

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermons - May 2026

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The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

How can we know the way?

We live in a world that promises: “Always find your way, never get lost again”—so runs the advertisement for a navigation app.

And indeed, we rarely travel alone now. We have surrounded ourselves with guidance: GPS, live traffic updates, reviews, ratings, algorithms that suggest not only where to go, but how to live.

And yet—it is not at all clear that we are less lost.

There was a time, not so long ago, when knowing the way meant something quite different. To drive a cab in London, one must still pass *The Knowledge*: a demanding test requiring the memorisation of some 25,000 streets and thousands of landmarks. It takes years. Many begin; only a few complete it. It is, quite literally, a way of shaping the mind. The city is not simply consulted—it is inhabited. The knowledge becomes part of you.

And perhaps that is where today's Gospel begins to open. For this is no peaceful, luminous scene. It is the night before everything falls apart. Jesus has washed his disciples' feet. He has spoken of betrayal, of denial, of departure. "Where I am going, you cannot follow now." The ground is shifting beneath their feet. And so the question comes—more urgent than it first appears: "How can we know the way?"

We might hear it in different tones. Confusion: "Lord, we cannot see the road—how can we follow?" Anxiety: "What will become of us, if you are no longer here?" Or something deeper still: "Tell us how not to lose what we have found— how to find a way through uncertainty, through change, through life, and even through death."

And to all of this, Jesus responds: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." No roadmap. No strategy. No carefully laid-out future. Just himself. Relationship, presence, communion—here and now.

It is disarmingly simple—and so unsettling. For we are used to other kinds of answers: systems that promise clarity, voices that claim to embody the truth, paths that offer control, predictability, mastery.

But all of these, in the end, remain partial—fragile, contested, subject to change.

Jesus does something altogether different. He does not point to the way as something outside himself. He says: *I am the Way*. Which means

that to “know the way” is not first to understand, but to remain. To stay in relationship. To trust a presence, even when the future is unclear.

And more than that—there is a promise: “I go to prepare a place for you ... and I will come again, and take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.”

It is difficult to hear these words without something in us responding. There is, in every human heart, a longing for home. An old folk song gives it voice with quiet honesty: “I want to go home... I feel so broke up, Lord, that I want to go home.” And perhaps we recognise that longing. When life becomes uncertain, we want to go home. When we feel scattered, or burdened, or alone, we want to go home. When the way ahead is unclear, and the ground beneath us seems to give way—something in us says: *there must be somewhere I belong.*

But Jesus gently reshapes what we mean by “home.” “In my Father’s house ... so that where I am, there you may be also.”

Home, in the deepest sense, is not a place to which we travel, but a life into which we are drawn— the life he shares with the Father. The “dwelling places” he speaks of are not distant mansions, but the spaciousness of God’s own heart: a life in which there is room enough for all that we are— our doubts, our fears, our questions, our longing. God is generous. God is hospitable.

“You have a place,” Jesus is saying. “You have a place with me. You have a place in God.”

And yet—this place is prepared in a way we would never have chosen. The one who speaks of the Father’s house is also the one who will be rejected. As the First Letter of Peter puts it: the stone rejected by the builders

becomes the cornerstone. What is refused becomes the foundation. What is cast aside becomes the place on which everything rests. Christ himself is that stone— rejected, misunderstood, set aside— and yet, through him, God begins a new building altogether: a living house, a life into which we are drawn, a new creation.

And this is the astonishing hope at the heart of it all: that the world does not, in the end, collapse into meaninglessness or loss, but is being gathered—patiently, persistently—into something that will endure.

If Christ is the cornerstone—if this “place” he prepares is not simply waiting somewhere beyond us, but already being formed in him—then something follows. We are not only invited in. We are built in. “Like living stones,” Peter says, “let yourselves be built into a spiritual house.” Living stones: shaped, placed, held together in something that is still becoming.

