ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – First Sunday of Epiphany - Baptism of Christ

12th January 2025

Eglise du Sacré-Coeur, Oppède

Christine Portman, Reader

I wonder. Does anyone here this morning remember their baptism? Many of us were very young; our parents and godparents made promises for us. We can renew them through Confirmation, but it does beg the question: what right do others have to make such serious promises for us?

This morning we're remembering the baptism of Christ, so let's compare it with our own. Heading your service sheets is the Theophany icon, theophany meaning an appearance of God to humankind. It represents the moment when God's voice is heard saying *"This is my own dear Son with whom I am pleased."* You might notice the Holy Spirit descending as a dove. Christ's halo, in the form of a cross, is inscribed with three letters **O Ω N**, "He Who Is". Today's psalm magnificently described God's power and glory, and these letters, ὁ ὢν, reflect that power. They also reflect God's words to Moses "*I am who I am*". The crowds standing on the banks of the Jordan questioned John. Was he God's Messiah? But he tells them clearly: *"one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire*. (Luke 3.16). Now they know for certain: this is that greater person.

So here's the first difference between Jesus' baptism and our own. Clearly the child is not being revealed as the Son of God. Instead, we believe baptism bears witness to God's choice in opening a way to himself through Jesus Christ and through the gracious presence of the Holy Spirit. We believe that through the parents, who make the promises, God is choosing children to be nurtured in a Christian family

and, when old enough, come to faith themselves. Like the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, our church recognises baptism as a sacrament. In this morning's reading from the Acts of the Apostles we see Peter and John in Samaria baptizing for the first time. "*When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord* ***Jesus****. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.*" We believe that this sacrament has been passed down through the ages through the priestly laying on of hands.

But here's another clear difference between our baptisms and that of Jesus: Unlike today's priests, more than happy to welcome people into the Church, John felt reluctant to baptize Jesus. He thought that he was unworthy. Yet Jesus replied: "*Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness*". (Matthew 3.15). After that, he says nothing: there's no need – this is his revelation as God's Messiah. But in our case, whether it was ourselves or our parents who spoke, questions were posed and promises were made.

Do you turn away from sin? **I do.**
Do you reject evil? **I do.**
Do you turn to Christ as Saviour? **I do.**
Do you trust in him as Lord? **I do.**

"*I baptize you with water for repentance*" said John the Baptist, but at our baptism we don't simply repent of sins or turn away from evil; we make affirmations. We positively turn towards Christ as our Saviour. We put our full trust in him as our Lord. And that's why we celebrate his baptism. For us, Jesus isn't simply another great prophet. We recognise and profess him to be the Christ.

In their different ways everyone in the Christmas story learned that the child Jesus was precious to God, sometimes from angels, at others by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, through strange dreams, or their learning and a guiding star. All these foretold his greatness, but at this Theophany, for the first time, God's own voice announces *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."* (Matthew 3.17)

The preface to our church's liturgy for baptism reads: "Baptism marks the beginning of a journey with God which continues for the rest of our lives … a joyful moment when we rejoice in what God has done for us in Christ, making serious promises and declaring the faith. So what exactly has been promised?

Look again at the icon. It's clearly divided into three different sections, the two banks of the Jordan and, the centre, where Christ descends into Jordan's waters. The two banks rise into mountains representing the heavenly and the earthly worlds. Christ spans the divide. Now lower down, on the left bank, what's that axe doing there, lying at the foot of a withered tree? Perhaps you remember John's words to the Pharisees and Sadducces just before Jesus' baptism: *"You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' ….. The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.* (Matthew 3.7-10)

Our baptismal promises declare our desire to turn from a life without God to one which is lived for God through Jesus Christ. We are '*born again'* (John 3:3) because we intentionally turn to a life in God, knowing that our lives fall short of what they should be, and that Jesus Christ is the one from whom we receive forgiveness and new life in God's Spirit. Baptism is a challenging symbol of Christian discipleship.

