

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

**Sermon – Pentecost**

**3<sup>rd</sup> August 2025**

**Seventh Sunday after Trinity**

**All Saints' Marseille**

*The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain*

What would you do if you knew you were going to die soon?

You might want to tie up loose ends, say what has long been left unsaid, make peace with others—or with yourself. Some would want to make the most of now: seize the day, chase long-postponed dreams. Others may begin to reckon with life's deeper questions. What really matters in the end? What have we loved? What have we lost? What have we learned?

In our scientific, technological age, death is something we postpone, avoid, or outsource. We tuck our mortality away in a dusty corner of the conscience. Yet it doesn't go away.

Back in the 1980s, psychologists began to ask: How do human beings cope with the knowledge that we must die? The answers they found were unsettling. When faced with the reality of death, we tend to retreat into defensiveness. We become more aggressive in protecting our opinions, more contemptuous of those who are not like us. Some respond by numbing the dread: "relax, eat, drink and be merry." Others fall into despair: if death is coming, then nothing matters. "Vanity of vanities," cries the Teacher in Ecclesiastes. "All is vanity."

"This very night your life is being demanded of you." What would you do, if you knew your time was really short?

"I would plant a tree," Martin Luther once said, choosing to affirm life even in the face of death. In Tosca, Puccini's celebrated opera, the painter Mario Cavaradossi cries out in his final hour: "I lived uncaring, and now I die despairing—and never was life so dear to me."

Many of us might feel a twinge of sympathy for the man in the parable. Why does God call him a fool? He seems to embody the virtues we often admire: hard work, foresight, planning for the future. His barns are full because he has been prudent, careful, and efficient. He's done what many of us strive to do: take care of our own.

That's the jarring part. Because in one way or another, this story is about us. We recognise the rich farmer's dream of a life in which he can finally relax, eat, drink, and be merry—the kind of retirement Western society teaches us to aim for. Our culture equates security with wealth, happiness with consumption, and success with accumulation.

The truth is, we live in a society where consumption has become not just an economic act, but almost a spiritual one—a quest to fill the ache of longing with possessions. And no matter how much we have, we are always aware of what we still lack.

Qoheleth, the Teacher in Ecclesiastes, tried all this too—he built, acquired, achieved. And yet he found that even his best efforts could not guarantee lasting joy or security. “Vanity of vanities.”

Jesus sees in the farmer not a successful entrepreneur but an isolated, insecure soul. It is not that he had wealth, but that wealth had him. Wealth may buy us comfort—but not peace. It may ease our anxiety—but it cannot make us worthy of love. It may lengthen life—but it cannot give it depth or purpose.

Jesus is diagnosing a spiritual disease — and pointing us toward a cure.

The heart of the problem is greed. Jesus names it explicitly: “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.”

Jesus' parable is a direct challenge to the deepest instincts of our age. Some think greed is not just normal, but good. The character played by Michael Douglas in Oliver Stone's film 'Wall Street' says it clearly: “Greed is right. Greed works. Greed captures the essence of evolutionary spirit ....” Yet Jesus calls it what it is: greed is a form of spiritual poverty. A soul turned inward. A heart turned from God.

Greed, Paul reminds us in Colossians, is idolatry — not just a moral failing but a spiritual misalignment, a false worship of what cannot save. And it can take many forms. Not only the obvious craving for money or luxury, but also the subtler desires for control, security, prestige. Greed hides in every heart that clings, every soul that refuses to trust.

And yet, Jesus is not calling us into misery or renunciation for its own sake. He is inviting us to a better life. We will hear him say next week: “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

We are invited to reorient our lives. This is no small task. It requires trust. It means loosening our grip on what we think we control. It means daring to believe that God can provide. And it means choosing love over accumulation, community over self-interest, eternal hope over fleeting satisfaction.

Jesus calls us not simply to avoid greed, but to be “rich toward God” — to live open-handedly, open-heartedly. To align our lives with God’s generous, liberating purpose. To live the life that truly matters: the Gospel life. The life for others.

To be rich toward God is to see all that we possess — our wealth, our wisdom, our strength, our time — as something entrusted, not earned. A gift, not a guarantee. A means of grace, not a measure of worth. The barns we build are to be granaries for the kingdom. The fruit we bear is to be shared. The table we set is to be filled with guests — the poor, the weary, the excluded, the stranger.

