

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

Sermon – Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

7th September 2025

All Saints' Marseille

Christine Portman, Reader

What did you make of this morning's New Testament reading? We heard only half of what is Paul's shortest letter. It's unlike the other epistles which were sent to whole congregations in cities like Corinth or a province like Galatia. It seems at first glance not to have any of the profound theological reflections that we find in Romans or the other longer letters. It's just a short personal letter to Philemon, with two other church leaders copied in, along with the members of a house church, probably meeting in Colossae. So why did this little letter make it into the Bible at all?

To answer that, we need to look at what Paul is asking Philemon. He's making a request which, to any non-Christian then, would have seemed pretty absurd. Historians estimate that at that time, between 35 and 40% of the population in the Roman world was enslaved. They had no status, no rights. Running away was punishable by death. Yet Paul is asking Philemon to take his runaway slave Onesimus back into service. As a few sentences further on, Paul promises '*if he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me*'. This could well suggest that in addition to absconding, the slave had stolen from his master.

What might seem even more strange, it seems that Onesimus is willing to take a huge risk. Going back to face the music meant potentially

returning to a lifetime of slavery, even a death sentence. He's obviously not imprisoned with Paul at the moment, or he wouldn't have been able to return to Colossae. He's now a free man, able to choose where he goes and what he does. What could have happened to him that he'd do what seems to be such a crazy thing?

We have to assume that at some point he was thrown into prison, where Paul has brought him to faith. Paul has had a profound effect on the way he thinks. He now accepts who he is, a slave. Paul's teaching has led him to make a great discovery: true freedom doesn't depend on our outward situation, but on our relationship with God. In sending Onesimus back to Colossae, Paul was sending him back to the beginning. As John Schulz has written, *'returning to the place from which we ran away is the first thing we have to do after our conversion.'* This little letter has been correctly described as an object lesson in spiritual growth. Using the words from this morning's reading from Deuteronomy, Onesimus 'chose life'. He made the decision to go back to possible slavery, choosing to see Philemon, not as a hated master, but as a fellow Christian. He chose to have faith that Philemon would see him in the same way.

Onesimus now recognises Christ in Philemon and Paul's hope is that Philemon will see Christ in his slave. He asks him to take him back as an equal, a brother in Christ. This would go against all the cultural norms of the time and it's a big ask. Philemon might well feel quite angry towards his runaway slave. Perhaps, given his past behaviour, he mistrusts him too. But Paul sees Onesimus' faith and understands that this is another Christian soul who could help to build up the Body of Christ. Onesimus' name comes from the Greek adjective ὀνήσιμος, meaning "useful, profitable, beneficial." Brother Philemon, this is how I'd like you to welcome him home, says Paul.

Commenting on this little epistle, the Californian pastor, Ray Stedman wrote, *'the ground is level at the foot of the Cross'*. At the start of the letter, Paul says not only that he is a prisoner, but *'now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus'*. He doesn't simply mean that he's in prison because the authorities hate his preaching. He means that, in a very real way, Christ has captured his soul. Paul understands his total dependence on Christ. He realizes that all Christian people are interdependent within the Body of Christ. In Colossians 3.2-3, Paul writes: *'Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.* In verse 11, he goes on, *'In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!'*

It's not hard to see why this little letter is in our Bible; it's a microcosm of Paul's theology in practice. He's a powerful figure in the early Church, but he doesn't pull rank to order Philemon to take back the slave. He gently shows how to forgive others, accept them and treat as equal and, above all help to ensure that their lives are used for the building up of the kingdom of God. In his kindly persuasion, Paul shows all the qualities he talks about in his other letters: forbearance, patience, gentleness, kindness and love. We all sin, but when someone truly repents, retribution and punishment are not God's answer. If God accepts Onesimus, who are Paul or Philemon to bar him from serving God? Paul calls for Christians to show to each other the same mercy and graciousness that we all receive each and every day.

