most Sundays to affirm our faith: Jesus Christ is God, light from light, true God from true God…

In 1925, to celebrate the Jubilee Year and the 16th centenary of the council of Nicaea, Pope Pius XI established the feast of Christ the King. The Nicene Creed does not declare Jesus Christ as King. However, in the aftermath of World War I, with collapsing empires, and the rise of nationalist, secularist, and authoritarian leaders, it was hoped that the new feast would remind Christians

of the fidelity and loyalty they owed to Christ. It stood as a critique of unjust earthly power and as a sign of hope for a world gripped by anxiety and anger.

A century later, the world still grapples with anxiety and anger, navigating new iterations of nationalist, secularist and authoritarian leadership. Even among Christians, one may question if Christ's sovereignty is truly taken to heart. Therefore, it is fitting to pause and reflect on the meaning of Christ's reign over the Church, the world, and our lives. What does it signify when we speak of Christ the King? What does his rule look and feel like?

Kingship may seem archaic to those living in 21st-century Western society. There is, indeed, a significant cultural and political gap between ancient Israel's monarchy, or Rome's empire, and contemporary Western democracies – even those led by a monarch.

Even in Matthew's Gospel, when Jesus is referred to as 'King', this is met with puzzlement and even anger. Recall how people from Jerusalem reacted when the wise men from the East inquired about 'the new-born king of the Jews' or when Pilate ordered the inscription 'Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews' to the placed on the cross. It is not surprising that Jesus' contemporaries were shocked and angered to see the Galilean, the son of a carpenter, ascribed an earthly kingdom. However, today, we do not celebrate the reign of Jesus, but the reign of Christ. A careful reading of the Gospel continually points to the kingdom of God as a reality obscured by the world's endeavour. It is a reality that emerges where Jesus Christ is present – a sovereignty distinct from worldly reigns. He is a ruler who empties himself of all privilege, wielding power for wholeness and healing, not coercion and domination. A royalty that stoops. A ruler perpetually pouring himself out and surrendering his own life for his loved ones. A sovereign who comes "not to be served, but to serve" (Matthew 20.28).

Few contemporary rulers perceive their office as responding a call to serve. It is heartening that, this spring, throughout the Coronation Service of King Charles, the theme of selfless service was proclaimed, so that the monarch and people may "discover together the ways of gentleness and be led into the paths of peace". Don't we long to hear such words from all our leaders?

Yet many nations succumb to governance centred on domination, supremacy, triumphalism, and greatness. Even the Church sometimes forgets that the only power Jesus wielded on earth was the power to give himself away.

To live in Christ's reign and heed his call, we must follow in his footsteps and join him in his shepherding work: searching for the lost, going to places where most fear to tread, visiting situations others avoid, entering the chaos of other people's lives. And there we will meet Christ.

We heard in the Gospel reading this morning that there will be judgement in Christ's reign. The perplexing fact that Jesus reveals is that the final judgement hinges not on our belief or doctrinal purity. The judgement will be on the mercy given or denied to those suffering in the world, because Christ himself, the judge, is present in each one of them. "Whatever you did to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

We can meet Jesus Christ in the faces we avoid looking at, in the parts of town we don't drive through, in the voices we chose not to hear, in the lives so broken that we are afraid to approach them. "Truly I tell you, just as you did not show mercy to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." Judgment awaits the complacent and unconcerned in Christ's reign. If we take Christ's kingship seriously, we should go to meet him in the least and the lost, the broken and the wounded.

In a few moments, we will hear in the Eucharistic Prayer that the Kingdom we celebrate today is "a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace". As we approach the end of the Church's year and the season of Advent, let us review our lives and prepare for the new year of the Church. This is a good moment to make resolutions for this new year. Why not resolve to leave familiar paths and enter the world of insignificant people, cherishing and guarding the Church's identity as distinct from, and often in opposition to, the ways of the world? In the busyness of Advent, let us remember that every encounter we have with one of the least is an encounter with the Sovereign Christ. It is not metaphorical. It is not optional.

Throughout this coming year, may our prayers be that "with our eyes enlightened, we may know the hope to which Christ [the King] has called us, the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints" (Ephesians 1:18).

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Advent Sunday – 3rd December 2023

Zoom service

Canon David Pickering

Three similar phrases from this morning's Gospel***.*** ***Beware, keep alert*** (some ancient texts add ***and pray) for you do not know when the time will come.*** Secondly: ***Therefore keep awake - for you do not know when the master of the house will come.*** *And finally, in what seems like a clarion call from Jesus:* ***And what I say to you I say to all. Keep awake.***

Today I find myself preaching on Advent Sunday for the fourth consecutive year at our Chaplaincy Zoom Eucharist. How to begin a new Church Year is always a challenge. On this Sunday four years ago, with the same readings as today, I avoided referring to the actual texts for the day. Instead I made general comments about Advent Sunday being the Church's New Year's Day.

But scripture cannot be ignored. It's there in the liturgy to be proclaimed, expounded and reflected upon. And on each year, in our three-year cycle, the Gospel for Advent Sunday is Jesus's teaching about the Second Coming by one of the first three evangelists. So, as we begin Year B, today we have Mark's account which provides us with the closing words of Jesus' longest continuous piece of teaching in that Gospel.

And what words they are! Here we are on Advent Sunday, looking forward to celebrating the coming of Christ at Christmas, and the Church asks us to reflect on the *Second* Coming of Christ and the eventual destiny of all things?!

