

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

**Sermon**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Trinity – 6<sup>th</sup> July 2025**

**All Saints' Marseille**

*Christine Portman, Reader*

I wonder if any of you has seen the new Ralph Fiennes film, *The Return*? He plays the ancient Greek hero, King Odysseus, returned at last to his beloved island of Ithaca after 10 long years away. After defeating the Trojans, he's been blocked at every turn by the gods as he tried to make his way home. Those of you who've read the *Odyssey* will know that his homecoming was far from easy. Aggressive suitors have turned up, each of them determined to steal his kingdom by marrying his long-suffering wife, Penelope. They harass her, beat the islanders and steal their food. They're ruining his beautiful home.

Even if you know the outcome, I'm not going to tell you how the film ends, but a closing conversation between Penelope and Eurycleia, Odysseus' childhood nurse, was striking. Reflecting on the mayhem that now surrounds them, Penelope says it would have been better to have kept the peace they'd had before her husband's return. Eurycleia simply, and truthfully, replies, "That was not peace".

That's something we might reflect upon this morning. We've just heard the instructions Jesus gave as he sent out his seventy disciples: "*See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.... Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you*".

This isn't the language of aggressive evangelisation. At the start of John's gospel, we see how Jesus approaches people: "Come," he replied, "and you will see." (John 1.39). In the same way, Philip invites Nathanael: "Come and see," (John 1.46). A respect of the other, an open invitation to find out more – that's where it all starts. And if people aren't interested, Jesus is equally clear what the

disciples must do: *“whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near’”*.

Sadly, that still isn’t understood by many Christians today. And the same applies to other religions of course. Identifying with a specific group, religious or ethnic, then working to ensure that the group becomes powerful, too often that’s the driving force behind so much evangelization, whatever the belief system. The term *jihad* means ‘effort’ in Arabic. Originally it was meant to convey the spiritual struggle within the self on behalf of God and Islam. Now for many people it’s a frightening word used to describe militant holy war against those who don’t agree with the faith. In Israel today we hear loud slogans, from *both* sides, asserting that the land from the Jordan to the sea is theirs, and theirs alone. Is this the way to Christ’s peace? Families grieving for hostages and the ruins of Gaza would suggest not.

In terms of dealing with conflict, little seems to have changed since the first Holy Week. So many of those who were wildly enthusiastic for Jesus on Palm Sunday were equally happy to reject him on Good Friday. He wasn’t the Messiah they wanted: they were looking for someone to lead an army, help them fight their way out of Roman oppression. But the mission of the seventy sent by Jesus was to spread the Good News of the kingdom of God, to let people know that through Jesus, the kingdom *“has come near”*. Seventy may refer to the belief that this was the number of nations that made up humanity – in which case it’s clear that the message was for us all.

But what is this kingdom? In the final chapter of Isaiah, the prophet ends with a prediction of a time when God’s people will finally live in peace: *“As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice”*. It’s so unfortunate when literalist interpretations of the Bible are used to distort the meaning of the original text. Isaiah’s Jerusalem was not a geographical place, but a symbol for *“the City of the Lord, Zion of the Holy One of Israel”*, where *“the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory”*, where God *“will make peace your governor and well-being your ruler”* and *“no longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction (be seen) within your borders”*. (Isaiah 60)

Yet modern Jerusalem remains a battleground, just as it has been for thousands of years. We’re living through a highly unstable period. War and preparations

for war are our daily news these days and it's very unsettling. In Europe we've been used to telling ourselves that since the end of WW2, we've been living in peace, but is this really the peace that Jesus talks about in today's Gospel? For more than seventy years, governments have spent trillions of dollars on armaments, and that's now set to increase. Worldwide the stockpile of nuclear weapons currently stands at almost 13,000, way more than is needed to cause Mutually-Assured Destruction. The acronym, MAD, is rather apt. If we reflect on that for a moment, we might, like Odysseus' nurse, decide, "That was not peace".

Likewise, those who live in Israel now might well wonder whether or not an Iron Dome of air defences and an army equipped with ultra-modern weaponry has really bought them peace. Jesus brought God's message of peace to the Jerusalem of his day: your old ways are going nowhere. Stop! Listen! Follow me and learn about the true nature of God's kingdom and his peace.