Jesus' words in this morning's gospel reading underline that message, *Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my*

disciple. Jesus isn't suggesting that we turn away from our families or give up all that we possess: his point is that if we choose to become his disciples, if we accept him as our Lord and Saviour, nothing should stand in the way of our love for him and what he requires of us. And what he requires of us is too do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Tirteenth Sunday after Trinity – Holy Cross Day
14th September 2025
All Saints' Marseille
The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

At the end of the 1940s, in war-torn Poland, Stalin promised a gift: a vast steel plant and a model city for the workers who would run it. The project was named *Nowa Huta* — the New Steelworks, the New City. It was to be a workers' paradise, the shining future of communism.

There was one thing this city was not to have: a church. Atheism was written into its foundations. And yet, the workers who moved in had other plans. They began to petition, to gather funds, and in 1957 they planted a wooden cross on the land where they dreamed their church would rise.

Soon permission was withdrawn. The cross was marked for demolition. But the people of Nowa Huta rose in defence of the cross. They stood unarmed before the militia. Arrests followed. Brute force. Yet still the people clung to the sign of Christ.

Can you imagine that? Men and women, workers and children, risking all — simply to let a cross of wood stand in their midst.

Why defend the cross? What does it mean for the world, for the Church, for us?

Holy Cross Day is among the oldest of feasts. It began when Helena, the mother of emperor Constantine, journeyed to Jerusalem in the year 326, and there discovered what was believed to be the wood of the True Cross. Soon after, Constantine had the Church of the Holy Sepulchre built, and on the 14th of September, 335, it was dedicated. From then on, the Church has remembered not only that discovery, but more deeply the meaning of the Cross itself.

The Cross has become the most universal sign of Christian faith. It has been defended and cherished in ways large and small. Think of the Hill of Crosses in Lithuania, covered with tens of thousands of votive crosses, a silent defiance of Soviet oppression. Or of the steel cross seen amid the ruins of Ground Zero after September 11th, a witness to the God who shares in human suffering. And yet the Cross is also worn lightly, sometimes as little more than a fashion accessory. Its meaning is contested, sometimes distorted — but never erased.

The cross crowns churches across the world. It is traced upon us in baptism. It marks our graves. It is the gesture we make in prayer, and to give or receive a blessing. It is not mere ritual. To trace the Cross upon ourselves is not superstition, nor is it a display. It is a confession: that our lives are not our own but belong to the Crucified One. It is a way of placing ourselves again and again under the love that was poured out on Calvary.

The Cross has always been a scandal, a stumbling block. “The cross puts everything to the test,” said Martin Luther. How could an instrument of torture and death become the central sign of life and salvation? The crucified Christ confronts us with a riddle, a mystery. And so the temptation is always, for us as for the first disciples, to soften the Cross, to make it easy, convenient. But the truth is fiercer:

here we face the intensity of divine love, the costliness of grace. And yet the promise is also here: even in our deepest sorrow, we are not alone. Even in God-forsaken places, Christ has already gone before us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God made known in the Cross of Christ.

We heard today one of the most beloved verses of Scripture, in which the riddle of the Cross is answered: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”* God’s motive is love. And the Cross stands as the deepest sign of God’s love: love that descends into the depths of human pain, love that meets us in our lostness, love that refuses to let sin - that bites and poisons like a serpent – have the last word.

To wear the Cross, or to trace it on ourselves, is to choose love - in the midst of pain, in the face of suffering, when we cannot understand, when life is broken, still we choose to love. Because that is the choice Christ made upon the Cross — and he made it for the whole world, not only for a people, a group of disciples, or for the righteous. For the whole world.

The human being, it has been said, was created in the shape of a cross. Stand with arms open wide, and you see it: a body open to the world, ready to embrace, ready to welcome. A child runs to the open arms of a parent. Two people meet and welcome each other in an embrace. In open arms we see something of God’s image, God’s likeness, God’s love.

