

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

Sermons – July 2026

1/ 5th Sunday after Trinity - 5th July 2026 All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

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Jane Quarmby, Licensed Lay Minister

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The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

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The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

1/ 5th Sunday after Trinity – 5th July 2026 All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

When the late, great soprano Dame Joan Sutherland was asked to name her favourite Bible verse, she replied with the words from our Gospel reading today: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' She explained that she had sung them many times as a soloist in Handel's Messiah, and they never failed to move her. Chapter 11, verse 28 of Matthew's gospel is undoubtedly one of the most memorable and comforting verses in the whole of scripture.

Many of us, much of the time, feel as though we are dragging heavy burdens – of pressures, responsibilities, other people's or our own expectations, a sense

of unworthiness, financial worries, health concerns, uncertainty about the future. But Jesus offers us his yoke to share. How does this help?

Hanging outside my cottage in the southwest of France is an old farm yoke. One might assume it's something constricting, uncomfortable to wear. But in fact a yoke is the opposite: it's designed to help animals pull a plough or cart more easily. It's more comfortable for the two who are yoked together, because it enables them to walk in step and share the load evenly. The one who is yoked to another is better able to bear the load.

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

There's a prayer of blessing which refers to 'the simplicity of the Gospel'. There *is* a simplicity in Jesus's message which we do well to hold onto. He often challenged the Pharisees for making religion too complicated, becoming obsessed with detail. Their expertise in the Law had prevented them from recognising the coming of God's kingdom and God's Messiah. Instead, Jesus found an audience among the ones who found themselves unable to keep the Law in all its rigour and who were therefore considered outcasts: the tax collectors and sinners, who heard his message and felt the force of his inclusive

welcome. It's a human tendency that, in anxiety, we fall back on rules and regulations. Anxiety is one of the things that holds us back from being the people we could more fully become.

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

Paul seems to have suffered similar agonies. One wonders what the source of his anxiety was in today's passage. Having grown up a strict Pharisee, he would have been fearful of anything that would condemn him by reference to the strict moral code he tried to live by. Thirty years ago, a Bishop in the US Episcopal Church, John Shelby Spong, caused a stir in suggesting that what Paul was struggling with in our Epistle today was what conservatives in church circles refer to as 'same-sex attraction'. It's an interesting theory. It would certainly have terrified Paul, the strict Pharisee, to find his feelings at odds with the teachings of his tradition ('I do not understand ... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. ... Wretched man that I am!') If Spong's theory is correct, it would add a layer of irony to the fact that, two thousand years later, it is often a few

short sentences from Paul's letters - sentences that are largely misunderstood and/or taken out of their context - which are used by some churches to condemn those of LGBT+ identity, at a time when such identity is now much better understood as being simply a normal part of human variety.

Whether or not there is truth in Spong's theory, and whatever may have been burdening Paul's conscience in our Epistle, I suspect that what did happen to him is that in his youth he was secretly drawn to what he had been taught were the heretical views of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, so he set out to persecute the followers, to suppress them so completely that they would no longer be there to tempt him. But there was something deeper in Paul that responded to the unconditional welcome of Jesus, offering him – like Luther - a sense of acceptance above and beyond his incapacitating sense of sinfulness, a welcome which in the end he found irresistible, and he sank to his knees in a mixture of gratitude and terror on the Damascus road. 'Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!'

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

What matters is to love, and thereby to live in peace. Jesus's own summary of the Law – that we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength

and our neighbour as ourselves – is a good test if we are about to do something we are unsure about. Will this be for the glory of God? Will it be for the wellbeing of another person? Am I building up, or tearing down? Will it, when all is said and done, be loving? And what would Jesus have done?

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

Amen.

2/ Sixth Sunday after Trinity - 12th July 2026 All Saints' Marseille
Jane Quarmby, Licensed Lay Minister

Today we would normally be focused on Seaman's Sunday in our service, but in fact we will be marking that day next week. So instead, we have a more agricultural theme which begins with the reading from Isaiah, talking about the water necessary for crops coming from heaven and not returning there until it has done its work in giving life to plants and food to "the eater". A very all-embracing expression which doesn't differentiate between birds, animal or humans. And he gave us the lovely phrase which follows and is now a hymn too – you shall go out in joy and be led back in peace – trees of the field shall clap their hands.