The prosperity Isaiah prophesies for Jerusalem is not simple material prosperity, but the ultimate triumph of God's kingdom. The overflowing stream of comfort that its inhabitants will experience will stem from what they all know in their hearts: *"that the power of the Lord is with his servants"*. As John Rogerson has commented, *"There is nothing wrong with hoping for a more prosperous world; but to be prosperous in the most profound sense it must include God. It must be the kingdom of God"*.

In this morning's extract from the letter to the Galatians, Paul writes, *"Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh, but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit"*. As Jesus' followers we are called to be peacemakers. In him, the kingdom of God has come near and he has shown a new way of living. As Paul goes on to say, *"a new creation is everything! As for those who will follow this rule - peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God"*.

Later in the service, Jamie will say: *We are fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God, through Christ our Lord, who came and preached peace to those who were far off and those who were near. The peace of the Lord be always with you. We'll respond, And also with you. Then we'll offer one another a sign of peace.* Christ's peace comes to us when we acknowledge that we constantly fall short of what God wills for us. We are blessed by his peace when we turn around and walk his way.

Just before we join together in the Communion, we'll say together twice: *Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us.* We finish with, *Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, grant us peace.* God's ways are not our ways; his thoughts are not our thoughts. When we willingly accept that we're often in the wrong and in need of his mercy, when we truly intend *Thy will be done*, our hearts can begin to open up to the riches of his kingdom and true peace.

Amen

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

**Sermon – 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**13<sup>th</sup> July 2025**

**Église du Sacré-Coeur, Oppède**

*The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain*

Someone once suggested to me that the parable of the Good Samaritan was an easy one to preach about. In one sense they were right. It's one of the 'feelgood' passages of the Gospel. There's apparently a clear sense of right and wrong. What is asked of us doesn't sound too difficult – being kind to people and practical. And it has a happy ending.

For the lawyer asking Jesus the question, it also starts out as an easy encounter. He seems to know the answer to his own question. 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' - 'Love God and love your neighbour'. Jesus confirms to him: 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'

The conversation could have ended there, as it does in Matthew and Mark's Gospels. But Luke, with his characteristic focus on how Jesus's message is for the whole world, goes further. He recounts that the lawyer wanted to 'justify' himself by asking a further question. It's not clear why. Perhaps he wants Jesus to give him greater affirmation (of the 'I wish all disciples were as clever as you' type). Or perhaps he wants to justify why he has asked a question at all if he already knew the answer. Or it may be a case of genuine doubt. Some rabbinic teaching of that time confined 'neighbour' to those who shared the same

religious affiliation. The lawyer may have wanted to know if Jesus agreed with this. Whatever the reason, Luke leads us through this into deeper territory that is suddenly less easy.

Jesus tells the story of an attack on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. If you have visited the Holy Land, you may have seen it - a steep road, twisting through barren red rocks, in the past notorious for its bandits. It was known as the Red Road, or the Road of Blood. To be fair to the priest and the Levite (who would have ministered in the Temple), they had every reason to pass by on the other side. The body in the ditch might have been a decoy, a trap that could have resulted in them being attacked themselves. The body might have been, or become, a dead body, so that by touching it they would have been prevented from carrying out their religious duties.

But the Samaritan is moved with pity and crosses the road. It is hard for us today to get a real sense of the shock that this example would have caused to Jesus's hearers. The Samaritans were descended from a population who had occupied the land after it was conquered by the Assyrians. They had opposed the rebuilding of the Temple and they worshipped differently. So they were social outcasts, regarded as ceremonially unclean and religious heretics. They were the hated 'other'. Notice how at the end, when Jesus asks the lawyer which of the three was a neighbour to the one who needed help, the reply comes back 'The one who showed him mercy'. He cannot even bring himself to utter the word 'Samaritan'.

The more I reflect on this parable, the more it seems to be saying something important about what I believe is one of the greatest scourges of our time: our human tendency to 'other' people who are different from ourselves – at its worst, the human habit of scapegoating.

A hundred years ago the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber wrote a book called *I and Thou*, in which he noted that when dealing with people we sometimes unconsciously reduce them to an object, an 'It'. He cites the example of the ticket seller. Often we don't engage with them as an individual – they are simply fulfilling a function for us. By contrast, in other encounters, we engage fully with the other person, treating them as another subject, another 'I'.