The shape of God’s love is self-giving, self-emptying, as St Paul says in his letter to the Philippians: *Christ Jesus [...] emptied himself, humbled*

himself, becoming obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross.” The whole ministry of Jesus, and so the whole calling of the Church, is cruciform. In Christ’s way of the Cross, weakness becomes strength. Service becomes true leadership. Humility breaks down pride. Less becomes more, and in dying we find life. This is the paradox of faith — and it is the pattern of our calling.

The Cross is not only what Christ has done for us; it is the form of the life we are to live in him. To live cruciform lives — lives of self-emptying love — is to let the Cross imprint its form upon our humanity.

In the end, the people of Nowa Huta prevailed. Permission was finally granted for a church, but the authorities gave no support. No materials, no equipment. So the people built it with their own hands. They mixed the cement. They made the bricks. They gathered the two million stones that form its walls. Stone after stone, lifted up, until the Ark of the Lord took shape — crowned by a great 70-metre-high cross, like a mast above a ship, visible across the city. That cross became not only the sign of faith, but of resistance. In the 1980s, under martial law, the church became a centre of prayer for the nation, a place where people gathered to keep hope alive. The Cross, once threatened with destruction, became the immovable heart of the community.

And so it is for us. The Cross of Christ shouldn’t be a relic, or a mere ornament, but the very centre of our faith - love poured out, the pattern of our lives, the mast by which we set our course.

It is the power of God for salvation.

It is the shape of God’s love.

It is the sign under which we live and die.

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

**Sermon – Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity
Feast of Saint Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist**

21st September 2025

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain



Some words pass by and are soon forgotten. Others linger, shaping us for years. And then there are words that change everything in an instant—words that awaken us, reorient us, set us on a new path. Sometimes the most life-changing words are the simplest: *“Follow me.”* With that, Matthew left his desk and stepped into a new life. The Gospel tells it with startling brevity, inviting us to stand in that moment ourselves.

In 1600, the Italian painter Caravaggio tried to capture the scene with brush and light for the Contarelli Chapel in Rome. Commissioned to depict the life of Saint Matthew, he chose three scenes: The Calling, The Inspiration, and The Martyrdom. Together, they form a meditation on vocation, mission, and witness. Caravaggio's paintings—with their dramatic realism, their interplay of light and shadow—draw us into the story and insist that faith is lived in the grit and texture of real life.

In *The Calling of Saint Matthew*, Jesus enters an ordinary room, almost quietly, half in shadow yet full of presence. From above his head a shaft of light pierces the darkness, settling on the group around the table, fixing attention on one man, the tax collector Matthew. He points to himself, as if to say, “Who—me?”

Everything in the painting hinges on contrasts: darkness and light, wealth and poverty, belonging and exclusion, old life and new possibility. Matthew sits at the intersection of them all—despised for collaborating with the occupiers, perhaps weighed down by compromise, even as he counted his coins. Now the light exposes him: his past, his present, his divided heart.

Notice the hand of Jesus. Caravaggio shapes it to echo Michelangelo's Creation of Adam. It proclaims Christ as the New Adam: fully human, fully divine, reaching into darkness to bring new creation. The gesture summons but does not coerce. It is the hand of life, of forgiveness, of mercy.

Above that hand, the windowpanes form a cross. Not an accident. To follow Christ is to take up the cross, to leave behind the old life and walk a new way. The cross hovers over the whole scene, a reminder of both the cost and the promise.

Caravaggio captures a single breath of time—just after the words “*Follow me*” and just before “*Matthew got up and followed him.*” The painting freezes that in-between moment: decision suspended, grace hovering, the heart poised to answer.

And here lies the invitation. Caravaggio does not only paint Matthew’s story—he paints ours. He places us in the room, lets the shaft of light fall on our faces, and leaves us to wrestle with the same question: What will we do when Christ points to us and says, “Follow me”?