As we know only too well here in Provence, nothing will grow without water other than some spiteful prickly plants designed to withstand drought like thistles. They have long roots which go deep into the ground and find moisture.

Isaiah draws a parallel between the life-giving rain and snow, and his word which is also life giving. It too won't return to him without bearing fruit. His words were special – if only people would listen to him and take them to heart, act on them. He foretold the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, describing accurately that he would be the Prince of Peace who was the obedient, suffering servant. In fact, the Book of Isaiah in the Old Testament has more overtones of the New Testament than any other.

He lived around 700 BC, at a time of virtually constant warfare in the Middle East and spoke out against social and political evil. The people were outwardly religious but not inwardly. Religious hypocrites who said all the right things but it was only skin deep – much like the Pharisees that Jesus would encounter. He challenged everyone at all levels to live by God's word, not just speak it – and that is often hard to do. Isaiah opposed idolatry, insincerity, and all forms of rebellion against God. He had a long ministry and must have been frustrated so many times that his prophecies and admonishments were ignored or misunderstood by so many.

Our psalm today also dwells on the generosity of God, again in beautiful language which people who lived off the land would have understood. God provides water, rivers, and good fertile land which produces corn and supports huge flocks of sheep.

Paul tackles not the provision of water and food for the body, but for the spirit. He emphasises Isaiah's message that it isn't enough to pay lip service to the word of God, whilst remaining firmly wedded to the transitory pleasures of the flesh. Christ's followers are reborn spiritually and so must remain true to that rebirth, not be hypocritical and try to have their cake and eat it. To be a Christian requires self-discipline and focus on the life-giving spirit which Jesus brought.

And then we come to the parable of the Sower, from Jesus. This must be one of the most well known of all his stories, giving rise the expression often used nowadays when a message hasn't got across "some fell on stony ground." He often spoke in parables – stories to illustrate a point, to make it understandable to everyone from the

illiterate to the well-educated, and he used everyday life examples. This one would have been easily approached by his audience, all of whom would have been close to the land. It's still recognisable today by farmers and growers.

In his day seed would be sown by hand – someone with a basket or bag of seeds would walk up and down the field throwing the seed around in a broad arc. Not for them the computerised drilling machines so beloved by today's farmers when every seed is placed at exactly the right depth in exactly the right place. It was hit and miss. Seed would be blown about and not every one would sprout. Birds would have a feast, weeds would smother them, some would fall on rock or thin soil so they shrivelled up and died before they in turn could set seed. So usually, you would have to sow a lot more seed than you would eventually reap. Although the sower in this parable seems unusually careless!

Nature knows all about this – you could say it's God's design – most plants produce way more seeds than they need to. I left a couple of carrots in the ground last year and this year I have two big bushes of attractive flowers busily going to seed. I'll get hundreds from those two little carrots. If I look after them, I could grow enough carrots to keep the village going all year. God is generous to a fault – all we have to do is appreciate his generosity and tend our crops.

Much as we need to tend our spiritual crop too. Our spiritual harvest. Jesus isn't talking about plant seeds, as he went on to explain. He is looking for a harvest of the soul from his words.

He explains to the crowd on the bank – who could hear him clearly due to the unusual acoustics in that particular place where an inlet of the lake forms a natural amphitheatre – that he is talking about people hearing about the Kingdom of God and not acting upon it for all sorts of reasons. If they hear it but don't understand it, the devil will come and take those words from their memory. Some people will hear it and be very enthusiastic but as soon as life gets difficult, and it becomes hard to live a Christian life, they'll give up. Others are smothered by the trials of everyday living, the "cares of the world" and by the temptations presented by the pursuit of wealth. Consumerism, the next must have fashionable shiny bauble gets in the way.

It's always hard to judge what people take in when you talk to them. Are they listening with all their attention, or are they thinking about something else altogether like what's for Sunday lunch? Or are they too keen to get their own ideas across to give the words of someone else any credence? Perhaps they are too tired to concentrate, or perhaps they can't actually hear individual words. It's an occupational hazard for preachers – wondering what people have really taken in from your words. Often, I find, people have taken in something that has resonated with them, which hadn't occurred to me. They will take some of my words, and think about them, and come up with a different message to the one I thought I was giving. And that's fine – we all have our own road to travel and our own individual signposts.