Which means that the way we were asking about at the beginning—“How can we know the way?”—is not simply something we learn, like a map, or even like *The Knowledge* of a great city. It is something that begins to reshape us. As we come to Christ, as we remain with him, our lives are slowly, patiently re-formed. We begin—not perfectly, but truly—to take our place in what God is building.

And that has consequences. For Jesus also says: “Whoever believes in me will do the works that I do... and even greater works than these.” The works of Jesus are the works of God: to give life, to restore what is broken, to bring meaning where there is emptiness, to open a future where there seemed to be none, to bring peace. And now—astonishingly—that work is entrusted to us.

So are we part of what gives life—or what diminishes it? Do we help to build spaces where dignity can flourish— or do we, perhaps without

noticing, contribute to what excludes, fragments, or silences? How do we bear witness to “the way, the truth, and the life.”

This requires practice. Just as a city was once learned, street by street, so this life is learned—day by day— by returning, again and again, to Christ, the Way. By abiding in him.

A troubled night. A real question. No clear map. And yet—an answer. “I am the way.” Not a way we must master, but a way that holds us. Not a future we must secure, but a presence we are given. We learn it as we go—not by certainty, but by trust, not all at once, but step by step—until, almost without noticing, we begin to walk in Christ’s way.

There will still be moments of uncertainty. There will still be times when we do not understand. But the promise remains: we are not alone, we are not lost, we are being led. Led towards a home that is not far away, but already opening before us—a home in the heart of God, where Christ has gone ahead, and where, in him, we already belong.

The Way is given. The Truth is with us. The Life is already at work among us. And it will bring us home.

2/ Sixth Sunday of Easter 10th May 2026 All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

We are often told that modern life has shortened our capacity for attention. Studies suggest that the average human attention span has diminished dramatically over recent decades — so much so that it is now said to last only a matter of seconds. Eight seconds, apparently, for an adult: barely enough time to form a first impression and decide whether something deserves our attention.

Imagine, then, that you had only a few seconds to say something true about God to someone who had never believed — or someone who once believed and no longer can. Something capable of changing how they see the world, how they see themselves, how they see God. What would you say?

Would you speak about power? Creation? Beauty? Justice? Comfort? Judgment? Salvation? Or would you dare to say, with the First Letter of John, something disarmingly simple: “God is love”?

Yet do we truly know the God about whom we speak? Or do we often find ourselves worshipping an image of God shaped by fear, culture, memory, or ideology, rather than the living God who always exceeds our understanding?

Perhaps the altar Paul discovers in Athens, dedicated “to an unknown god,” says more about humanity’s longing for the divine than all the temples rising above the streets and altars standing at every corner. Athens dazzles with intelligence, beauty, philosophy, and religion — not Paul’s religion, certainly, but still a testimony to humanity’s restless search for God.

Most people sense that there is something beyond us, greater than us, and yet elusive. And so, throughout history, we have fashioned images of God small enough to manage, safe enough to explain, familiar enough to control.

For some, God becomes little more than someone to question, blame, or accuse when life turns cruel. Others imagine a God carefully keeping account of failures, demanding to be appeased by good behaviour. Some images of God comfort us; others terrify us. And sometimes the god we worship is little more than ourselves reflected back to us.

The Christian tradition has long recognised this danger. The theologians spoke of the *apophatic* way: the understanding that God is always greater than our words, our concepts, our definitions. Every sentence we speak about God is, in the end, inadequate. The moment we imagine that we have fully understood God, we have probably begun to worship something smaller than God.

And yet Christianity does not end in silence. Paul does not say to the Athenians, “God is unknowable.” He says: “What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.”

The God beyond all comprehension has nevertheless chosen to make himself known — not through abstract ideas or philosophical systems, but through relationship: a voice that calls, a presence that accompanies, a love that seeks humanity before humanity even knows how to seek God. The movement is no longer humanity searching upward toward a distant God; it is God drawing near, God coming to dwell with humanity, God refusing to remain distant. The God who is love.

And yet, if God is love — and if humanity is created in God’s image — why does Jesus’ commandment, “Love one another,” sound so impossibly demanding?