The point about this is that, when humans begin to treat one another as objects, all kinds of dysfunction arise. The worst kind of dysfunction is scapegoating. Some of you have heard me speak of this before. By the psychological mechanism of scapegoating, our uncomfortable feelings about ourselves (such as envy or guilt) are projected onto another, more vulnerable, person or group. It works like this. I feel bad about myself, so I pick on someone who is obviously 'worse' than me, and then I feel better because I am not as bad as *them*. (Jesus highlighted this mechanism at work in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican.)

Scapegoating also works to overcome my sense of powerlessness in the face of things in my life that cause me unhappiness - for example, economic uncertainty. I can say that everything is the fault of the 'bad' people. In Western societies, scapegoating has reached epidemic proportions. Mostly it is directed at those who are 'different' - those of different nationality, ethnicity, social status or sexual identity from the person doing the scapegoating. Politicians are currently trying to outdo one another in sounding toughest on immigration. 'For of course it is the immigrants who are to blame for everything.' Parts of the Church of England at present are scapegoating the LGBTQIA+ community. 'For of course if the church were rid of them, everything would be fine.'

Scapegoating needs to be called out. Not just in others, but in ourselves. Who do I make assumptions about and judge without knowing them as another 'I'? We all do it. And Jesus knew this. If we study the miracle stories, we see that many of them involved bringing people in from the margins, especially those the religious authorities had excluded: people who were disabled, people who were unwell, people who were bleeding, people who were foreign. The scribes and Pharisees, with their anxious, rigid application of the Levitical purity codes, lost sight of their common humanity with the people they were 'othering'. The story of the Good Samaritan shows this in action – while the so-called 'good' religious people hurry on down the road, ironically it is the one treated as an outsider who responds to human need.

You can tell when scapegoating is taking place by the violence with which it is pursued, when the targeted person or group is accused of something out of proportion to reality. And when scapegoating extends to whole groups it can become particularly dangerous. In the 1930s it took a very sinister turn, culminating in the crimes against humanity of the latter years of the Second World War. Politicians who lull their voters into thinking that 'everything would all be all right if "they" weren't there' - foreigners, migrants, asylum seekers, Jews, sexual minorities - should be reminded where that train of thought inexorably leads if left unchecked: Auschwitz.

Last week marked the twentieth anniversary of the London transport bombings of 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005. Four young men, one of them only 18, detonated bombs alongside their fellow travellers because they had been brainwashed into believing they were irreconcilably different from them. The hated 'other'. In his message marking the anniversary, King Charles urged people to use the day 'to reaffirm our commitment to building a society where people of all faiths and



backgrounds can live together with mutual respect and understanding, always standing firm against those who would seek to divide us’.

Jesus of Nazareth consistently resisted the human tendency towards ‘othering’. In his words and actions – his parables and miracles - he deliberately included those excluded by the society of his time. So let us, in his name, catch ourselves before we fall into ‘othering’, and always be on the alert for instances of scapegoating. Let us treat each person we encounter as another ‘I’ and not an ‘It’. Let us strive to uphold the dignity of all, find ways to celebrate our common humanity rather than point the finger at our differences. And let us never give up in proclaiming God’s inclusive love. We ask this in the name of the one who, for doing so, was belittled and beaten, spat upon and scourged, who suffered, died and was buried, and is risen, ascended and glorified, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

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

**Sermon – Fourth Sunday after Trinity**

**Sea Sunday**

**13<sup>th</sup> July 2025**

**All Saints' Marseille**

*The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain*

Few of Jesus' stories have captured the imagination as much as the parable we heard today. Alongside the prodigal son, the Samaritan has become part of our shared language and cultural memory. His name is given to hospitals, nursing homes, rescue charities, even to laws protecting those who stop to help a stranger on the roadside.

Can we still feel the sting of this parable and its beauty afresh? Because it is a story for now. For our world, our cities, even for our seas. How do I respond to those in need—whether near at hand or far off, whether on dry land or crossing distant waters?

There is a question hanging in the air, at the beginning of the story. A lawyer steps forward to ask Jesus: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" There is something admirable in the question. He wants the depth of things. And when Jesus turns the question back on him, the lawyer shows he knows the answer: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself."

That is already a life's work. And Jesus says simply: "Do this, and you will live."