Jesus was all too aware of these pitfalls, and understood that his listeners were a mixed cross section of the community, with different experiences and different viewpoints; he knew all too well what

obstacles would come up for them to really follow his teaching every day of their lives. He knew that the people were looking for a glorious revolution sweeping through against the Roman occupiers, not a piecemeal change to hearts and minds. They wanted it all to happen on one day – God changing the world and judging all its inhabitants. Which would be fine if everyone had a clear conscience wouldn't it? God's new order, all the evil people judged and thrown out, all the good people rewarded. There's a snag with that though – it's great if you are in the right group, not so good if you aren't. And God thankfully doesn't work like that -He knows that that most people make mistakes, need time to work out how to live as God wants us to, need guidance and patience to figure out where we might go wrong.

So, like the sower of seeds, Jesus carried on teaching, giving out his wisdom and his guidance because he knew that there would be some people who would be fertile ground, who would take his words to heart, who would despite all the temptations and difficulties they would meet, would flourish. And in their turn would work hard to really understand the meaning of his teaching and pass it on to others. And it can be hard to understand, it needs effort and study and thought. Words, like seeds, get implanted. It's up to us to decide what to do with them – whether to be fertile soil and change the world, or whether we like the idea but find it all too difficult.

3/ Sea Sunday 19th July 2026 All Saints' Marseille
The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

When I was growing up, I lived in a city a long way from the sea. The sea meant summer holidays, sunshine, freedom from school, and the sheer delight of standing before something vast and beautiful.

For my generation, the sea also stirred the imagination. Throughout my childhood and teenage years, beautifully illustrated editions of Jules Verne's *Extraordinary Voyages* appeared one after another: *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas*, *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras*, *The Mysterious Island*, *Dick Sand: A Captain at Fifteen*, *Two Years' Vacation*, and many more. Those stories filled our minds with images of distant lands, hidden islands, fearless captains, and extraordinary adventures.

For many people, the sea speaks of mystery and wonder, of beauty and danger. It reminds us of the depths of human emotion and of the forces of nature that remain beyond our control. Like life itself, the sea can be calm and life-giving one day, stormy and threatening the next. It is a place of uncertainty, but also of discovery and transformation.

On Sea Sunday, we are invited to look beyond the romance of the sea. For millions of people, the sea is not a place of escape or adventure but a place of work. It is their livelihood, their home for months at a time, and often a place of loneliness, hardship, and risk. Today, we are

invited to consider the sea as the setting in which countless men and women live and labour.

This year has brought particular challenges. The conflict affecting the Strait of Hormuz has left thousands of seafarers caught up in circumstances entirely beyond their control: stranded in dangerous waters, unable to return home when their contracts ended, while many waiting ashore have been unable to begin new contracts. For months, many have lived with uncertainty, as hopes of a safe return were repeatedly raised and then disappointed.

Their experience reminds us that behind the goods that fill our shops and arrive at our ports are real people, often unseen and largely forgotten, whose daily work carries significant risks. Sea Sunday invites us to remember them, to pray for them, and to recognise in them our neighbours, whom Christ calls us to love.

The Bible knows that the sea is both beautiful and dangerous, a place of abundance and of fear, of journeys and of storms. Again and again, God's people discover that faith does not spare them from the deep waters, but that God meets them there.

That is the promise we hear in Isaiah, who speaks to people who feel vulnerable and uncertain, and God says to them: *“Do not fear... When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.”*

God does not promise that there will be an easy journey, with no storms or dangers. He promises something far greater: *his presence*. The waters may still rise, but they will never separate his people from his care.

Paul echoes the same confidence in his letter to the Romans. He names hardship, distress, persecution, famine, danger and the sword—almost every threat imaginable. On Sea Sunday we might add storms, piracy, conflict, long separations from family, and the loneliness of months at sea. Yet Paul concludes that nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” God's love reaches across every ocean and every border.

Our Gospel takes us a step further. In Jesus' account of the final judgement, he does not ask whether people have been successful or influential. Christ asks whether they have recognised him in those who were hungry, thirsty, sick, imprisoned, or strangers.