Dorothy Day, the American Catholic social activist, once wrote: “Whenever I groan within myself and think how hard it is to keep writing about love in these times of tension and strife ... I say to myself, ‘What else is the world interested in? What else do we all want, each one of us, except to love and be loved?’”

Beneath all our conflicts, anxieties, ambitions, and divisions remains this deep human hunger: to love and to be loved. The Gospel tells us that this longing is not an illusion. It is rooted in the very being of God. But how do we respond to it?

We must not reduce love to emotion, preference, or compatibility. The love revealed in Christ is something deeper: fierce enough to embrace suffering, patient enough to endure rejection, generous enough to include even enemies. It transcends self-interest, prejudice, and parochialism. It widens the heart. It calls us beyond ourselves.

And perhaps that is why such love feels humanly impossible. Love requires trust, and we are suspicious. Love crosses borders and dissolves boundaries, while we often feel safer deciding who belongs and who does not. Love takes time, attention, discipline, and transformation — and we are perpetually busy, distracted, exhausted.

Yet Jesus is not imposing obedience as a test of loyalty. He is inviting his disciples to abide in divine love: to let the Father’s love flow through the Son into his people, binding them together in mutual affection and in a shared vocation to embody that love in the world.

The commandment to love is difficult precisely because it is divine. Left to ourselves, we cannot sustain such demanding love for very long. Our patience runs thin, our courage falters, our generosity dries up. Love, as Christ embodies it, would be unbearable if it depended solely on human strength.

So Jesus gives his disciples words of assurance and hope: “The Father will give you another Advocate.” A Comforter, a Helper, a Counsellor — one who stands alongside. Jesus promises not merely guidance, but God’s own presence abiding within them. And this gift is not for private consolation alone. God’s Spirit of truth forms a community capable of embodying divine love.

Paul proclaims in Athens a God who “gives to all mortals life and breath and all things”; now, through the Spirit, that divine life breathes within the Church itself, calling it to become a living witness that God is not far away — a people able to bear witness even amid fear, division, and hostility.

The credibility of that witness depends not only on words, but on transformed relationships. The world will not come to know God merely through arguments about God, but through communities shaped by forgiveness, mercy, patience, and hope.

Already in the second century, Tertullian observed that the surrounding world looked at Christians with astonishment and said: “Look how they love one another.” That is the work of the Spirit.

The Advocate is God’s own heart living within us, making possible the startling and counter-intuitive obedience which is love, creating holy spaces where self-giving love can take root and flourish.

So, if you had only a few seconds to say something true about God, what would you say?

Perhaps simply this: the God we seek has already sought us. Or: the God we cannot fully understand has nevertheless drawn near to us in Christ. Or again: the unknown God has made himself known, not as an idea to master, but as a love into which we are invited.

Perhaps, in the end, that is the most convincing witness the Church can offer the world: not that we have fully understood God, but that, little by little, we are learning to love with the love by which God has first loved us.

3/ Seventh Sunday of Easter 17th May 2026

Manosque *Jane Quarmby, Licensed Lay Minister*

It was Ascension Day on Thursday – and one of the many mysteries I encounter living here in France is how a rigidly determined secular country can have a public holiday on Ascension Day? And for that matter, holidays at Christmas and Easter? Perhaps successive French governments have decided that if you can't stop it, you may as well give in with good grace. Who knows?

Ascension Day is just as important to us as those other big Christian festivals although without all the trimmings of presents, tinsel or chocolate. It's when we stop and pause, to revisit the account in Acts of the beginning of the church. We are reminded that God sets his own timetable, and that whilst the disciples are being sent out to tell people everywhere about Jesus, they will not be alone – the Holy Spirit will be sent to them to be the source of power for this evangelism, the spreading of the Christian gospel or good news by personal witness and public preaching. They are to begin locally and spread the gospel worldwide – no mean task!