John's closing words in today's Gospel are these: "*His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire*." It's not fashionable these days to talk about the consequences of leading a sinful life, but from the very beginning, at the heart of John's preaching lay a clear message: "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*". (Matthew 3.2). After John's imprisonment, yet before he has even called his first disciples, we hear Jesus using exactly the same words: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4.17)

These words sound so very dramatic. We may feel we're not up to theatrical turnarounds. Can we imagine ourselves suddenly donning a hair shirt or cutting ourselves off from our normal way of life? But are John and Christ actually asking for that? We know in our hearts how much sin hurts, how it can burn us up like a

fire. Repentance, in the Greek, *metanoia*, quite literally means turning around and looking and going the other way. It's hard to see the Kingdom of God if you're facing the wrong way! We're asked to face Christ's way, the way of love. Sometimes it can be costly – not simply in terms of money of course, though we are called to share what we can. It's emotionally costly to back down when we know we're in the wrong, to stop ourselves from saying a harmful word when we've been crossed, to try to see Christ in the face of the person we really don't like at all.

Christ does not want us to wallow in guilt; he comes to bring healing and wholeness to our lives. But first we need to recognise where we've fallen short. At the beginning of our service before the Confession, we heard these words:

> *Because God was merciful,*
> *he saved us through the water of rebirth*
> *and the renewing power of the Holy Spirit.*
> *But through sin we have fallen away from our baptism.*
> *Let us return to the Lord and renew our faith in his promises*
> *by confessing our sins in penitence.* (Titus 3.5)

In his Epiphany message, our bishop writes:
"The audacious claim of the gospels is that, in Christ, God himself enters the human situation. Through the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, humanity is given a new start with God. We can be healed from the radically damaging effects of sin and ultimately liberated from death into eternal life with our Creator".

If our faith is feeling a little dusty, this time of New Year resolutions is a wonderful opportunity to revisit the meaning of our baptism. A time to *pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off and start all over again*. *Metanoia* – turning to face Christ's Way.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Baptism of Christ

12th January 2025

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

The rhythm of the Church seasons is both comforting and dizzying. The journey from Christmas to Epiphany to Candlemas unfolds rapidly, leaving us breathless. One moment, we are gazing at a swaddled infant; the next, a twelve-year-old boy is lost in the Temple. Soon after, we encounter magi bearing gifts, a young family fleeing to Egypt, and a mother pondering all these things in her heart. Today, we stand by the banks of the Jordan river, witnessing the baptism of Jesus: the promised child stepping into his promise.

As we stand here, perhaps feeling a bit uncertain, we wonder how to reconcile the open heavens and the descending dove with our modern, rational minds, which often struggle with the symbolic. Meanwhile, the Eastern Churches celebrate the baptism of Jesus with grandeur and song, proclaiming: 'Today the Lord comes to be baptized, so that humankind may be lifted up; today the one who never has to bow inclines himself before his servant so that he may release our chains; today we have acquired the kingdom of heaven: indeed, the kingdom of heaven that has no end.' [1] This moment marks, indeed, the 'official' revelation of Jesus as the Son of God to the world by God the Father. Where the Eastern tradition dwells in mystery and wonder, the Western mind often seeks to analyse and explain.

Just weeks ago, we heard the opening chapter of this story: John the Baptist preaching repentance and judgment at the Jordan, instructing the people on how to live out their conversion. 'That Jesus should come and be baptised by John is surely cause for amazement. To think of the infinite river that gladdens

[1] Orthodox Liturgy for the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

the city of God being bathed in a poor little stream!'[2] For the early Church, this was not only remarkable but also perplexing. The Messiah placing himself under the tutelage of John? God's incarnate Son receiving a baptism of repentance? Aligning himself with sinners? And why did God the Father choose this moment to part the heavens and declare his Son beloved?

"Today the Lord comes to be baptized, so that humankind may be lifted up…"

It is truly extraordinary that Jesus begins his public ministry by identifying with 'all the people,' as Luke describes them—the broken, the hurting, and the hopeful who had gathered at the Jordan. Jesus' first public act is one of alignment: a radical, humble joining with humanity. His first step is toward us. In his baptism, Jesus declares that God's abundant mercy is available directly and immediately to everyone. We are thus invited into a story of identity, transformation, and calling — not only of who Jesus is, but also of who we are.