Let us hear those words with seafarers in mind. Every port is unfamiliar to them. They arrive as strangers, often with little opportunity to leave their ships, unnoticed by the communities around them. They bring us the goods on which our daily lives depend, yet they themselves are frequently invisible.

Christ identifies himself with all who are vulnerable and easily forgotten: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” When the Church welcomes the stranger, listens to the lonely, visits the isolated, or offers practical help to those far from home, it is not simply performing an act of kindness. It is meeting Christ himself.

The theme of this Sea Sunday is *Harbours of Hope*. A harbour is much more than a place where ships anchor. It is a place of safety after danger, of welcome after a long journey, of rest before setting out again. It is a place where people are seen, received, and cared for.

Perhaps that is also an image of the Church at its best.

Christian communities are called to become harbours of hope: places where strangers are welcomed, people are listened to with compassion, dignity is restored, practical help is offered, prayer is shared, and friendship reminds people that they are not alone.

This is the faithful ministry carried out every day by organisations such as the AMAM, the Mission to Seafarers, Stella Maris, and port chaplaincies around the world. Their members board ships, often with no agenda other than to listen, to offer a friendly face, to provide practical assistance, to pray with those who ask, and to remind seafarers that they have not been forgotten.

Sea Sunday also invites us to make the invisible visible. Most of us rarely think about the people who transport the food we eat, the medicines we depend upon, or the goods that fill our shops. Yet by praying for seafarers, supporting those who care for them, and remembering them in our worship, we bring into the light lives that usually remain hidden from view.

This is an expression of Christian discipleship. For whenever we welcome the stranger, encourage the weary, or stand alongside those who are overlooked, we discover that Christ has been there before us, waiting to be recognised in the least of his brothers and sisters.

We may never meet the seafarers whose work sustains so much of our daily life. Yet we can become part of Christ's answer to their fears and needs. Through our prayers, our generosity, and our concern, we can help answer their unspoken question, "Does anyone care about us?" with a clear and confident "Yes—God cares, and so do we."

Sailors have always looked for lights along the coast. A single light shining in the darkness could mean the difference between safety and disaster. As a Christian community we are called to keep the light burning—to be signs of the God who says, "Do not fear, for I am with you," and of the Christ who still comes to us disguised in those whom the world scarcely notices.

May this Church be a harbour of hope: a place of welcome, compassion, and friendship; a place where the forgotten are

remembered and the stranger is received. And when all nations are gathered before God, may we be found among those who recognised Christ in the least of his brothers and sisters and served him with joy.

For nothing—not distance, nor danger, nor storm, nor sea—will ever be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

4/ Eight Sunday after Trinity 26th July 2026 All Saints' Marseille
The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

Some have suggested that, beneath all the complexity of human life, there are three great desires that often drive us: we want to be in control; we want to have enough—or perhaps more than enough; and we want to enjoy life. What we most deeply desire tells something about who we are. It reveals what we believe will make us happy, what we think is worth pursuing, and what we value most.

So what would you ask for, if God offered you anything?

The Old Testament lesson tells us that, for Solomon—who had survived the intrigues of his power-hungry brothers and the struggles surrounding his succession—the supreme good was a wise and discerning mind: one that could listen, understand, and distinguish between good and evil. It is indeed a great gift—one we might wish for everyone who holds a position of leadership, anywhere in the world.

Even if the story was, at least in part, intended to present the king in a favourable light, Solomon's prayer remains wise advice. Discernment changes the way we pray. It challenges those prayers in which we simply ask God to arrange the world according to our wishes—to give us what we want, to protect what we have, to remove what troubles us. A discerning heart begins to ask different questions:

What is truly good? What is worth desiring? What is God's purpose in all this?

Every time we pray the Lord's Prayer, we say: "Thy kingdom come." This is among the first things Jesus teaches his disciples to pray for. And yet, do we really know what we are asking for?

The Kingdom of Heaven is not simply a place we hope to reach one day, after this life is over. It is a way of living that Jesus promises us, and into which we can grow together, here and now, even in the midst of our ordinary, day-to-day lives.