Christ’s call comes in the midst of our daily lives—in the places where we work, worry, and carry the weight of the everyday. Sometimes that world feels dark and weary, yet into it the light of God breaks. His hand reaches out in the midst of our toils. His presence may come quietly, even unexpectedly. But if we remain awake to grace, we will know when he calls us by name.

The Venerable Bede, the monk and scholar of eighth-century Northumbria, wrote of this moment: “[Christ] saw Matthew through the eyes of mercy, and chose him.” Centuries later, Pope Francis recalled how those words spoke to him, saying of Caravaggio’s painting: “That finger of Jesus, pointing at Matthew—that’s me.” Seen through the eyes of mercy, and chosen.

So it is for us. Christ does not call us because we are already righteous or worthy. He calls us because his gaze is merciful. He sees our gifts and goodwill, yes—but also our weakness, our failures, our divided hearts. And still, in mercy, he chooses.

The story moves quickly from the tax booth to the table. Jesus is soon surrounded by tax collectors and other disreputable folk, provoking

murmurs and scandal. Why would a holy man eat with such people? Jesus' answer is clear: God desires mercy, not sacrifice. Mercy is the language of the kingdom, spoken at an open table where there is room for all.

Notice again what Jesus does not do. He does not give Matthew a moral tune-up and send him away, slightly improved. He calls him into relationship: "*Follow me.*" That is the transforming invitation—to walk with him, to share his life. In that relationship lies the power to become new.

Matthew discovered this at Christ's table. And so may we: mercy that heals, love that transforms. But mercy is not only a feeling; it is a way of life. It must be practised, chosen, repeated. To live in mercy means dying to self—letting go of comforts and judgments—so that we may learn to love as Christ loves.

The other paintings in the chapel complete the picture. *The Inspiration of St Matthew* shows the apostle guided by an angel as he writes the Gospel, a reminder that God's call is not only to know Christ but to live the calling in truth, love, and unity.

The Martyrdom of St Matthew shows his final witness: murdered at the Easter Vigil while baptizing catechumens. The angel that once guided his pen now offers a palm branch, symbol of martyrdom and salvation. The hand that once pointed doubtfully at himself is now open to receive the reward of faithfulness.

Three paintings, three stages: the call, the inward transformation, the outward witness. So too in our lives: Christ calls us personally,

transforms us by grace, and sends us to bear witness—sometimes in quiet faithfulness, sometimes at great cost, always in love.

So let us take courage. Let us notice the hand of Christ, the light breaking into our ordinary rooms, the call extended to us. And let us rise, like Matthew, and follow—so that God’s mercy and transforming love may shine through our lives.

Amen.

Picture: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio: The Calling of St Matthew, 1600; Contarelli Chapel, San Luigi dei Francesi Church, Rome

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

Sermon – Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity

28th September 2025

All Saints' Marseille

Jane Quarmby, Licensed Lay Minister

Last weekend I bought a lottery ticket and was persuaded by the shopkeeper to take another one for 3 euros which would put me into a special national draw which would give me the chance to win 20 million euros. I duly invested my extra 3 euros on the basis that it would be wonderful to win all that money and promptly forgot all about it.

But this week, I began to think – “what would I do with all that money”? There’s no mortgage on the house, my car works fine, I have a comfortable life and enjoy my retirement from paid work. What would you do with 20 million euros? What guidance comes from God on this in our readings?

They all stress that God has already provided us with everything we need, and so it’s up to us to do good with what we have been given – be rich in good works, generous and ready to share. This would be an investment in our future life.

Luke gives a graphic example of the dangers of being rich, of loving money, with his story of poor Lazarus. Jesus doesn’t say that being rich is in itself a bad thing, but it all depends on how we use wealth. We would hope that if we found someone like Lazarus, ill, covered in sores, unable to feed himself, filthy and homeless lying outside our homes, that we would help him. We wouldn’t be enjoying ourselves eating,

drinking, and living the high life without a thought for the suffering right outside our doors. In our developed part of the world, we have organisations to deal with our Lazarus's so we might call an ambulance, get social services involved, refer him to the benefits office or perhaps give him money for somewhere to sleep and food. Part of our taxes cover the social care aspects of our lives. Or would we be tempted to call the police to have him moved along?