This morning's passage in Acts is also the last time that Jesus appears physically to the disciples. They see him "taken up into a cloud and rising into heaven". There have been many attempts by artists to depict this ascension into heaven, mostly of someone in a long robe floating in the air. It is hard to explain or describe something we don't understand or is outside of our experience – imagine explaining television to someone who has never encountered one, who lives far outside any of the trappings of so-called civilisation. So we get these often rather strange images by well-meaning artists of heaven.

What is heaven?

For centuries people thought heaven was above them, no doubt helped by all the images of Jesus floating in the air. As time went on, that notion faded, with the discovery that the world is round. Jesus wasn't a spaceman, headed out into space, to some mysterious other dimension. He was returning to God's dimension. The Bible often uses a cloud as a sign of God's presence – think back to the Exodus from Egypt when God led the Israelites in a pillar of cloud. Jesus returned to God's dimension, having completed his work of renewal, of the uniting of God's dimension and ours. As Tom Wright puts it “on the cross he had indeed dealt with the main force of evil, decay and death itself; the creative power of God, no longer thwarted as it had been by human rebellion, could at last burst forth and produce the beginning... of that joined up heaven and earth reality which is God's plan for the whole world.” Heaven and earth are two halves of a whole – heaven is within our grasp if only we could reach out to it. Prayer, worship and scripture are our gateways.

Let's take prayer as a gateway. Jesus often prayed, but rarely aloud. Prayer has a mystery and is something many people don't understand. They ask how do I pray? Who am I praying to? Some pray directly to God, some to Jesus perhaps as a more familiar aspect of God who experienced being wholly human as well as wholly divine, and some to saints asking them to intercede with God for them. As did a friend of ours driving her husband to hospital where parking near the entrance was always nigh on impossible and she came up with “Holy Mary, full of grace, please find me a parking space.” Apparently, it worked! I'm not entirely sure about that as a prayer...

When someone is undergoing a difficult time, they may well pray to God when they don't normally – pain and hardship can sharpen the need dramatically. Every month we hold a service of prayers for healing, which is attended by just a faithful dozen or so of us, but we are asked to pray for well over 100 people.

When someone prays silently, it becomes a private conversation with God. This is even less understood by many. In our modern age, if they can't hear what's happening then they have no interest in it – like children excluded from an adult activity it becomes boring and they want to pass on. I remember at a family baptism service years ago, my parents in law, kneeling in silent prayer after the service, with others in the church trying to push past them. I stopped them with the words “they are praying, turn around and go a different way.” They looked at me in surprise and did (eventually) turn around and go another way. Now as I look back, I should have said “they are praying – join them”. Many people really don't understand prayer.

We read in all the gospels of Jesus praying but very rarely are we told what he is praying. But here we are. Jesus is celebrating that he has achieved what he came to do – he has revealed the true God to his disciples so that they believe in him and asks that he may return to his rightful position alongside God having ushered in the new heaven and new earth as the Messiah, the Son of Man, exalted worldwide, fulfilling the traditions laid out in the Psalms. Jewish prophets had told how when the Messiah takes his rightful place next to the Father, then the coming age will have arrived, signalling a new age, of new life, with new quality of living – all achieved through Jesus. He still has to endure the cross the next day to make all this happen, but when he does, he will have ushered in the new dawn and change the world forever. He will complete the final victory over death, decay, and evil. And he does. This prayer is exceptional – its way above our heads, this prayer from the Messiah, the saviour of humanity and the world, to God. But he doesn't forget us, as he prays for the people God his Father has given him. He is mindful that although he will not be in the world much longer, they, his disciples and all who believe in him, will be, and they will need to be cared for. The world which rebelled against God and chose darkness instead of light is not the world of Jesus – and not now

the world of his believers. They have transferred over to the new world of God, through Jesus. But the old world is still out there, with all its temptations and dangers, and Jesus is mindful of that so he's asking God to keep us safe in his place.