The whole of chapter thirteen in St Mark's Gospel concerns the Second Coming of Christ - an unmistakable time of trial and betrayal preceded by cosmic disasters. Hence those three urgent phrases we began with - stay on your guard, be ready for it!

Our three synoptic evangelists certainly expected an early return of the person they had come to know as the Christ. And from St. Paul's early letters to the Thessalonians, it's clear that at that time Christians believed in, and looked forward to the imminent return of the risen Christ.

But of course, that didn't happen. The Church has now existed for two thousand years, and Christ hasn't returned. Perhaps we've become accustomed to thinking that his second coming must be something in the far-off future, something not to be too troubled about? Perhaps we hear this text and think we ought to make sure we're ready just in case it happens tomorrow? After all, we never know. In these troubled times of wars and cruelty, climate threat and terror, all kinds of disasters may lie just around the corner.

So maybe we think we need an annual reminder of what might lie ahead, and that the beginning of the Christian year could be a good place to have it? Being forewarned is being forearmed. Once this First Sunday in Advent is behind us, we can leave behind the apocalyptic warnings and get on with looking forward to preparing for Christmas. Over the next three Sundays of Advent our gospel readings all lead us towards the Christmas story.

But can we leave thoughts of the Second Coming to one side? I don't believe so. Today's Gospel message reminds us that Christ Jesus is present in our world, our own time and space, in the here and now. If only, to quote our text, we are awake to it.

Our Christian message tells the story of how through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has triumphed over sin and evil. The call and role of the Church, down the ages, is to declare and show that victory in every generation. We have the message of the presence of the Second Coming for our world today. Through the power and reality of Holy Spirit, Christ Jesus is present in our world - if only we have the eyes of faith to recognise the divine in the so-called 'ordinary'. Wherever good overcomes an evil, love defeats hatred, peace replaces enmity, healing restores a broken body or mind, a positive replaces a negative in thought, speech or action. And so we could go on. But all of these are the presence and reality of Christ's Second coming in our contemporary world.

I suppose that, on Advent Sunday, and now realising we're already into December, we may have just woken up to all we need to do to prepare for the festive season. But perhaps before we celebrate Jesus' birth, we could use this

time to wake up to where God in Christ is already present in our world and recognise where he still needs to be, including in our own lives.

So, in the in the words of one of the earliest Aramaic Christian prayers quoted by St. Paul, ***Maran atha, Our Lord, come!*** *(1 Corinthians 16.22)*

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Advent Sunday

All Saints' Marseille

3rd December 2023

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

I wonder if any of you have visited Chartres Cathedral. If so, you may remember the labyrinth set into the floor of the nave. Labyrinths were used by the monks to provide a focus for prayer, a way of stilling the mind as they sought to come close to God. Nowadays people - whether or not they have a religious faith - use all sorts of ways to find stillness. But there is something intriguing about a labyrinth as it winds around, circling back on itself, so that you find yourself at times close to the middle and at others on the edge, finally arriving at the centre. For contemplatives, this was where the still small voice of God was to be found.

In his poem *Prayer,* the 17th century poet George Herbert wrote a description of what prayer can be like for us:

> '…Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,
> Exalted manna, gladness of the best,
> Heaven in ordinary, man well drest,
> The milky way, the bird of Paradise,
> Church-bells beyond the stars heard, the soul's blood,
> The land of spices; something understood.'

‘Heaven in ordinary’. The breaking in of heaven on our ordinary lives.

You could be forgiven for asking how this chimes with the apocalyptic visions we heard in our readings this morning. They are hardly images of quiet and stillness, but ones that disturb and unsettle us. Creation in upheaval, the powers of heaven shaken. Not exactly comforting.

But life around us is full of challenge and disturbance at the moment. The brief days of the ceasefire in Gaza ended two days ago with more violent exchanges. The war in Ukraine grinds on, with no end in sight. The vision of a climate almost out of control through our destructive behaviour looms large again at the COP28 summit. If we are seeking God’s presence in our world, we must be able to do so in times of tumult too.

Today marks the beginning of the church’s new liturgical year. Each year our Lectionary readings lead us through one of the first three Gospels. We have spent the last year with Matthew, and we now move to Mark. Much of Mark’s account is about what Jesus did, but in Chapter 13 there is a long speech in which Jesus looks ahead to a time of great disruption. This style of writing is known as ‘apocalyptic’. Mark’s Gospel was written at a time of massive political upheaval, around forty years after Jesus’s death. A revolt by the people of Judea against the occupying Roman forces was followed by a violent backlash from the Emperor Nero that culminated in the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. The purpose of this kind of writing was to reassure people that, however bad things seemed, God had not abandoned them. The extreme events described in our reading would have resonated with Mark’s hearers. The same would have

been true of the reading from Isaiah, written when the people of ancient Israel had been captured and taken to exile in Babylon - modern day Iraq. Perhaps these readings do not feel so out of step with our times. But what a long way it all seems from George Herbert's 'peace, and joy, and love, and bliss'.

In her recent book entitled *Heaven*, the theologian Paula Gooder invites us to re-examine our concept of heaven. She suggests that we have 'privatised and postponed the idea' of it, and that this has dulled us from being alive to God in ordinary life. In popular thinking, heaven has become a future rather than a present reality, more about 'me when I die' than 'God engaging with the world now'.