Sometimes being rich toward God begins with the simplest act: paying attention. Paying attention, letting gratitude awaken us to life, to the preciousness of now. It’s not so much about ambitiously “making the most” of time, as it is about summoning love toward life, moment by moment. Living wide rather than living long.

To be rich toward God means living out of a changed heart, that sees everything as blessing and treasures those blessings by sharing them generously. It means being stewards, not consumers. In the way we use water and food, in the way we share money and care for creation, we become rich toward God when we realise that our abundance is not meant for us alone. It is to be protected, cared

for, and distributed for the flourishing of others. And not just as individuals, but as a community — a community held in God's love.

To be rich toward God is a matter of alignment. Are we drawing life from our silos, or from the living God? The richness that does not perish, the treasure that will not fail, is a life steeped in gratitude, shaped by mercy, invested in community, and animated by love.

Be rich toward God. Don't shy away from the discomfort of the invitation. Be brave and wrestle with what it means in your life, in your habits, in your heart. Because the richness we spend on God — in generosity, in gratitude, in love — is the only richness we'll keep in the end.

Amen.

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

**Sermon – Eighth Sunday after Trinity**

**10<sup>th</sup> August 2025**

**All Saints' Marseille**

*The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain*

“People get ready,  
There’s a train a comin’.  
You don’t need no baggage, you just get on board.  
All you need is faith to hear the diesels hummin’.  
Don’t need no ticket, you just thank the Lord.”

“All you need is faith,” Curtis Mayfield sang in the sixties. The writer to the Hebrews says much the same: “All you need is faith.”

But in our world today, can we really speak of that kind of faith—faith as readiness, trust, gratitude? Can it still bring coherence and hope, sustaining us amid the turbulence of our time?

This week, a well-known British politician—who calls herself a “cultural Christian”—spoke openly in an interview. As a young woman in hardship, she said, she drew strength from faith. But later, reading of a horrific case of abuse, she felt her faith in God extinguished—“like someone blew out a candle.” And yet, she has recently defended the right of another political leader to speak publicly about Christian convictions guiding her stance on social issues.

Faith, it seems, is not always something we either have or lack. It can flicker. Falter. Disappear—and return. Faith is mysterious. Paradoxical.

Today's readings all explore its shape and feel. Abraham's belief is reckoned as righteousness. The psalmist sees the Lord's eye on those who trust him as help and shield. Hebrews calls faith "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."<sup>1</sup> In the Gospel, faithful servants are those ready for their master's return.

But what of our faith? We gather Sunday after Sunday to celebrate it—in Scripture, in prayer, in silence, in music, in sacrament. This is how we remember, how we give thanks, how we root ourselves again in the God who speaks and saves. We also profess the faith of the Church, passed down in creeds, shaped in teaching. Yet faith is more than assent to doctrine. It is a response of the heart—a "Yes" to God lived out in the story of our lives.

The Letter to the Hebrews does not only define faith—it clothes it with flesh and bone. It points to those who lived it as risk, struggle, perseverance. I admit—reading the author's list of faithful ones can be overwhelming. They seem so strong, so resolute, so... faithful.

The Dutch spiritual writer Henri Nouwen once said he learned most about faith not from theology books but from the circus. Watching a trapeze troupe, he asked the leader how they flew with such grace, ease and confidence. "The real star is my catcher," came the reply. "The flyer does nothing—the catcher does everything. When I fly, I simply stretch out my arms and wait. It's his job to catch me."<sup>2</sup>

Faith lived is like that: the outstretched arms, the letting go, the trust that when we leap into the unknown, we will be caught. Abraham

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<sup>1</sup> *New King James Bible*

<sup>2</sup> Henri Nouwen, *The Only Necessary Thing: Living a Prayerful Life*

knew that trust. God called him from one of the most sophisticated cities of his age to live out his days in tents. He left present certainty for future mystery, the familiar for the strange—simply because God asked.

Faith steadies us, yes—but it also pushes us forward, giving courage for the next step when the road is unseen. It calls us not to settle, but to journey. Not to cling, but to launch out. A life without maps.

And letting go is hard. We carry baggage—emotional, intellectual, spiritual. The thought of being a nomad of faith makes many of us uneasy. Yet faith should be future-oriented. God invites to journey into new life, into new directions.

In today's Gospel, Jesus shows faith as active, watchful readiness: the heart rightly aligned, the body dressed for action, the lamp lit through the night. It is humble stewardship of a house not our own, patient waiting for a Presence not yet visible, a promise not yet fulfilled.