Every city in our developed world has beggars. They can be outside churches, railway stations, in the streets. Too often there is a ragged bundle of blankets and carrier bags in a doorway, which is all the possessions a rough sleeper has. Sometimes there will be someone in them, who can't cope with the world. They might be drug addicts or alcoholics, taking refuge in oblivion or just unlucky. Often, they have a dog with them – which is normally in a much better condition than its owner, providing some security and unconditional love. Dogs are no longer regarded as filthy vermin, as they were in Lazarus's day. Do we pass by, expecting the authorities to deal with the embarrassment of these people.? Do we try and help? Even just a hot coffee on a cold winter's day, as I saw a young man in Aix giving to a line of beggars outside the cathedral once. Personal, practical help.

And what of the Lazarus's in other countries around the world, where there is no social services or benefits structure but here is a big divide between rich and poor.

Jesus describes what happens to the abject creature outside the rich man's gate once he has passed through his miserable painful life - he is carried by the angels to the messianic banquet in the kingdom of God where he will be happy and cared for, pain-free. But the rich man who also dies, has already had his share of the good life and goes to the

place of the dead where he is tormented. No longer dressed in the finest clothes money can buy, feasting on the best food and wine available, he is in hell. But he hasn't lost his imperious disregard for Lazarus – he shouts to Abraham to send Lazarus to help him. As though Lazarus is a mere lackey. But there is too wide a gulf for any help to be sent to him. And so, he begs for his family to be warned of the danger they are in, so they don't end up like him. But God has already sent endless warnings from Moses through a long line of prophets – the writing was on the wall but ignored. As would be the final warning or alarm call from the one who rose from the dead – Jesus.

It's a very stern story.

It made me think about this whole question of wealth and how we use it. If we are selfish and greedy, hiding in our shell against the horrors of the world outside as is graphically illustrated by an advertisement for a charity on Irish tv at the moment. It opens with two photos side by side. One is of lush green, fertile Irish countryside with animals grazing, the other of a dry, devastated landscape ravaged by war. The voiceover says – not our country. But it goes on to say that it may not be our country, but it is still our problem – our duty, to give generously to feed the starving, heal the sick, help the homeless. We are urged to give a small monthly donation. If all of the well-off gave a little, it would change lives dramatically.

What does this mean for the billionaires of the world? The superrich? I began with wondering what I would do with 20 million and then began to wonder what they do with their billions. Do they sit on it like a broody hen and hatch yet more billions? And risk eternal suffering in the next life, if they even think about what next? So, I looked a few up and the numbers were staggering. For example, Warren Buffet has

donated 62 billion dollars to various charitable causes, out of a net worth of 133 billion. He hasn't left himself in a penniless state but 62 billion goes a long way in relieving suffering. Bill and Melissa Gates have so far donated nearly 48 billion in very focused ways, concentrating on reducing inequity in 3 areas – health, climate change and education. Bill Gates states “I believe that people who are financially successful have a responsibility to give back to society.” He is busy giving away virtually all of his wealth before he dies. He also states, “Private markets do a great job of responding to the needs of people in wealthier countries, but they don't serve the needs of the poor because there's no profit to be made.”

He and a number of other billionaires are using their vast wealth to do good. We could always argue that they could happily donate more – but then perhaps so could we. Instead of donating food to the Resto du Coeur once a year at harvest – we could do it every month. We could increase our charitable giving; we could give our time to helping others. There's always more that we can do as individuals and as a church. Jesus said that the poor would always be with us, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't be moved by the media coverage of starving children in Gaza and do our best to help.

If I do win that 20 million – think how many Lazarus's it would help. Or 5 euros a month to UNICEF if I don't win.