Does the lawyer try to protect himself from the weight of that commandment? He asks: "Who is my neighbour?" As if he were really asking: "Who is not my neighbour? Where can I draw the line? Outside my front door? Beyond my village? Outside my group, my people, my faith, my nation? We cannot be neighbours with everyone, can we?"

We may flatter ourselves, thinking we are more open than people were in Jesus' day. In truth, we too draw our circles carefully: family first, then friends, then those who look or think or live as we do.

Perhaps we cannot help it. Science tells us we are wired this way. Human beings have always looked after their kin, their tribe. It is a natural instinct—self-defence, survival. We care first for those closest to us.

And so, the ancient commandment in the Scripture, "Love your neighbour as yourself,"<sup>1</sup> was often understood to mean: love your fellow Israelite, your own people. Over time, that circle began to widen. In the Judaism that developed beyond Israel, there came the teaching: "Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you." Rabbi Hillel, a century before Christ, said: "This is the entire Torah. Everything else is commentary."<sup>2</sup> And in the Wisdom of Ben

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<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 19.18

<sup>2</sup> The Babylonian Talmud

Sirach, we hear it said: “The compassion of human beings is for their neighbour, but the compassion of the Lord is for every living thing.”<sup>3</sup>

The widening of the heart—from kin, to neighbour, to all humanity—is part of the story Jesus is about to tell.

And so, the element of surprise in this parable must not be overlooked. For Jesus’ first listeners, a jolt came when Jesus named the one who stopped to help: a Samaritan.

To us, that word sounds almost neutral. But in Jesus’ time, a Samaritan was the last person an ordinary Jew would want to turn to for help. The enmity between Jews and Samaritans was ancient and bitter. They disagreed on everything that mattered: how to honour God, how to interpret Scripture, where true worship should take place. Each side was fully convinced the other was in the wrong. Social contact was avoided.

By choosing a Samaritan as the figure of mercy, Jesus was dismantling the very notion of the invisible lines we draw between “us” and “them.” He was asking his listeners to imagine that a person might be more than the sum of their political, racial, cultural, or economic identity. With this unexpected character, Jesus redraws the map of human concern.

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<sup>3</sup> Sirach 18.13

But the parable is not only meant to surprise; it also holds up a mirror. Alongside the Samaritan, there are others in the story: some respectable, religious people, who see the wounded man and walk by on the other side.

Here, the parable becomes uncomfortably close to home. It is about the choice each one faces between compassion and indifference. Between crossing over to help and crossing over to avoid. Between stepping closer and stepping away. That is the heart of it. When we meet the vulnerable, on a roadside or at sea, near at hand or far away, do our actions tell a story of neglect, or one of mercy?

Some have called indifference the plague of our century. We see this at every level of life—from small, everyday acts of disregard to silence in the face of the great wounds of our time. Poverty, hunger, sickness, war, forced migration, environmental collapse leave injured people by the roadside in today's world. And too often, we simply walk past, become numb, detached.

And yet, the Gospel offers us no room for such detachment.

The lawyer had asked for a definition— “Who is my neighbour?”— Jesus offered a description of compassion: that deep stirring of the heart in the face of another's suffering, and the decision to act. He presented the essential choice we must all make if we wish to rebuild our wounded world: will we imitate the Samaritan?

How? In doing three things. First, he sees the man in need—not only as a problem, a risk or a burden, but as a neighbour. Second, the Samaritan draws near. Where others passed by at a distance, widening the gap between themselves and the man in the ditch, the Samaritan crosses over. He opened himself to the man's pain, to his need, even to possible danger. Third, and most crucially, he does not merely feel pity—he acts. Compassion is not sentiment alone—it is empathy put into action.

These three movements—seeing, drawing near, and showing active mercy—are at the heart of Christ-like living. For this is the pattern of God's own compassion: in Jesus, God saw our vulnerability, drew near to us in the Incarnation, and acted on the Cross, carrying us beyond the power of death.

Today, as we mark Sea Sunday, we remember a particular community of neighbours: the world's nearly 2 million seafarers, men and women who face not only hard work and long absences but also deep isolation, and sometimes exploitation, even abandonment in foreign ports.