Which is immensely reassuring. We are not being asked to do the impossible, to transfer over to this new world without any support or safeguards, but we are being asked to share this with others. When I was asked at interview why I wanted to be a Reader, what I saw my role as in the church, I replied that I would like to be a gate keeper, opening the gates to belief and God's new world, to people who had no faith, no knowledge of what lay beyond, of how they could live a new life in God. I wanted to show them how much better their lives could be. I still do. But I could do with a lot of help in that mission – and that's when I look to you all here today, and everyone in our chaplaincy. Don't be shy – tell people – help them to come into the new world that Jesus has opened up for us all. Even if you have to start local and go to the ends of the earth. You won't be alone.

Amen.

4/ Seventh Sunday of Easter 17th May 2026

All Saints' Marseille *Christine Portman, Reader*

On Thursday many Christians celebrated a key festival, Ascension Day - remembering the last time the disciples experienced Jesus' physical, earthly presence. Next Sunday it's Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit. Our Christian calendar, with its rich diversity of readings, gives a shape and rhythm to our worship. It allows us to reflect in depth on the meaning of Jesus' life, death and Resurrection. It causes us to think about his teaching and to enrich our faith through seeing the different emphases and perspectives of the writers of the Gospels and the early epistles. Our Old Testament readings show us the roots of our faith, whilst the New Testament letters and the Acts of the Apostles give us insight into the history and understandings of the early Church.

But the dates we use in our Church calendar are in many ways quite arbitrary. We don't know that Jesus was born on 25th December. In fact, if we were Orthodox, we'd celebrate Christmas around 6th or 7th January. And many of our dates reflect the Jewish calendar, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost all falling on different dates each year, according to the moon.

So what are we to make of this strange period, sandwiched as it is between Ascension and Pentecost? We're in a kind of No Man's Land, remembering the time when Jesus was no longer with the disciples physically, but before they'd experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit. In verse 5, before today's reading from Acts, Jesus had told them, *you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit **not many days from now***, but we've no way of knowing how many days they stayed together before the events of Pentecost.

However, we do know what they were doing. They'd followed Jesus' instructions. They'd gone back to Jerusalem *to the room upstairs where they were staying ...* and we're told they were *constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.*

We could go on an imaginary journey now, wondering what they might have been feeling. Jesus had promised to send the Holy Spirit to be their helper, but look at their first reaction after being told that the Spirit will soon come to baptize them: *Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?* Yes, they want to trust in his promise, but they're wondering what's going to happen next. When will they see him again? Is Israel is going to be restored to its former glory? Their prayer in the Upper Room is devoted and constant. They're living in faith and hope, perhaps excited anticipation, but also it's a time of great uncertainty.

Today we can't pretend that we're not living through difficult times. We're not personally facing the suffering of those who live in war torn and famine-ravaged countries, but we're more than aware of the many, real dangers facing our world and many people are experiencing anxiety. In difficult times it's tempting to lose heart, even to imagine that Jesus is no longer with this world. So let's stay with the apostles' uncertainties for a while and imagine what it may have felt like, not only to have no Jesus, but also unable to sense the presence of the Holy Spirit. All they could do was to hold on to Jesus' promises, do as he asked and keep the faith.

If we find ourselves feeling lost and find it hard to hold on to what we've been promised, we might remember them, crowded together and praying in that Upper Room. And we can take to heart the words we heard from Peter's letter: *Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your*

adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you.

The roaring lion may be what's happening in the world. But it could just as easily be a closer enemy, something within ourselves, prowling around, *looking for someone to devour*. Whatever causes the anxiety, Peter says, don't let it get the better of you: *discipline yourselves*. God's grace has placed his Helper, his Holy Spirit, within you and through his grace, he opens up to you the gift of eternal life, that place in our hearts where we know our *only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent*.

Our Gospel reading today comes from John, chapter 17. It's the climax of the final words shared with the disciples before the arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, sometimes referred to as Jesus' High Priestly Prayer. And what does he choose to focus on? He says: *And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent*.