But this is not what we find in the biblical narratives. They had a different understanding of cosmology. Heaven, like earth, was understood as a place that was created. A physical realm, out of reach yet somehow not far away. We think of Jacob, waking from his dream of a ladder stretching to heaven and saying: 'How awesome is this place, this is none other than the house of God … and … gate of heaven.' Or Moses, taking off his shoes because he realised he was standing on 'holy ground', encountering God. We have lost our awareness of the closeness of God's reality, perhaps when we need it most. It's as if our world and the biblical world don't match any more. How do we find a way to describe this relationship, given our modern knowledge of cosmology? How do we re-awaken that awareness of the closeness of God, who longs for us to become more aware of heaven – the dimension in which God dwells?

This is the kind of waking-up we need to do in Advent. We shouldn't wait until the end of our lives for that hope. In our Advent waiting, we are alive to God's

coming and transformation now. The need for God in our world, longing for God's transforming justice, peace, compassion and love. 'O, that you would tear down the heavens and come down,' wrote the prophet Isaiah.

Our 'cellist Aidan Hamilton has spent the last two months as a musician with the Iona Community, on the isle of Iona off the west coast of Scotland. The Iona Community is an international ecumenical Christian movement, founded in Glasgow in 1938 by The Revd George MacLeod. A social reformer and visionary, MacLeod took a group of Church of Scotland ministers and unemployed workers to begin restoring the ruined buildings of Iona Abbey, and the Community grew out of that experience of living, working and worshipping together. MacLeod called Iona a 'thin' place, where the divide between the material and spiritual worlds - what Jacob would have called 'heaven and earth' - is very thin. Aidan's posts home over his time there have testified to that 'thinness'.

In Advent, we turn to the awareness that the 'thin' place where heaven comes closest to earth is to be found in a person, the one who came to live alongside us. In these weeks we watch with hope, preparing ourselves for God in Christ who <u>is</u> 'heaven in ordinary'. The labyrinth teaches us there are no short cuts to finding him. We have to take the twists and turns, wind back on ourselves, find ourselves at one moment near the centre and at another on the edge. For we are all, in our beloved uniqueness, journeying towards God, who is to be found at the centre not only of our being but of all things.

Advent is about listening for the still small voice in a world of tumult. So let us listen for it – in the people we meet, the experiences we have, the gifts we receive in our everyday lives. Sometimes the journey will be joyful, other times

challenging. Yet it is a journey of discovery, of truth and wonder, of awakening to the nearness of heaven. Awakening to the peace to be found in the thin places, our encounter with Christ, who comes with his transforming justice, peace, compassion and love. 'Heaven in ordinary. Something understood.'

May I wish each of you a blessed Advent.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Second Sunday of Advent – 6th December 2020

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

I wonder what Babylon means for you. I wonder if there's a place you have ended up in which feels partly of your own making but from which you long to be released. For the people to whom Isaiah wrote those verses in our Old Testament reading (Isaiah 40.1-11), it meant exile and captivity and punishment and shame, dislocation and lament and longing and despair, for fifty years. Perhaps we can relate to some of those feelings this Advent. There's been a bit of Babylon in all of us since March, and it isn't over yet.

Yet suddenly, at the beginning of Chapter 40, Isaiah's hearers are told there is to be redemption and homecoming. Not only that, but the road home is going to be made easy for them – despite it being 800 kilometres of rough and mountainous terrain, 'every valley shall be lifted up and every mountain and hill made low'. And though they are very aware of their human fragility (like grass that withers and fades), they are told that God is coming with strength and will lead them like a shepherd, carrying them if necessary, all the way home. 'Comfort, O comfort my people', says your God. You have served your term. Your penalty is paid.

It's the most beautiful vision. Like a prison door swinging open, freedom restored when you least expected it. 'A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God'. Cut to the opening verses of the first chapter of the first Gospel, Mark, and there they are again: 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight'. This, we are told, some six hundred years later, is 'the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God', and that the voice in the wilderness is 'John the baptizer'. The beauty of Isaiah's vision is happening now.

I spoke last week about judgment being an Advent theme. Traditionally in the church this Second Sunday of Advent is the one on which clergy used to be encouraged to preach on judgment, as part of a series of sermons on the 'four last things': death, judgment, heaven and hell. There is more than one way of looking at the four last things. Last Saturday I attended an online retreat for Advent run by the Church Times, which included a talk by Mark Oakley, the priest and author who served in the Diocese some years ago as Archdeacon of Germany and Northern Europe and is now Dean of St John's College, Cambridge. He began his reflection by describing the sense of yearning which characterises Advent, as expressed in the great 'O' antiphons used at evening prayer in the week before Christmas. They each begin with the invocation 'O', reciting the attributes of Christ mentioned in the Scriptures: O Wisdom, O Lord, O Root of Jesse, O Key of David, etc. We sang them last week in our hymn, 'O Come, O Come Emmanuel' – come and be God-with-us again. 'O Come, Key of David' – unlock us, free us.

Mark Oakley suggested that the four last things can be explored in terms of our inner landscape, which in many ways the pandemic has laid bare. 'What is death? What will mine be like? What will come after? And under such pressure, how am I judged as a human being at the moment? What am I like to be with? What happens to other people in my presence? As for heaven and hell, which do I bring people closer to? Which do I live in?'

He noted that Advent is a season of longing and incompleteness, in which our words struggle to contain the hope of the Christian faith and at the same time deal with the confusions and distresses of life and the world. We long to hear the promises again, to find our way back to God. It occurs to me that this is why Advent is often paired with Lent, and why the early church looked on it as a time of penitence as they waited for the coming of Christ. The reason for our sense of yearning is the desire to be at one with God again. The word for that goal of longing is atonement (literally 'at-one-ment'), what theologians refer to as 'the work of Christ'. The closeness to God that was lost in Eden but restored to us in Jesus, who brings us back – brings us home - to God.