When Jesus was baptised, in the Jordan, he heard the words: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Jesus, the elder brother, the 'firstborn among many brothers [and sisters],'[3] received this assurance from the Father. In our own baptism, we too are told: "You are my son, you are my daughter." What is true of Jesus, the eldest Son, is in some measure true for all of God's children. To hear these words—'You are my beloved, in whom I am well pleased' — is astonishing. How can such words be meant for us?

The Church has not always echoed this message. Too often, we have heard instead that we are unacceptable, sinful, outsiders, shameful, condemned. But this is not the story of our baptism. Paul affirms it with conviction: 'We are children of God … and therefore heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ.' [4]

These words are almost too beautiful to believe. This is why they need to be attested to in a rite that engraves them in our memory. How can we know we are daughters and sons of God if no one tells us? How can we believe it we don't receive evidence of it? Our baptism attests to it. Our baptism affixes its seal, so that from now on, the one who is baptised can no longer ignore God's word, which has the power to transform their life. If I am the Father's most beloved

[2] Hippolytus of Rome
[3] Romans 8.29
[4] Romans 8.16-17

daughter or son, then 'whom shall I fear?'[5] There will be anguish, temptations, and tribulations, but of whom shall I be afraid?

In baptism, God conveys to us our identity as beloved children, so cherished that God would go to any length to communicate that love, even to the point of dying on the cross. In a time when understanding who we are has become increasingly complex, baptism offers clarity: our true identity is found in knowing whose we are. We are God's beloved children.

Living as God's beloved requires courage to accept this identity, especially when the world tells us otherwise. The freedom bestowed upon us in baptism is vast and generous. Yet this love does not impose; it does not coerce. It descends quietly, like a dove, speaking in a gentle voice we are free to heed or ignore.

This assurance — that God delights in us not because our lives are flawless, but because we are God's children even in the midst of murky waters — brings peace and freedom. To embrace Christ's baptism is to embrace the truth that we, beloved daughters and sons, are one. Baptism binds us to all of humanity, making us kin, with responsibilities toward one another that we too often fail to honour. It calls us into radical solidarity, not separateness. Through baptism, we are freed to touch, accept, and love all that is broken within and around us, precisely because we are always and already God's beloved.

There is one baptism, one common hope for all of us. What greater reason for hope than this: Jesus stands with us at the water's edge, willing to immerse himself in shame, scandal, and pain so that we might hear the only Voice that will tell us who we are: God's beloved children. Even in the darkest waters, we are God's own.

"Today the Lord comes to be baptized, so that humankind may be lifted up…"

For the baptism of Jesus, when he was made one with us, and for our baptism, when we were made one with him and one another, God's name be praised.

Amen.

[5] Psalm 27.1

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Second Sunday of Epiphany
Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
19th January 2025
Manosque

Jane Quarmby, Licensed Lay Minister

Last year Garry and I were invited to our nephew's wedding in Oxfordshire, a happy occasion when two families got together to celebrate the love and commitment being made by our young relatives. He was marrying a girl from Azerbaijan, so it was also a meeting of two cultures, and an international event in many ways. A warm and sunny day, a lovely old church, everyone dressed up in their best outfits, and even our hairy little sheepdog was made welcome as it was too warm to leave her out in the car. She sat in the front with us and caused great hilarity when she woke up with a start as the newlyweds were given a round of applause after their vows, and barked at the top of her not inconsiderable voice to join in. Afterwards we all adjourned to a restaurant for the speeches, toasts, a meal, drinks and later on, dancing to celebrate.

A happy day, and a new family beginning.

Weddings have always had great significance, the uniting of two families, a new start to a new family. In Jesus's time, a wedding could last a week, with processions, and it must have seemed like endless celebrations. I marvel at the social staying power of our French friends who sail through a long lunch, into boules in the afternoon, then start all over again with more apéros and food in the evening. I can't imagine

a whole week of that! Just planning the Christmas celebrations for family and friends leaves me needing a week off afterwards.

The hosting of a wedding then would have involved huge preparations and expense. It was a village event, with everyone invited and also people from neighbouring villages. Much social status was at stake, to ensure it all went smoothly and there was enough food and wine every day. So to run out of wine would be a disaster – the family would face embarrassment, shame and social disgrace and be talked about for years afterwards in the village.