This is the heart of our faith. We don't simply believe that Jesus was a good man or another prophet who possessed special healing powers. We don't follow Jesus just because we think he gives a good moral example. In fact, in John 16 Jesus says that the Holy Spirit *will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness, and judgement*. No, we believe and trust in something that isn't possible to grasp with our rational minds because it can only be understood in the human heart.

Things don't have to be visible or tangible in order to be real. The physical Jesus had to leave this world. His physical presence was

experienced by several thousand people, but he needed to allow his Spirit to enter every receptive human heart. Our God knows human experience from the inside, down to the very worst we can suffer. We believe our God exists in a mysterious unity of love: the Trinity we know as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the God we recognise as living within us, as Paul said in last week's readings, the God *in whom we live and move and have our being*. God lives within us, as we live in him.

So as we wait for Pentecost, let's not imagine we're in No Man's Land. Instead let's remember that Jesus kept his promise. Out of his suffering came life. Out of death and darkness he brought resurrection. He did send the Holy Spirit, to be with us always, giving us awareness of the risen Christ walking beside us to guide, teach and protect us.

After Communion Roxana will say a prayer that sends us on a mission:
*your Son Jesus Christ has sent us into all the world
to preach the gospel of his kingdom:
confirm us in this mission,
and help us to live the good news we proclaim.*

That good news is that through Jesus' death and resurrection we know that we're forgiven, loved and free. We can live confident in Jesus' final words as recorded in Matthew: *And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'*

Amen.

5/ Sermon – Pentecost 24th May 2026 All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

Churches sometimes dream of perfect silence and composure — but Pentecost suggests God may not be overly interested in tidy silence.

Pentecost is a power-filled day. The Holy Spirit arrives with movement, unpredictability, energy, life. Sound, fire, languages: these are the images Luke uses in the Acts of the Apostles to speak of Pentecost. “And all were amazed and perplexed,” he says. But these images are only windows opening onto a deeper reality.

Which is why it is good that today's Gospel gives us another picture of the descent of the Spirit: frightened disciples behind locked doors, a quiet room, into which Jesus comes and breathes on them, saying: “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

A toddler's baptism is a wonderful example of the quiet breath version of Pentecost. No rushing wind. No tongues of fire. No dramatic sermon. Just water, promises, prayer, a child, the church family gathered around. And yet the same Holy Spirit.

The same Spirit who comes both as rushing wind and as quiet breath.

Either way, there are good reasons to be amazed and perplexed.

For perhaps this is where Pentecost begins for many of us: in those moments that interrupt our ordinary ways of seeing and understanding; moments when something larger than ourselves breaks in, and we find ourselves asking the question the crowd asks in Jerusalem: “What does this mean?”

Sometimes the Spirit amazes us. Sometimes the Spirit disturbs us. And perhaps both are necessary. For wherever there is true amazement and true perplexity, there too the Spirit may be moving — the Wind of God blowing through the settled rooms of our lives, the Breath of God awakening something new within us.

That is the power — and perhaps also the risk — of Pentecost. Because whenever the Spirit comes, something begins to move. Fear gives way to courage. Silence gives way to speech. Locked doors begin to open.

Pentecost is not the ending of a story. The coming of the Spirit is the opening of a future. That is why Peter turns to the prophet Joel: “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.”

Pentecost is a day to prophesy, to see visions, and to dream dreams.

To prophesy does not mean predicting the future. It means learning to see truthfully and speak courageously. It means looking at the world with clear eyes and asking difficult questions. What kind of world are we creating? What are we leaving to those who come after us? What happens if we continue living in the same destructive ways?

Pentecost is also a day to see visions.

Jesus himself lived with a vision of God’s kingdom: bringing good news for the poor, freedom for the captive, healing for the wounded, sight for the blind, dignity for the forgotten, reconciliation for the divided - a world shaped by love, justice, mercy, and peace.

What is our vision? What kind of world do we truly long for? And does our vision resemble the vision of Christ?

Pentecost is also a day to dream dreams — to recover a sacred imagination.