To be Christian is to live in this in-between—between death and resurrection, promise and fulfilment, what is and what will be. Faith is the peg on which we hang our deepest hopes, stretching vision beyond the immediate into God's future—and our part in it.

This is no easy thing. It is not a once-for-all certainty. Yet Jesus says, "Do not be afraid, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Not sell it, or loan it, or dangle it out of reach—but give it, because God delights to share his life with us.

This Kingdom is no private reward, no self-fulfilment project. It is participation in God's subversive economy—where the poor are blessed, the forgotten remembered, the last first, and the lost found.

Faith aligns us with that Kingdom. It reorders priorities. It frees us to be generous. It loosens our grip on anxiety. Not because life is easy, but because our future rests in God. This faith is not naive. It doesn't deny the hardness of things—injustice, grief, fatigue. But it dares to see our world—complicated, wounded, weary as it is—as the very womb of possibility. It believes that God is still speaking, still acting, still bringing new creation into being. It imagines a future that may seem unlikely— but is nevertheless real.

The opposite of faith is not doubt—doubt can stretch and deepen us. The opposite is complacency, apathy, resignation, cynicism. It is refusing that holy restlessness which calls us to act. It is settling for less than the kingdom God longs to give.

Faith is mystery. Paradox. Not a possession to hold, but a path to walk. Often it grows in silence, unseen. It takes root deep within, beneath the level of words. It shapes us gently. It sustains us, often without our noticing.

And so, we need “not be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.”<sup>3</sup> The God who calls Abraham still calls us. The God who catches the flyer still catches us. The God who gives the Kingdom still delights to give it—to you, to me, to the world.

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<sup>3</sup> Attributed to Corrie ten Boom

So get ready. Travel light. Keep your lamp burning. Listen for the knock in the night. Step out in faith, into the promise that is already on its way.

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

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

**Sermon – Nineth Sunday after Trinity**

**17<sup>th</sup> August 2025**

**All Saints' Marseille**

*Jane Quarmby, Licensed Lay Minister*

Very soon now our chaplaincy will start work on recruiting a new chaplain. A normal part of that process will be to describe our chaplaincy, with its varied congregations here in Marseille, in Manosque, in Aix, in Oppède and our faithful international online worshippers. Each congregation is different, with its own unique character, challenges and blessings. Each will contribute what they think is important in the eventual outcome, perhaps with a wish-list of what they would like to see in a new chaplain.

In any recruitment process, the recruiter needs to be truthful about the job, and what is to be reasonably required from the successful candidate. There are two sides to every process, and we will need to tread carefully between the optimistic, rosy glow of what would be ideal, and the gloomy, pessimistic view. For example, our chaplain would need to travel very widely to cover all those congregations, seeing the wonderful area of Provence. But travel can be very tiring and time-consuming. I'm sure we can all think of the positives in coming to this chaplaincy.

But equally, we need to be clear that this job now is no 9-to-5 job three days a week. It is a full-time job covering the Seaman's Mission, all the ecumenical initiatives that we are required to join in with, the pastoral care of such a huge area, overseeing a team of an Assistant Chaplain,

2 Lay Ministers and 2 retired clergy with Permission to Officiate, and of course – take services. I'm sure that Jamie worked a lot more than 3 days. And for what recompense? A flat. No salary, just expenses. So we will be looking for someone willing to work long hours, travel extensively, manage a big team, sit through many meetings and conferences, take services, lead by example, show great faith and look after our on line services too. For no wage at all. If we worded our advertisement like that it might not sound very attractive.

Our readings today could be taken both ways too. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews starts off well, describing all the marvellous things that were accomplished in the past of men and women of faith. The greatest example of course was the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites escaping from Egypt. I'm not convinced they all had the same strength of faith as Moses, but they obediently, despite their fears, did as they were asked. The walls of Jericho fell down merely by the Israelites marching round and round blowing trumpets. Did many of them think that this was just daft? Faith enough to follow sometimes bizarre orders to achieve a miraculous end. The list of the faithful goes on, condensing so many accounts in the Old Testament of amazing things being achieved, great military victories, escapes from lions, the resurrection of the dead by both Elijah and Elisha. All wonderful examples of triumph over tragedy – all through faith in God.