Seafarers often embody compassion—helping one another in crisis, responding to migrant boats or distress calls even at risk to themselves. The Mission to Seafarers, alongside ministries like Stella Maris or the AMAM<sup>4</sup> here in Marseille, seeks to reflect that same compassion: offering a place to rest, a listening ear, a way to contact home, a moment of worship, a quiet chapel, or practical help when things go wrong.

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<sup>4</sup> Association Marseillaise d'Accueil des Marins

Our own chaplaincy has deep roots in this ministry and it was shaped from the beginning by the Mission to Seafarers. Much has changed since those early days. British sailors no longer call regularly at our port. Seafarers no longer come knocking at the church door. And yet, the call to compassion remains. Members of our chaplaincy continue to help at the Seamen's Club, offering welcome and assistance to seafarers of all nationalities and faiths—no conditions, no exclusions. Through such small and steady acts of service, people encounter something of the living heart of God's compassion for all his children.

"Who is my neighbour?" the lawyer asked, hoping for a clear definition. Jesus answered with a story refusing to draw lines. Your neighbour, he suggests, is the one who surprises you with compassion, who crosses the boundaries you thought were fixed, who upends your neat categories and shows you a fresh face of God.

"Go and do likewise"—this is not merely a moral instruction, but an invitation to live a different kind of life. Eternal life is a way of being now: a life shaped by mercy, by drawing near, by seeing others not as strangers or burdens but as fellow children of God.

Go and do likewise. See the need around you. Draw close. Show mercy. Extend kindness. Live out your faith not just in thought or word, but in quiet, practical acts of love. Not just thinking love—but doing it. And in that doing, discover life in all its fullness.

Amen

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

**Sermon – 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**20<sup>th</sup> July 2025**

**All Saints' Marseille**

*The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain*

Those of you who have worked in organisations may be familiar with the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator. Based on Jungian psychology, it's a personality test devised to identify people's natural strengths and preferences – how they are 'wired' - with the idea of helping organisations to function more effectively as people understand one another better. One of the textbooks on the subject has the engaging title: 'I'm not mad – I'm just not you!'.

The story of Martha and Mary in our Gospel reading looks like a classic description of people - two sisters - who seem to be wired differently. It is ironic that this Gospel is set for today, when we have a full church, lunch afterwards for 40 people in a building whose only catering infrastructure consists of a cold tap. If ever a community needed Martha – and if ever Martha needed help - it is surely on a day like today. So what is this story about? Is Jesus really just saying, 'Don't worry, lunch will cook itself'?

No. For, like many of his encounters, this one is many-layered, and therein lies its value. The story has often been heard too simplistically – 'Mary good, Martha bad', or 'a life of contemplation is superior to a life of action' – but that would



be to miss its subtleties. Martha is in fact one of the figures in the Gospels most valued by Jesus. In John's account, at the raising of Lazarus, it is Martha who utters the words reserved to Peter in the other Gospels – the climactic moment of recognition, when she says 'Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God'<sup>5</sup>. Mary is described in our reading as sitting 'at the Lord's feet'. In the Scriptures this is shorthand for being a disciple, the culmination of which is to become a teacher oneself. Contemplation that leads to action. Throughout Luke's Gospel Jesus insists that it is not just hearing the word of God that matters but acting upon it. This story comes just after the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is all about love in action. So this domestic 'moment' is not so much about personality types: it opens a window onto what it means to be a follower of Christ.

Mary discerns that the one in front of her is what Paul refers to as 'the image of the invisible God'. That if she wants to know what God is like, she need look no further than Jesus of Nazareth, the teacher from Galilee who lived both with absolute openness to the transcendent mystery of the divine, and offered an unconditional response of compassion to the needs of those around him – loving God and loving neighbour. She senses in her heart that this is the one humanity has been waiting for, whom her sister will later identify by name. In whose name we meet this morning.

A few weeks ago, while I was recovering from surgery, I was given a novel by Tracy Chevalier called *The Glass Maker*. Set in Murano, the islands near Venice famous for glassmaking, the novel uses an unusual narrative device in which the author moves her characters through time, picking them up and putting them

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<sup>5</sup> John 11.27

down again amid different historical events - plagues, wars, changes of regime. She likens it to skimming a stone across water, watching it touch down at different intervals. And so the narrative moves through time, yet you are always with the characters in the moment they are living, the moment that is now.