Mark Oakley went on to explore how the insights of the psychologist Carl Jung seem particularly relevant for the season of Advent. Jung believed that the human self, as it grows up, learns to fit in, to socialise and to keep people happy – parents, siblings, friends, teachers, bosses. In order to do this, we develop a social self, a mask, a face to present to the world. And the more we put the mask on, then the more we repress other bits of us – emotions, feelings, talents, that are part of who we are but we don't want them seen by others because we have been taught – or taught ourselves - that they are somehow unacceptable.

This can include things like permission to express emotions (tenderness, vulnerability), or to show originality, or to show ignorance, to admit we don't know things. So we become guarded versions of ourselves, with a collection of 'stuff' we carry round with us, getting heavier and heavier. This untouchable part of ourselves becomes hidden, from other people and ourselves. Jung called it the 'shadow', an essential part of us but one that we fail to integrate as part of the whole. He cautioned that it will always emerge, sometimes in unconscious acts, or when we project things – good and bad – onto others. The shadow is everything within us that hasn't been allowed expression, and it can apply to nations, groups and churches as well as individuals. Sometimes we throw onto others the unloved bits of ourselves which we try to hide or remove, and that leads to scapegoating.

Spiritually this is important, because it's about how we relate - to ourselves, to others and to God. If we can learn to integrate our shadow, the bits of us we try to hide from ourselves, we will become better at relating to others - less touchy, less prone to react sharply with people, less distrustful. It's part of learning to love our neighbour as ourselves, not hate our neighbour as ourselves. And that in turn will bring us closer to God. If we aren't trying to hide ourselves from God, like that couple in the garden long ago, we will draw closer to God in honesty and trust. We can start by looking at ourselves more honestly in these weeks leading up to Christmas.

For God in Christ comes to meet us as we are. It's part of the incalculable gift of the Incarnation. We may not feel we can tell him who we are because, if we did, he might not like us. But it was to people like us to whom Christ came, and he met them with love. We can tell him who we are, light and dark, for he is the one who will still accept us after we have told him. The process will not be easy

– Jesus warned that there will be signs of distress, confusion and fear – and we may well need help with it. But Advent is a time of the year when we are encouraged to take it seriously.

I should probably have preached to you a traditional Advent sermon about sin and separation from God and the need for repentance, a turning around. But I wonder if coming to terms with our own shadow doesn't point us in the same direction. Perhaps that's been our Babylon, from which we are being offered a way back. And the way has been prepared, for every hill and valley of the complicated ways in which we separate ourselves from God and our true selves has been removed in Christ. If we listen, we will hear the words we need for the journey: 'Comfort, O comfort my people.'

At this point I might have played you eight minutes from Handel's *Messiah*, in his unforgettable setting of those words. But they have also been encapsulated by the modern poet Michael Dennis Browne, in a setting by Stephen Paulus which Christine found for our Compline service a few weeks ago. It's called The Road Home. Let's hear it again now.

Amen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49Og75MrkV8

Tell me, where is the road
I can call my own,
That I left, that I lost
So long ago?
All these years I have wandered,
Oh when will I know
There's a way, there's a road
That will lead me home?

After wind, after rain,
When the dark is done,
As I wake from a dream
In the gold of day,
Through the air there's a calling
From far away,
There's a voice I can hear
That will lead me home.

Rise up, follow me,
Come away, is the call,
With the love in your heart
As the only song;
There is no such beauty
As where you belong;
Rise up, follow me,
I will lead you home.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Second Sunday of Advent

All Saints' Marseille

10th December 2023

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

'Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.'

Yet, where shall we go for comfort?

The readings for this second Sunday of Advent challenge our conventional expectations and urge us to seek comfort in a place we'd rather associate with harshness and desolation: the wilderness. It is a paradox that in a place known to have been a site of captivity and exile, a landscape devoid of established trails, the promise of consolation comes. It is here that God 'speaks tenderly' to his people: 'Comfort, comfort my people.'

Our reading from the Book of the prophet Isaiah addresses the despair of the exile – from one's homeland and from oneself - driven away from all that is safe and familiar. Likewise, in our Gospel reading, Mark announces the beginning of the good news in the middle of nowhere: John the baptizer appears in the wilderness and proclaims a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John's words, like Isaiah's, are destined for a people in despair.

We may not easily identify with the audience of both Isaiah and Mark. Our lives are rather comfortable, are they not? Yet, anyone can find themselves 'in the wilderness', the place of unexpected trials and challenges, where carefully laid plans fail, trust is betrayed, loved ones depart, and faith seems to dry up.

As we journey deeper into Advent, we may wonder why there is an invitation to dwell in the wilderness in the weeks leading up to Christmas. Why could God's comfort come to us in such barren, desolate settings? Is there something for us to learn in the wilderness?

I guess this invitation comes because the wilderness is a space that exposes vulnerabilities, a place where illusions of self-sufficiency shatter swiftly. In its raw and risky environment, one must confront one's own powerlessness. Acknowledging vulnerability becomes imperative, and in the starkness of the wilderness, waiting and watching become second nature, as if one's life depends on God showing up. It is here that the word of God resonates, as both Isaiah and John the Baptist affirm.