One of the saddest things that can happen to individuals, communities, even churches, is that they lose the capacity to imagine that anything could be different. We settle for what is. We stop expecting renewal and transformation.

Yet this is what the Spirit continually does: drawing us beyond ourselves, beyond our fears, our habits, and our limitations, and sending us out into the world — not in despair, but in peace, hope, and courage.

And one of the most beautiful things about Pentecost is this: the Spirit is not reserved for a few exceptional people. Peter announces an outpouring without barriers or privilege: sons and daughters, young and old, servants as well as masters. To all, the Spirit is given freely and abundantly.

Peter's words are full of hope. The Spirit is poured out on the young and the old alike. So looking at a Tiaina being baptised, we cannot help but wonder: What kind of person will she become? What visions will one day inspire her? What dreams will God plant in her heart? What gifts will she bring into the world?

We have heard Paul reminding the Church that the gift of the Spirit always takes visible form in human lives. The Spirit gives gifts — “for the common good,” says Paul — and every one of them matters.

The gifts of the Spirit are not abstractions. They become real only when they take flesh in our lives. This is how the breath of Christ continues to move through the world.

Pentecost is not only about what God does. It is also about what we are now able to become. We can be transformed. And so can the Church. We can all do something that makes a difference.

For God's Spirit is here — quietly, persistently, powerfully.

Today, as we baptise Tiaina, we are reminded that the Christian life begins not with our achievement but with God's gift. Before she can speak in long sentences, God speaks a word of love over her life. Before she can choose God, God has already chosen her. Before she can dream dreams or see visions, the Spirit is already breathing life into her.

The wind of God is always blowing. And perhaps one of the clearest signs that the Holy Spirit is still at work is that, after two thousand years, the Church is still making room for children. Still pouring water. Still speaking promises. Still believing that God is not finished with the world yet.

So on this day of Pentecost: think big, imagine freely, expect more — from God, from yourselves, and from this community. And then step into it.

For the Spirit has already been given.

6/ Sermon - Trinity Sunday 31st May 2026 All Saints' Marseille

Jane Quarmby, Licensed Lay Minister

Trinity Sunday - a day to strike anguish into the hearts of preachers! God's mysterious nature which is well beyond our ken is the central feature of today's service, in churches all over the world. And there are countless ministers today trying to make sense of the Holy Trinity, God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit – three in one.

In our church calendar it follows on in quick succession from Ascension Day, when the disciples saw Jesus for the last time as he left them to return to heaven. Then a week later we had Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in tongues like fire and gave them the gift of speaking in different languages so that they could spread the good news of God's intervention in our world via his Son Jesus Christ, which destroyed the power of death and evil. Extraordinary events, changing our world and so difficult to explain or even describe – and perhaps also to understand. How does anyone describe something like Jesus's ascension, or the Holy Spirit coming to the disciples to someone who didn't see it for themselves? And how could those events be made sense of on a wider scale?

To round off the sequence we then arrive at Trinity Sunday. Something else really difficult to understand, to explain clearly and easily. Greater theologians and priests than I have struggled with this, as has the whole church since the early days. Visual displays and metaphors have been used, like water for example, which comes as water, steam and ice, but remains essentially water. I don't know about you but that doesn't really help me too much. Or the shamrock, a leaf with 3 parts to it but is still one leaf.

I remember going to an 8 o'clock in the morning service once in a village in a rural part of England, due to be taken by a rising star in

ministry circles, looking forward to finally getting to grips with this Holy Trinity issue. It was a cold crisp morning in, with only a few of the faithful gathered for such an early morning service. When we arrived at the sermon the Rector said something like “today is Trinity Sunday, which is a very important day in our church year. It’s when we look at our faith in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I have brought this to show you and help me explain.” And she brought out a child’s toy. It was bright red, with a circle in the middle and three more circles on the three arms that came out from the central circle. And she made it spin so fast that the whole thing became a blur and all three separate arms and the centre merged into one.