But in the very same paragraph, the tone changes and goes much darker. The faithful didn't always win through in earthly terms – they were tortured, hounded, mocked, homeless and destitute and we're given some very gory examples of what happened to them. No miracles, just misery and pain. And to what end? They were commended for their faith, certainly and many became famous, but their faith wasn't always seen to be rewarded. And yet – did that

matter to them? Their faith was so strong that they underwent extreme testing and suffering, sure in the knowledge that the best was yet to come. God would look after them and reward them with a life far better than the one they were living. Faith as solid as a stone to borrow the words from John Denver in Matthew's Song –

“A twister came and stripped them clean  
He lost the farm and lost his family  
He lost the wheat and lost his home  
But he found a family Bible  
Faith as solid as a stone”

We are urged to live that way too, taking as the best example we could have, that of Jesus, who suffered far more than I care to imagine, - ridiculed, tortured, shamed - but who won through and showed us the way to live. Not bound up in the cares of this world, worn down by the daily struggles to do more, and have more, but with our eyes fixed on the path he has laid out before us.

It has to be said our Gospel reading isn't very cheery either, especially if anyone reading it or hearing it thinks that being a Christian is all sweetness and light, love thy neighbour, all in it together for the common good, one big happy family. Many people don't expect Jesus to be a divisive figure. We can probably all think of divisive figures who loom large on the world stage today, like Donald Trump who is either much loved or much detested, and we'll all have our own views. But Jesus came to shake the world up, change the status quo for ever, bring judgement on the wicked and to purify the righteous. No-one would be able to sit on the fence about him – either one believes whole-heartedly in God, or one doesn't. He knew that this would cause problems in families, the tensions and anger, despair and sadness. He

also found it exasperating that those around him couldn't see what was happening in front of their own eyes. They could read the weather patterns to predict rain, but they couldn't see the storm brewing in Israel which would eventually lead to its destruction. Their only hope was to turn to God, to believe in him and have faith. But they couldn't see it.

And what of us? We may be living 2000 years later, but there is still evil in this world. We as a species are busy destroying not only one another through wars, aggression, selfishness and unequal distribution of wealth but we are in within touching distance of destroying life on our planet too. Jesus' message is as strong and urgent today as it has ever been. Perhaps we need shaking up too, and to turn to God as well. It won't be easy, or comfortable but it will definitely be worth it!

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

**Sermon – Tenth Sunday after Trinity  
Feast of Saint Bartholomew the Apostle**

**24<sup>th</sup> August 2025**

**All Saints' Marseille**

*Canon David Pickering*

The opening words of this morning's Gospel passage, **A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. But he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like a youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. Luke 22. 24 - 27**

For nine years towards the end of the last century, and millennium, I was the Rector of the ancient Parish of Saint Bartholomew, Whittington, on the north side of Chesterfield in the Diocese of Derby. So Saint Bartholomew is a bit of an old friend to me.

But who was Saint Bartholomew?

His name appears in the lists of the Twelve in the first three gospels, and in a list in the first chapter of Acts. But that's all. He is missing from John's gospel, but many biblical scholars believe he is the Nathanael that appears in the fourth gospel. He was brought to Jesus by Philip, when Jesus said he had seen under the fig tree, and said of

Nathanael, **“Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”** *John 1.47.*

The name Bartholomew in Hebrew means *son of Tolmai*. So he could have been known by a name, such as Nathanael. In Hebrew this means *God gives or gave*.

So why did such doubt and anonymity lead to the dedication of my church in Whittington?

This next bit may not be for the faint hearted!

According to Tradition, which may sometimes be speculative and not always reliable, Bartholomew preached in India and Armenia. He was flayed alive and beheaded. His body was eventually brought to Rome, where the church of Saint Bartholomew on the Tiber claims to have his remains. Now the unsavoury bit: an arm was given to Canterbury in the eleventh century by king Canut’s wife, Queen Emma. This was seen as a great prize, and led to his popularity in England, where 165 ancient parish churches are dedicated to Bartholomew: my parish in Chesterfield being one of them.

While just a name on a list of disciples does not tell us much about an anonymous person, we have to ask why today’s readings were chosen for Saint Bartholomew. The nineteenth century Anglican scholar John Henry Blunt speculated, that *The Gospel ....perpetuates an old tradition that St Bartholomew was of noble birth, and hence arose the “strife.”* The opening words of today’s Gospel reading, *A dispute arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded the greatest.*

So in all honesty there's not much we can say about the Apostle and Evangelist we are called to celebrate today. For the most part he remains hidden and anonymous. But perhaps there is a lesson for us there.