The wilderness possesses the transformative power to soften us towards repentance - the internal change that renders God's comfort possible. John the Baptist, in proclaiming his baptism of repentance, deliberately situates himself away from the familiar. Why? Because the wilderness reveals the true nature of our hearts, prompting a melting of hardened exteriors in penitence, sorrow, and hope.

Terms like "sin" and "repentance" may be uncomfortable for us, people of the 21st century. We may be averse to the idea of "judgment" as well. We may have been told that sin is an offence that stirs God's anger. Yet, sin is a problem because it jeopardizes our very existence. Sin represents estrangement from God and others, disconnection, and disharmony.

Advent, whether we like it or not, should begin – and continue - with an honest reckoning with sin. Isaiah depicts the God who comforts as also the God who judges. His judgment is not arbitrary but arises from God's understanding of how deeply sin distorts and damages our souls, of the impact of sin on those suffering on the margins, and even on Creation itself.

Could acknowledging our sin be an occasion for relief? I think so, if we are willing to brave the desert, finding comfort in the awareness of our hopelessness. Confessing our need for deliverance may lead us to a place of profound comfort, where God can make us whole. He alone possesses the power and the will to forgive and to heal. The paradox lies in the fact that repentance itself is the inception of hope. As we recognize our insufficiency and failure, we own up to our exiled condition, longing to return. The acknowledgment of sin becomes the place of renewal.

The wilderness is also a place where we can participate in God's work of leveling inequality and oppression. Isaiah envisions a day when every valley is lifted up, and every mountain and hill are made low. In the wilderness, privileged

locations are stripped away, exposing the rough places beneath our feet. Here we can sense God's dream of a reimagined landscape - a terrain so smooth and straight that the promised salvation becomes visible to all.

In the wilderness of our lives, we have the task to make straight the way: by turning from ourselves to God and turning from ourselves to those around us. This great leveling, this reversal of high and low, must precede the appearance of the Lord to 'gather his flock in his arms and carry them in his bosom' (Isaiah 40.11). The highway that brings God in our midst is one we can and must pave through our sustained insistence on liberation, justice, and reparation.

In a world where comfort is often sought in the familiar and the secure, are we willing to embrace the discomfort of the wilderness, as the people in exile that we are? Are we open to risking the wilderness to hear God's word of consolation?

Comfort does await us in the wilderness. God promises to come to us in the midst of barrenness, desolation and hopelessness. May we believe this promise, wandering and being found. And like the prophets before us, may we become strong voices in the wildernesses of the world, in hard and challenging places, preparing the way of the Lord.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 3rd Sunday of Advent

All Saints' Marseille

17th December 2023

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

Today is Gaudete Sunday, the day the church's focus in Advent shifts from watching and waiting to the joyful anticipation of Christmas. 'Gaudete' is the Latin word for 'rejoice', taken from the first word of the second reading for this Sunday.

As we begin to anticipate Christmas, we should not be surprised that the figure we are pointed to is John the Baptist. Our reading is from the Fourth Gospel, where the emphasis is on John's role as a witness. The first part of the reading comes from the Prologue, the beautiful poem we will hear again at Christmas which begins: 'In the beginning was the Word'. It is understood to have been a hymn of the early church, included at the start of the Gospel like a lens through which to see the identity and significance of Jesus – the eternal dimension to his life, death and resurrection. John is the first human being mentioned in the Gospel, and the thing we are told about him is that he came to bear witness, witness to the light.

All the way through the Fourth Gospel light and dark are contrasted. In the Prologue there is also a conscious echo of the opening verses of Genesis: 'In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, … darkness covered the

face of the deep … . Then God said, "Let there be light." ' The writer is saying that the light which shone at the dawn of creation is appearing now in person: 'The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.' John's task – and ours – is to witness to it.

Our reading then cuts to the end of the Prologue, when the narrative begins. The religious authorities were anxious to know who John was. Part of their role was to police the minority cults that grew up across the region, to check if they were authentic to the tradition. So they ask John to identify himself.

He starts by saying who he is not. 'I am not the Messiah.' Nor Elijah. Nor the prophet promised in the Book of Deuteronomy who would be like Moses and lead the people. Then come the words 'I am'. Those hearing them, familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures, could not mistake them. 'I AM' was the response God had given when asked his name. 'I am' resounds through the Fourth Gospel on the lips of Jesus – 'I am' the bread of life; the good shepherd; the true vine. And here, John is saying: 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord".

The Gospel emphasises that John's task is to be a witness to Jesus, a voice identifying himself by reference to the one who will come after him and who is more significant. John's witness is full of humility. He says of Jesus: 'He must increase, but I must decrease.'[1] Humility is not fashionable in the 21st century, yet it lies at the heart of our understanding of God. Within the Trinity there is continual, self-giving love, a constant attentiveness between Father, Son and Spirit which shows that to live abundantly is to enable others to live abundantly too.

[1] John 3.30.

And so, like John, we are to be witnesses. It is not all about us. It's about Christ. John's answers to his interrogators remind us of this. We live most of the time with a mixture of identities – through our families, our work, our activities, our multiple belongings of geography and physicality. Yet we hold all those in tension with the eternal dimension of who we are, our primary identity as children of God. John is clear that our deepest identity lies in our relationship to the divine, and that we must point towards the light, the hope that we find in God.

Isaiah describes what this hope is about. The passage we heard this morning[2] is the text which Jesus chose to read in the synagogue at Nazareth at the start of his ministry. Isaiah's great vision of salvation is described not in terms of individuals 'going to heaven' - salvation in biblical times was a much broader concept. Isaiah's vision is of a quality of life that reflects God's longing for humanity now. Debts are extinguished, slaves are set free, the creation is cared for properly, and people can live in peace.