The Kingdom of God is what happens when the love of God becomes the ruling reality of our lives and of our world. It is a Kingdom rooted in the sacrificial love of Jesus—the very embodiment of those words: "God so loved the world."

And yet we can never predict exactly how the Kingdom of God will appear. Do we have a discerning heart to recognise it when it comes?

There are times when it may seem as though nothing is happening at all. We look at the world around us—with its wars, its instability and its suffering—and we wonder where God is at work. We may feel

uncertain about what lies ahead for our world, or even for our own lives.

And yet Jesus tells us that the Kingdom is already present. In today's Gospel, he describes its subtlety. It is like a tiny mustard seed: something insignificant and fragile, something unlikely. And then it is like yeast hidden in a batch of dough, working quietly and imperceptibly. Slowly, invisibly, the yeast transforms the dough from within. At first sight, we might be tempted to turn this into a simple proverb: "Big things sometimes have small beginnings." But there is something more provocative going on here.

The mustard plant was not necessarily a modest garden plant. It could be an invasive weed, spreading rapidly and taking over the ground. And yeast, in the biblical imagination, could also carry negative associations. So why would Jesus compare the Kingdom of God to a weed and to something that spreads invisibly through dough?

Perhaps because both images speak of something that cannot easily be contained.

The mustard seed grows beyond what anyone might have expected. The yeast works its way through the whole mixture. It infiltrates. It spreads. It changes everything it touches. Perhaps Jesus is telling us that the Kingdom of God is far more powerful, far more pervasive, and far more difficult to contain than we imagine.

The Gospel of the Kingdom can be comforting—but before it comforts us, it may well disturb us.

We might prefer to keep our faith in the Kingdom in a manageable corner of our lives: something for Sundays, something for our private prayers, something that comforts us when we need it. But what if the Kingdom of God is not content to remain in one small corner?

It makes a claim upon the whole of us. It challenges assumptions to which we have grown accustomed. It questions the values by which we have learned to live. It asks us whether the world we have accepted as normal really is the world as God intends it to be.

And that is why we need the gift Solomon prayed for: a discerning heart.

We need eyes to see what God is doing, even when it seems small. We need patience to trust what is growing, even when it remains hidden. And we need faith to believe that, beneath the surface of our ordinary lives, God's Kingdom is already at work.

The Kingdom of Heaven is God's gift. It is God's work. But we are invited to become part of it—to become its citizens and its labourers, to join in what God is already doing in the world.

And perhaps it begins with learning to see.

It begins with becoming aware of how precious, how beautiful, how important the ways of God are in this world.

Sometimes the Kingdom is something we have been seeking. Sometimes we stumble upon it unexpectedly. But when we recognise its value, something changes. We discover something so precious that we are willing to reorder our lives around it.

The treasure hidden in the field and the pearl of great price point us towards that moment of discovery.

The Kingdom is not simply something to admire from a distance. It asks something of us. For the Gospel speaks to us of an inner energy, a hidden power at work in God's creation. The seed grows. The yeast works through the dough. Grace gives life. Grace nurtures. Grace transforms.

The Kingdom asks us to let go of our self-centredness. To loosen our grip on the things we thought we could not live without. To trust that

there is a greater treasure than the things we have spent our lives seeking.

So how do we become part of this Kingdom?

We need a discerning heart to recognise it. Once we have recognised it, we need something more: the courage to trust it, and the willingness to let it change us.

And when we begin to recognise grace at work, our response can only be joy, gratitude, and service.

Like the woman kneading the dough, we can take part, hands-on, in the work of the Kingdom. We can stand up for what is right. We can offer forgiveness. We can bring hope where there is despair. We can share our faith. We can choose kindness when it would be easier to turn away.

These may seem like tiny acts in the great scheme of things. But then, so was a mustard seed. And so was a little yeast.

And who knows what God may do with the small things we place in his hands?

Perhaps, at its deepest level, a discerning heart is one that learns to see our whole life in the light of God's love. It knows that God is for us. It knows that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God.

Perhaps the wisest prayer we can ever make is not simply, "Lord, give me what I want," but:

"Lord, give me a discerning heart, so that I may recognise your love, live in your love, and learn to receive the gift of your love."

May your Kingdom come.

Even here.

Even now.