Like Bartholomew, to the wider world round us today, our faith will be mainly hidden and anonymous. Here this morning, our shared faith is accepted and known to each other in general terms, and perhaps in a casual and friendly manner. There may be those, who are close to us in our daily lives, family members, relatives, colleagues, and close friends and associates, who will know something of our Christian faith and Church commitment. But to the world at large our faith will remain hidden.

But there is another side to hidden faith, that is important for all of us. It is the inner faith that gives meaning and strength to the outward Christian values, commitment, behaviour and actions of our lives.

We can be regular and committed worshippers, carrying out many good Christian deeds and acts in our day to day lives. But what lies underneath?

Perhaps we can use something of the tradition that Bartholomew and the Nathanael of St John's gospel are one and the same person. Jesus seems to see into the inner nature of Nathanael, and calls him as a true and faithful Israelite with no hidden deceits or falsehoods.

Throughout my ministry I have often been asked, what is this Christianity thing all about. Who is this God? What lies beneath all the stories and traditions. My simple answer has always been that is about LOVE, spelt with capital letters.

Last Thursday, the 20th of August the Church celebrated the feast of St Bernard, who is famous, not for his dogs, but for a classic treatise ***On the Love of God***. In this he states that nothing really matters, but Love. This, of course is based on the first and greatest commandment. First found, fairly early on in the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy 6.4. *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and all your might.*

And as we read through scripture this simple statement gets developed. Jesus takes it up in the first three gospels and expands it. To quote Jesus's response to the scribe in Mark 12.30, *You shall love the Lord your God with all you heart, and with all soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, you shall love your neighbour as yourself.* In St. John's gospel, Jesus, to emphasise the importance of love, goes a stage further and says, *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*

St Paul has his famous and familiar words at the end of 1 Corinthians 13. *And now faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.*

And as we get towards the end of the New Testament, we have in the First Letter of John which in many ways is all about love; is a kind of love letter. In the letter's five short chapters love is mentioned thirteen times, and perhaps the key definition is chapter 4. 7 & 8 *Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God.....for God is love.* Yes. God is love, so true love is of God. It is the absoluteness of love that

binds together the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It's love that makes them one, and not three gods.

The love that is God is absolute and can and is experienced in every kind of genuine love. It is there in the bond of love of all degrees between two individuals. It is there in the general human love we feel and experience with others, in ordinary and general human relationships. This divine love comes through us when we come to the aid and help of others, especially to those with great needs. This is when it can be a sacrificial love, when it comes at a cost; with the absolute familiar words of Jesus, John 15.13 *No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends*. This being what Jesus did in his death on the cross, but love brought him back to life in his resurrection.

Finally, and perhaps the most difficult and challenging of all come when Jesus says, *But I say to you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Matthew 5.44*.

In some ways it's perhaps because Jesus is all loving that he can say the words of my text this morning. The Christian life is all about loving service, sometimes sacrificial.

Amen.

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

**Sermon – Eleventh Sunday after Trinity**

**31<sup>st</sup> August 2025**

**All Saints' Marseille**

*The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain*

In July, during the state visit of French President Emmanuel Macron, the royal family hosted a banquet at Windsor Castle - every detail carefully orchestrated, down to the seating plan itself. My neighbour, remarking on the occasion, found it extraordinary that a French minister—known for her ambition to become mayor of Paris—was seated beside the King, after already riding in a carriage with the Prince and Princess of Wales. “Should she not have shown some humility and known her place?” my neighbour asked.

Sitting plans, after all, are not left to chance. Whether it be place cards carefully arranged on the table, or an escort guiding each guest to their seat, these decisions signal something. They tell guests who they are, and in what company they belong.

This is no modern invention. Throughout history, the banquet has been one of the most powerful metaphors for authority and influence; a social theatre, uniting some, excluding others; a stage on which honour and rank are displayed; an opportunity for influence and for the careful dance of conversation.

So when we hear today's Gospel reading—Jesus noticing how people are manoeuvring to get the places of honour at the table of a leading

Pharisee—we might ask: is this a story about the importance of table manners and etiquette?

Anxieties about prestige and privilege, about how to get a better seat at the table, existed in Jesus' time and are still very present in ours. To insinuate oneself into places of importance, to secure a prestigious invitation, to be seen at the right banquet with the right people—these are entirely human temptations. Pride and the desire for recognition are woven deep into human nature. Even Jesus' disciples quarrelled about who among them was the greatest.