Yet in Jesus's time, the joy of Isaiah's radical vision was quick to darken. Within hours of his telling the people of Nazareth that the vision was being fulfilled, they were taking him up a hill to try and put him to death. Three years later, in Jerusalem, that is what happened.

Is all this just confined to history? To a strange man eating locusts in a world from which we are disconnected? No. Jesus's experience in Nazareth confronts us with the question: how radical are we willing to be? And as we prepare to celebrate Christmas, we do well to ask ourselves: 'What do I need to do to help bring about a vision like Isaiah's, the one Jesus made his own? Where do I put my energies?'

[2] Isaiah 61.1-8.

In case we are unsure about the relevance for us now of John's witness to Christ, let us take a recent example. Six years ago, in the richest borough in one of the richest cities in the world, a fridge caught fire in a tower block of social housing and the whole structure went up like a firework, killing over 70 people and scarring the lives of hundreds more. The building, in the London Borough of Kensington, was called Grenfell Tower. For the last three years, through a member of our Zoom congregation who works tirelessly for a charity in that area, we have been collecting money to help mothers living in the shadow of that wrecked building to put food on the table at Christmas. The enquiry into the disaster revealed that a catalogue of cost-cutting and profit-seeking in the management of the building had left the inhabitants exposed to risks even though they tried to raise the alarm. At the memorial service for those who lost their lives, the Bishop of Kensington said this:

> 'My hope, my prayer, is that today we will pledge ourselves to change – from a place where we didn't listen, where we didn't hear the cries of our neighbours because we were too wrapped up in our own interests and prosperity, to create a new type of life together, where we are turned not inwards to ourselves, but outwards towards each other.'

That sounds to me quite a lot like the man with the locusts. Witnessing to the Gospel now, building a new type of community now, is what churches are there to do. Testifying that to live abundantly is to enable others to live abundantly, in the dynamic of the divine.

In Advent, we are called to go out into a world hungry for light in the darkest of times. To be like John. Witnessing to the light that shines in the darkness, which the darkness did not, and will not, overcome.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 4th Sunday of Advent

All Saints' Marseille

24th December 2023

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

I wonder if any of you saw the 1998 film *Sliding Doors*. It's a film that alternates between two possible storylines, showing two paths which the life of the main character (played by Gwyneth Paltrow) could take depending on whether or not she catches a particular train. In one storyline, she arrives just too late as the train's sliding doors close. In the other, she arrives just in time and catches the train, and her life takes a very different path. Because of the film, people sometimes talk about a 'sliding doors moment' in their lives.

Our Gospel reading tells of one of the greatest 'sliding doors moments' in history, the Annunciation. What if Mary had been too busy, or too conventional, or too afraid? What if she had said 'no'? For a moment, the consequences of saying 'yes' flashed before her; the angel saw the panic in her eyes and moved to reassure her: 'Do not be afraid: you have found favour with God.' 'That's all very well,' she might have said, 'but I have to go on living in this community, in this tight-knit, traditional village. I'm not sure that saying 'yes' to you will find favour with them.' What on earth was Joseph going to say? To be an unmarried teenage mother in that community would have meant being outcast, condemned to a life on the margins.

No one would have blamed her if she had said 'no'. Have you ever wondered if the angel might have knocked on other doors before arriving at hers? God's call had been thwarted many times by men and women saying 'no'. It's an extraordinary idea that the redemption of the world should have hung on the 'yes' or 'no' of a young woman in a small village in this remote province of the Roman Empire. Was there any contingency plan?

Well, one could say that the whole of the Old Testament had been a contingency plan. It tells the story of God's constant initiative of love towards humanity, trying to find ways around human intransigence, faced time and again with our God-given capacity to say 'no'. If Mary had chosen convention, safety, obscurity, she might have joined her 'no' to all the others. It wasn't her idea, after all, this notion of God banking on the 'yes' or 'no' of the beautiful but headstrong creatures he had made in his own image, to enable his purposes to be worked out. Their participation, their freely given 'yes', was a necessary part of it – a crucial ingredient in what the bidding prayer that is read at carol services calls 'the tale of the loving purposes of God'. God places himself in the hands of a human being, because it is only from her acceptance, the God-given capacity to say 'yes', that God's creative purpose can be brought to fruition.

Mary must have sensed the awesome responsibility, in the pause before she replied. Like every parent to be, she will have sensed the challenges that lay ahead. Might she also have had an inkling of the particular challenges that would come with a child destined for the purposes that had been told to her? A child who would sometimes seem to reject her - staying behind in the Temple aged 12 ('why have you treated us like this? … your father and I have sought

you sorrowing'); declining to help when the wine ran out at the wedding in Cana ('Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.'); asking to speak to him while he was teaching and hearing him reply ('Who is my mother?'); gradually but inexorably feeling him move away from her to a place of suffering and danger, culminating in crucifixion as a criminal when, in the prophetic words of Simeon in the Temple, a sword would pierce her soul. What if she had said 'no', before it all began?

The late journalist Bernard Levin wrote an article about the courage it must have taken Dutch resistants in the Second World War who took the decision to shelter Jewish families from being rounded up and deported. A decision which involved the resistants in increasing danger as time went on. He noted the strength it must have taken to be able to recite to themselves each day: 'We have said A; now we must say B.' Mary paused before she said 'A', while heaven held its breath.