In the final pages we are shown how loyalty to a relationship is transmitted through generations. The main character, a woman glassmaker, remains loyal to the love of her life, who left Murano for the mainland while they were both young. In the novel he becomes a sort of Christ-like figure, a model of unconditional love who every few years sends her a token of that love in the form of a tiny glass ornament shaped like a dolphin, the symbol by which he asked to be remembered. Like bread and wine for the earliest Christians, who - as with the glassmaker in the novel - believed that Christ would soon return.

If you don't want me to spoil the surprise of how the novel ends, block your ears for the next thirty seconds. It turns out that on the mainland time moves differently (i.e. normally) and that the man the glassmaker loved had lived a normal lifespan, whereas her story has continued across centuries. So it turns out that she has kept her loyalty to him for over 500 years, and the little glass dolphins she has been receiving have been sent to her by twelve generations of his descendants, because their ancestor had asked them to do this.

It struck me that it is not unlike how the Christian faith is transmitted. How the story of the teacher from Galilee has been transmitted through generations, inspiring each one with its invitation. An invitation that challenges, liberates, enables things to change. That refuses to take no for an answer in the face of human need.

Like in the novel, I became aware of the impact of this story on my own family, a tiny example of how faith is transmitted across generations - a great-great

grandfather, great-grandfather and grandfather, each inspired to devote their lives as priests to tell of the gospel to another generation, each in the moment they were living.

The same notion of transmission is true of the list of Chaplains of All Saints that hangs behind the pulpit. Long after my name had been added to it and forgotten, there will - please God - be people here who still serve in celebrating the sacraments, preaching the word, encouraging community and caring for those in need - each in their own generation, in the moment that is now. It's a promise of faith, a ground for hope and an invitation to love - the three so-called theological virtues, which form the logo that we use for our chaplaincy, in the shape of a Camargue cross.

If there's one thing that I hope I have been able to impart to you in my time here, it is the notion that at the centre of our common life there are four gestures that matter. On the night before he died Jesus had supper with his friends, during which he took bread, blessed it, broke it and shared it with them. That taking, blessing, breaking and sharing has been called 'the proper pattern and shape for all human life'<sup>6</sup>. Our lives offered to God, lived thankfully, broken and shared in the service of others. It matters that we do this, in remembrance of him. That we come to this place week by week, even when it is cold and wet, or baking hot. When we feel tired or low, even let down or hurt by the institutional church. For the message of love matters more. The pattern of taking, blessing, breaking and sharing is stronger than all the ups and downs of our lives, stronger than all the violence and pain and injustice in the world. This pattern will, in the end, prevail. For it comes from God, and we enact it in remembrance of Christ.

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Mayne, *Pray, Love, Remember* (1998)

Soon it will be time to say farewell. I will miss this community deeply, in all its manifestations – Marseille, Aix, the Luberon, Manosque, our online congregation, our work with seafarers and migrants, and our ecumenical partnerships. I feel very blessed to have been part of it.

As he took his leave of his friends, Jesus asked them to love one another. Across the world countless millions of followers of Christ are doing just that. As you do here, and do it so well. Like Abraham, welcoming the stranger, ready to entertain angels unaware. Please go on offering an inclusive welcome to all who cross this threshold. It is one of the hallmarks of this community.

And may God bless you as you continue on your journeys of faith. Thank you for allowing me to share with you this part of the pilgrim's road, as we journey on until we reach our ultimate home in God, our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, to whom be the glory.

Amen.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

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

**Sermon – 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**27<sup>th</sup> July 2025**

**All Saints' Marseille**

*The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain*

I once heard a story of a young child during the Second World War who announced to his family one evening: 'I prayed that it would snow at Christmas, and it didn't. I prayed that I would be given a puppy, and I wasn't. I prayed that God would keep my father from being killed in the War, and he didn't. I'm not going to pray to God any more.' How do we square that small child's experience with the words of Jesus in today's Gospel reading: 'Ask, and it will be given to you ... for everyone who asks receives'?

There is a mystery about prayer. We have probably all known times when we feel that a prayer has been answered, when there is a sense of God's presence in the situation and we feel blessed and full of gratitude. But many of us have probably also known times when the thing longed for didn't happen, when heaven seemed silent and we felt bereft and alone with our need. We may have been left wondering whether it was because we didn't pray hard enough, or well enough. And if we didn't receive what we asked for, are we, like the child in the story, to give up on prayer altogether? I have known more than one devout Christian who, faced with this kind of experience, has done just that. But in the extract from Luke's Gospel we heard this morning, Jesus urges his disciples not

to give up on prayer, but to persist in it. Yet what should we be asking for when we pray? That's a question Jesus's disciples asked him too, as we heard in our reading this morning.