At first glance, Jesus' advice might sound like no more than practical guidance on avoiding embarrassment, in a world where social ranking was rigid, and meals were one of the clearest places where that disparity was on display. "When you are invited, do not sit down at the place of honour ... go and sit down at the lowest place." A kind of ancient equivalent of Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* - if you want to be appreciated, put on the mask of humility; it is better to be asked to move up than to be asked to move down. Yet Jesus goes further and deeper than the advice to behave with restraint, modesty and deference when invited at a special meal, which ancient wisdom literature had already offered<sup>4</sup>.

Jesus turns the values of the banquet upside down: those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. Christ places humility at the heart of discipleship — a virtue that has never been rewarded by the world. Our culture tends to idolise the loudest, the biggest, the greatest. Whether in politics, sport, entertainment, we admire those who can claim the most.

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<sup>4</sup> Ecclesiasticus 31.12-18

The Church, too, has sometimes failed in this. Historic Christianity, especially in the West, has not always been known for humility. The temptation to control who is admitted to the Lord's table, who is seated close to Christ, who is deemed worthy of inclusion, is still with us.

This is what makes Paolo Veronese's painting of *The Feast in the House of Levi* meaningful. Originally intended as a depiction of the Last Supper, the Church authorities objected that it was too full of "jesters, drunken German soldiers, dogs, dwarfs and other such scurrilities."<sup>5</sup> Even the disciples behaved too casually: Peter carving meat, another attending to his teeth... For the censors, this was not dignified enough for the Lord's table.

It was as though Veronese understood something of the Gospel's point. Human banquets may strive for honour and dignity, for keeping the right company and showing oneself in the best light. But Christ is found among the unexpected guests, the overlooked, the ones who do not "know their place." And is that not precisely the scandal of the Gospel? That Christ comes not to take the highest place, but the lowest; not to admit a chosen few, but to open God's banquet "for you and for many."<sup>6</sup> At the table of God's kingdom, honour is not seized, it is received. True dignity is humility—placing oneself in God's hands, waiting to be called forward by the host.

Jesus now turns from the guests to the host. "When you give a dinner," he says, "do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours," that is, those who could reciprocate, those who could raise your standing. Jesus continues with words that cut across

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<sup>5</sup> Transcript of the interrogation of Paolo Veronese, 18<sup>th</sup> July 1573

<sup>6</sup> Eucharistic prayer, quoting Luke 22.20 and Mark 14.24

that logic: “Invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.” In other words, invite those who cannot repay you. Invite those who do not count in the eyes of society.

Jesus knows that who we eat with matters. Our guest list tells the truth about how we want to shape our identity. It is no accident that the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

This is not easy. Authentic hospitality is never easy, because it requires us to let go of control. It is unconditional. It risks relationship. It leaves the outcome open.

Ten years ago to the day, German chancellor Angela Merkel stood at a press conference in the middle of a refugee crisis and spoke about her decision to open Germany’s doors to all Syrians refugees. “Wir schaffen das,” she said— “we shall rise to this.” It was a commitment to hospitality that risked everything: fury from her critics, division within Europe, the uncertainty of what would follow. “If Europe fails on the question of refugees,” she said, “it won’t be the Europe we wished for.” The consequences are still debated. But this remains a vivid illustration of what happens when a leader dares to make room at the table for those who were once shut out.

Hospitality, as Jesus describes it, is just such a risk. It is costly, unpredictable, uncontrollable. It does not protect our status or guarantee our reward. But in God’s kingdom, it is the only hospitality that counts. We bring nothing to the table that can repay God’s generosity. And yet Jesus Christ invites us, freely, joyfully. We are guests, not because we are worthy, but because God is gracious. We

who once sought the best seats find ourselves humbled and yet lifted up. We who were strangers are called friends, guests at the banquet of the kingdom. The table is larger than we dream, and the feast more generous than we dared to hope.

How, then, do we respond? We cannot reciprocate to God directly, but we can mirror God's generosity by opening our lives to others—to those who are different, those we might otherwise overlook, those who cannot repay us. Blessedness comes when we make room for true connectedness across all divides. No one who lives in the way of Jesus will miss a seat at the table that matters most.

At the banquet of God's kingdom, where no seat is lowly and every guest is welcomed, we too are called to open our tables wide in trust and generosity—believing, with courage and humility, *“we shall meet this calling”*.