What if she had said 'no'? At one level she had all the choice in the world. She could have said 'no', or 'wait', or 'maybe'. The encounter between Mary and the angel takes place on an ordinary day, while all around her people are going about their daily lives. The sacred breaking in on the ordinary, as we saw on Advent Sunday when we reflected on 'thin' places – places where the divine and earthly come very near. When the sacred comes knocking, we are very good at finding other things to do. For the real question is not 'what if she had said 'no'?', but 'what if we say 'no'?' God places himself each day in our hands, like Mary's, waiting for our 'yes' to enable God's creative purposes to be brought to fruition.

One of my favourite parables of Jesus is the one in which he describes two sons being asked by their father to go and work in his vineyard. One says no, but later changes his mind and goes. The other says yes, but does not go. Jesus notes that it is the first one who did the will of his father. I find it a comforting story because so often I find myself thinking of all the reasons I don't want to do something I know I should do, before running out of excuses. It has been suggested that it's is a pattern of thought with which Jesus himself was familiar. The agony in the Garden of Gethsemane tells us of the ultimate cost of saying 'yes', however terrifying it feels. 'We have said A; now we must say B.'

What if Mary had said 'no'? Happily for humanity, she didn't. And for that we give thanks on this day. As it draws to an end, our hearts and minds will turn to celebrate the unique and miraculous event to which her 'yes' led, the Incarnation.

And as we move towards the beginning of a new year, let us be open to the 'sliding doors moments' in our lives. Learning to say not 'no', or 'wait', or 'maybe', but: 'Let it be with me according to your word.'

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Christmas Day

All Saints' Marseille

25th December 2023

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

Charles Dickens once wrote, "It is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when the mighty Creator was a child himself." The child in me thrills when Christmas draws near – because I delight in its music, its poetry, and its story.

It is an old story, spoken by God 'long ago'. For two millennia it has been repeated in hushed tones, in hope-filled words, or in glorious proclamations. The challenge with old stories lies in their familiarity; they can become tired and forgotten. We may forget to listen with new ears, and our eyes might refuse to see beyond the obvious.

Yet, something deep within us still craves the stable and the manger, the unexpected gift of light and welcome on the cold winter's night. The story of the Christ-child, a child of extraordinary promise, born in unpromising, unwelcoming and even life-threatening circumstances, strikes a chord with so many people.

This might be the reason why cribs remain very popular: year after year, there are dozens on Christmas cards and the Advent calendars we have just completed today. The humble cattle shed of Bethlehem, with the Holy Family, the shepherds, and the animals - this is a scene we can all picture, rooted in our earliest childhood memories of Christmas.

The tradition of the crib is 800 years old today: in 1223, Francis of Assisi recreated the scene of Christ's birth in a special Mass held inside a cave in the hill-town of Greccio. There he brought a hay-filled manger and live animals and

invited both his fellow friars and the townspeople to join in the celebration. Later, he shared with a friend: "I want to do something that will recall the memory of that Child who was born in Bethlehem, to see with bodily eyes the inconveniences of his infancy, how he lay in the manger, and how the ox and ass stood by."

Francis wanted people to see in the crib the deep truth of what Christmas is all about: the luminous Christmas story, the child in the manger, the song of the angels, the homage of the shepherds, the tender love of Mary, but also the essence of the Christmas event: that God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, that all might live through him.

So, what happened at Christmas? In fact, nothing unusual was happening that night. Luke's Gospel meticulously situates the birth of Christ within the tapestry of human history - a tiny knot in that tapestry. In the backwater town of Bethlehem, government bureaucrats conduct a census. A few shepherds stomp their feet to keep warm and gossip to stay awake. A young woman births a baby. As the British poet U. A. Fanthorpe observed,

"This was the moment when nothing
Happened. Only dull peace
Sprawled boringly over the earth."

Yet, Fanthorpe continues, on that ordinary night,

"This was the moment when Before
Turned into After… "

A whole new world was being born this night.

And here we come to the story of Christmas as told in John's Gospel, so unlike the familiar crib or Nativity play: no shepherds, no angels singing, no manger, no ox, or donkey, no Mary and Joseph. There is only metaphor, reflecting the Creation as John begins, "In the beginning," and ending with the eternal God taking on flesh and coming to dwell among humanity. Among the everyday affairs of ordinary people, God became a man. Eternity invaded time.

In Graham Greene's novel, *The Heart of the Matter*, one of the characters ponders the risk God took in becoming human, an openness and generosity that

would continue throughout Jesus' life. The writer says, "It seemed to him for a moment cruelly unfair of God to have exposed himself in this way: a man, a wafer of bread, first in the Palestinian villages and now here, there, everywhere, allowing man to have his will of Him, […] putting himself at the mercy of men who hardly knew the meaning of the Word. How desperately God must love, he thought with shame."

In the Christmas story, as told both by Luke and John, we read the opening lines of God's love letter to the world. The birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ are expressions of a most extravagant divine love - love that never fails, a love that lays down its life for its friend. The love that, in the beginning, brought us into being, now enters, at Bethlehem, in the person of Jesus Christ, into a new and more intimate relationship with us. God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son, so that every person who puts his faith in him will be reconciled to God and brought to live with him forever.

God incarnate in Jesus is the affirmation that God comes to meet us in exceptional ways within all the unexceptional times and places of our lives. When God's Word takes on temporal flesh for a fleeting human lifetime, so that our fragile, temporary flesh may be holy. So that our fleeting time here on earth may be holy.