A few years ago, the Feast of St Luke (known as 'the beloved physician') fell on a Sunday, and we looked at three different types of prayer we might want to pray for someone we love who is ill. First, we can pray for their recovery. Even if the evidence is that they are unlikely to survive, somehow there is a deep instinct in us to will God to bring life from death. It's a prayer of resurrection. Secondly, we might wish to pray that our loved one will find strength in their suffering, will find courage and patience to last them through the time of distress and a sense that God in Christ will be alongside them. It's a prayer of incarnation.

Finally, there is the third kind of prayer. If we cannot find it in us to ask for a miracle, but we want to pray for more than acceptance, we might pray that if this illness has to be, then let it somehow be not only a time of pain and sorrow but also of grace and gift. May it be a time when the person we care for finds a depth of love, companionship and truth; 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 those others face challenges themselves, and a piercing insight into the heart of God. We pray that our loved one may discover their real nature and destiny and see a glimpse of heaven beyond. That's a prayer of transfiguration.

Prayer in the end is about holding before God the people and situations which we carry on our hearts. It has been said that part of what prayer is doing is trying

to get ourselves into a position where we can say 'Thy will be done' and let go of control, to let God be God. There is something about sending out our deepest desire into God's infinite and loving presence, as strongly as we can, knowing that it is the most we can do and that it comes from the depths of our hearts. Knowing too that the outcome is not ours to dictate, but trusting that the response will be loving, albeit in ways we may not fully understand. Which, if we think about it, is the prayer Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane: 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.' (Luke 22.42.)

When Jesus's disciples asked him how they should pray, he gave them a few short sentences which offered them an insight and an invitation into his own relationship of intimacy and intensity with God, a relationship characterised by the sort of love that a parent gives to a beloved child. It has been said that the prayer we know as the Lord's Prayer contains in many ways everything humanity needs for its wellbeing. The version given in Luke's Gospel is slightly shorter than the one in Matthew, on which is based the prayer we use in church. But the essence is the same.

The Lord's Prayer contains three direct requests. The first is 'Give us'. 'Give us today our daily bread.' In other words, help us to live in the present tense, not to be so burdened by guilt or scarred by hurt that we live in the past, and let us not be so anxious about the unknown or obsessed with a particular goal that we become prisoners of the future. Give us enough, it says – not so much that we don't know what to do with it or so little that we can't see past our own need. 'Give us' is a prayer to be given the grace to live in the present.

The second request is 'Forgive us'. It is a request to take away the burden of the things we have done and of the things others have done to us. Forgiveness is a complicated thing, but it's vital to our wellbeing and the wellbeing of those around us. Allowing ourselves to be dispossessed of our hatred for someone whom we perceive has done us harm. It doesn't mean that wrong things haven't been done. But it does mean getting to a point where we can say: 'Those wrong things done to me or by me will not always determine the meaning of my life'. To be permanently consumed by hatred or resentment or guilt is to confine ourselves in a world in which the only things that matter are the bad things that have been done to us or by us. And that's a very small world. 'Forgive us' as we forgive is a prayer to be given back the past.

The last request is about the future. 'Deliver us.' Offering God our fear that the future will bring challenges that are too much for us. The request comes in two halves – fear of ourselves, of our own weakness ('Lead us not into temptation') and fear of what lies outside us, of the things we can't control ('Deliver us from evil').

Give us. Forgive us. Deliver us. If we can pray those three things, we will find that we begin to live more abundant lives, not burdened by regret for the past or fear for the future. The prayer says those three things. For the present, give us what we need and the grace to recognise what matters. For the past, forgive us what we can't undo as we forgive what others have done to us. And for the future, don't let us be overwhelmed by something that's too much for us.

One commentator has written: 'The Lord's Prayer says everything we need to say in words and brings us into God's presence as surely as the disciples were



present to the person of Jesus. We can pray with confidence, certain that our prayer is heard.'

I hope the child in the story may have discovered that when he grew up.

Amen.