Does that help you understand? I remember leaving the church somewhat bemused. But I went and bought one of the toys just in case I ever needed it.

More help is to be found, as so often, in scripture. Our readings today all focus on the Trinity or lead towards it. Isaiah emphasises the incredible nature of the creator God, who needed no advice or help in creating the world and all that is in it, his awesome knowledge and power, and how he can give power to the weak through their faith in him. Psalm 8 echoes this and wonders at how mere mortals have been treated by God in such a wonderful way, and how He gave them such authority over all living things. I am saddened that people have not taken that custodianship more seriously and responsibly over the years, when we see the consequences of our actions in decimating the flora and fauna of our world, polluting the land and the seas. We really are reaping what we have sown.

Then in the New Testament readings we encounter the Trinity in more detail. But Paul in writing to one of the communities he has worked with is more concerned with helping them and advising them on how to live as Christians, as followers of Christ, rather than in questions of

theology. He advises them to “put things in order” and to “live in peace”. They should greet one another with a holy kiss”. In his day it was usual for people to greet one another with a kiss – much as we do today in France with the *bise*. He ends by blessing them with the words which we still use so often today “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” No fanfare, just a quiet assumption that his readers would know and understand that blessing. Which presupposes a wide understanding of the nature of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In our gospel reading, Jesus declares his authority over all things, and uses it to commission his disciples to go out to every country in the world, to make everyone a disciple in turn. And he instructed them to baptise in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Most importantly he also instructs them to teach his commandments to everyone they meet. During his ministry among us he was clear that he came from the Father, from God. He was also clear that once he had returned to God, the Holy Spirit would come to help, support and guide his disciples. As it did in those very early days, when the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost, and the disciples became linguists with no courses involved or hard work learning vocabularies and verbs and all the rest of the painful business of learning a new language. They were given the gift in order to do the work of Jesus – to carry out his teachings, tell all whom they met about him and his way of life, to the ends of the earth.

And that I think is so important – to us nowadays. Rather than getting sidetracked by theology, which the early church did, with furious arguments about the Holy Trinity and its nature, with some factions denying it and others promoting all manner of variations, we need to focus on what we are being asked to do. Eventually after several hundreds of years of discussion and wrangling there was a meeting of all the different factions of the early church at Nicaea and eventually

they came up with an agreed version which has been handed down over the centuries. We will use it shortly we declare our belief in the Nicene creed.

So to understand the Trinity it makes sense to me that as a fellow Reader, Maggie Hammond, puts it " there must be the Creator God, and a sense of wonder and awe at the creation and the sustaining of all life, of the magnificence and the immensity of the universe and the mystery of our place in it. Secondly, there must be some way that the divine is manifest in our lives, in order that we can do good. For this we need to follow the example of Jesus Christ, who is the Son. And thirdly there must be a way that we sense the divine in our minds and hearts and souls, so that we can know what is right and be inspired to act in accordance with the divine will. This is the Holy Spirit. So the Trinity is our actual lived experience of God.

These three elements of the Trinity have to be held in equal balance If we focus only on the majesty and magnificence of God, then we lose the sense of how the divine should be manifested in our lives and hearts. If we focus only on Jesus, we can lose that sense of mystery and of the power of God in our own lives, and we can load everything onto Him and forget our own responsibility. And if we focus only on the ecstatic experience of the Spirit then we can become wrapped up in our own spiritual experience and forget our duty to others and the wider world."

God is mysterious. His ways are not our ways, nor are His thoughts our thoughts. We need to accept that fact, accept that we cannot possibly know or think like God, and sometimes have faith that we may only see the truth of God though a glass darkly. And that's OK.

We won't need a glass of water, a shamrock or a red whizzy triangle to help us along the way of our Christian faith. We must get out there and

live our faith, be a living example of loving one another and caring for creation. Accept God the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with all their different facets, but united as one, perhaps without trying to dissect it and understand it in too much detail. And use the gifts we have been given to make this world that much closer to heaven.