At the end of another year, during which we have all painfully experienced our fragility - a year which has brought grief, loss, anxiety and depression to many - we crave "go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us […] and the child lying in the manger". We long for the assurance of that gift of light and warmth and welcome in our cold winter's night, which seems to persist endlessly.

The Word is still among us, and the shining light of Christ can guide us out of the wilderness and despair. Remember that Mary and Joseph lovingly made a home for the Word, for Jesus. Will we make a home for God's Word when he knocks at our door? Will we invite Jesus' presence into our lives? Will we care for that presence, and share it with others?

Christmas should be the great annual renewal of our being a Church filled with wonder at the nearness of our God. May we be born with the Christ-child to new hope and trust. This Christmas, may we be born to life, full of truth and grace.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

31st December 2023

First Sunday of Christmas

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate

From some people's perspective, Christmas is over. The Christmas tree has been dismantled on Boxing Day, decorations and crib figures returned to their cardboard boxes, and carpets meticulously vacuumed to remove every trace of tinsel. The festive excitement fades, making way for a return to the routine of daily life.

However, in Provence, Christmas is far from over: the season of the Pastorales begins, with theatrical representations, in Provençal, of the Nativity. These performances evoke the procession of the shepherds (called *pastres*, hence the name 'pastorale') to the stable where the infant Jesus had just been born, eager to shower him with their offerings. On their way, they wake up the whole village. The inhabitants, not necessarily attractive and saintly people, set off to follow in the shepherds' steps, accompanied by the rhythmic sound of the tambourine and the galoubet. It is a transformative journey that leaves none untouched, as the shepherds and the villagers, having received God's gift of the child in the manger, are for ever changed.

The genius of the Pastorales lies in bringing the Nativity to life through the eyes of the ‘ordinary’ people along the shepherds' route. Thanks to the Pastorales, the shepherds rightfully assume their place in the Nativity story.

Of course, shepherds are familiar figures in almost all the Nativity scenes we pass by: carrying a lamb on their shoulders, perhaps another lamb or sheep hanging around. Yet, they are always assigned a minor role. They have also minor roles in the Nativity plays, assigned to the children who didn’t quite fit the roles of Mary or Joseph or the wise men.

Yet the shepherds’ role at Christmas is an important one: they help people notice what God performed in the stable, lest it goes unnoticed, lest it gets forgotten.

Do you find surprising that they were the first people to hear the message of God’s redemption? If you are familiar with Luke’s Gospel, you may remember that one of its central themes is God’s loving kindness for those on the margins, for those of no account to the world: the poor, the humble, the despised, the rejected - those whose voices are not heard, those whose testimonies do not matter. Angels could have visited the king Herod or the Roman governor Quirinius or the High Priest. But why would they rejoice at the birth announcement of the Messiah? What need did they have of God’s redemption when they possessed so much earthly power? Yet the shepherds were the ones predisposed to listen the life-altering news and rejoice.

Indeed, the angels came to sing their news to those for whom it held meaning: the outcasts, the lonely, the poor, and the lowly. The only requirement to receive God's love is the recognition of one's need for it.

Our God, who takes flesh in Jesus Christ, is the God of the lonely, the despised, the destitute, the rejected, the downtrodden, the sorrowful – the God of the shepherds. God, embodied as the child in the dirty manger and as the God of the shepherds on the hillside, is among us.

We need, again and again, to hear the words the angel addressed to the shepherds: fear not, the Savior of the world has come, here's your sign. Look for the lowly, the helpless, the most vulnerable. When we look in those places, we can't help but recognise God's love for the lowly, the helpless, the vulnerable.

The shepherds' brief encounter with the lowly, helpless, vulnerable baby, lying in a manger, ignited their acknowledgement of God's faithfulness and set them ablaze for God. Their response was to praise God and carry into the world the news of his coming among us. They returned into the silent night, carrying the gracious gift they have received. It was in the darkness of the shepherds' lives, that the great mystery of God made flesh made an irruption and changed them into children of God. This mystery makes an irruption in the darkness of our own lives, changing us into children of God.

The light of Christ is not meant to be stored away with the decorations. It is 'the light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.' (John 1.5) The love of God, radiating through Jesus Christ, can take root in our souls, if we make room in our everyday lives for it to shine in our darkness.

From one perspective, Christmas is over. From the shepherds' perspective, Christmas has only just begun.

"When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about the child. The shepherds returned, glorifying, and praising God for all they had heard and seen." After the Christmas season, we too will return to our 'fields and flocks,' to our usual routines and responsibilities. But we shall return not as the people we were before. Christ has come. God is with us. Jesus was born so that God has a name everyone might know. Jesus was born to make the unknowable God known and close to us.

There is work to be done after the Christmas season. In the words of Howard Thurman, an African American theologian, educator, mystic and civil rights leader:

When the song of the angels is stilled,

When the star in the sky is gone,

When the kings and princes are home,

When the shepherds are back with their flocks,

The work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,

To heal the broken,

To feed the hungry,

To release the prisoner,

To rebuild the nations,

To bring peace among others,

To make music in the heart.

As we stand on the threshold of a new year, we might ask ourselves: Where are we now? Where were we a year ago? Where do we want to go from here? We might anticipate the new year with excitement, or we may well see it with fear or as a challenge. Amidst the uncertainties we all face, one certainty prevails: God who gave his name to his Son, Jesus, travels with us into the year that is about to begin.

In our lives, throughout the coming year, there will be things we can control and others we cannot. But, in the words of a twentieth-century prayer: 'May God grant us serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference'.

Amen.