We don't know what linked Jesus and his mother Mary to the wedding at Cana, but they were both there. It's the first time that Mary is mentioned in John's gospel and not by name – only referred to as Jesus's mother. The next time he mentions her is at the foot of the cross at the crucifixion. He places her at the beginning and end of Jesus's ministry, as the instigator of the first miracle or sign and faithfully supporting him as he performs the ultimate miracle on the cross.

She clearly knows that her son is no ordinary man – she has no doubt that he can fix the problem which has arisen when the wine runs out. He on the other hand seems reluctant to get involved, telling her it's not her problem or his. It's not yet his time, he says. Which seems rather a strange thing to say – he's a carpenter, not a wine supplier so no-one would expect him to do anything about it anyway. But his mother, as mothers so often do, knows him better than anyone and knows he has compassion for others – and clearly also knows that he will save the day for their hosts.

The stone water jars that he told the servants to fill up with water were used for the ceremonial religious washing rites. They were huge, each

holding 20 to 30 gallons or 90 to 130 litres when filled up to the top. To have all that water turn into wine was a huge gift to the family and guests at that wedding – 600 litres of the best wine. It was a blessing from God.

On first sight this miracle may seem a bit frivolous – how wonderful yes – especially for the guests – but this first indication that Jesus was no ordinary man has much deeper significance too.

It's a happy, joyous occasion. The coming of Christ the Messiah is also a happy, joyous occasion. He has already begun his ministry – he's there with his disciples, but so far, his ministry hasn't revealed anything out of the ordinary. The water is transfigured – as our lives were to be transfigured by the coming of Christ. But it happened because Mary told the servants to do whatever Jesus told them to do. They obeyed – and a miracle happened. I find it reassuring that Christ took pity on his hosts and all the wedding guests and made the wedding something to remember. He recognised their need and dealt with it in an extreme and generous way.

This is the first glimpse we have of heaven and earth meeting, of Jesus as an extraordinary person in the midst of very ordinary people. Life would become serious and challenging for him and all his friends and family, but on this day, he came to the rescue and transformed what could have been a disastrous start to a young couple's life together into a joyous day. The water jars that were used for Jewish purification rites are symbolic of what God is now doing – he's using something old to bring in a new thing, bringing purification to Israel and the whole world in a new and unexpected way. This miracle shows us the effect that Jesus can have on our lives in every aspect. He took something very ordinary, water, and transformed it into the finest wine – as one wine

critic put it recently “Along with firelight and song, wine is humanity’s oldest friend”.

John describes seven miracles in his Gospel and the six which come later we might think are more significant than the one at the wedding that we’re looking at today – the feeding of the 5000, or the three healings – of the official’s son, the crippled man, and the blind man; or walking on water; and finally, the raising of Lazarus from the dead. All extraordinary. But his transforming of the water into wine was chosen by John to be the first miracle in his Gospel, and for good reason. John is using his Gospel to prove that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, God’s Son, who had the power to transform anything into something bigger and better beyond our imagination. If he could do that with water, imaging what he could do with people.

But we should always remember that he can work miracles through us too, providing we listen to him and do as he asks. Mary knew that – and Mum always knows best!

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Second Sunday of Epiphany
Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
19th January 2025
All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

A wedding is never an ordinary day. For the couple, their families, and their guests is a day for celebration, abundance, joy, and the beginning of new life - whether it is a grand royal event or a modest village gathering, like the one at Cana. It is a day when even mundane details can acquire unforeseen proportions and significance. A wedding is possibly our metaphor for things ultimately turning out well. Or is this idea merely fairy-tale philosophy and Hollywood fantasy?

Regardless of how one feels about weddings and stories surrounding them, we can agree that this is a remarkable episode. In this Epiphany season, it sheds light on who Jesus is and what he is about to do in the world. Still, it is striking that John places such emphasis on this event, calling it 'the first of Jesus' signs'. Why did Jesus do it? Running out of wine at a wedding banquet, while a breach of hospitality and a potential source of embarrassment and shame for the hosts, hardly constitutes a matter of life and death. It is a social inconvenience, not a moral or existential emergency. How does creating an extravagant amount of wine at a village wedding – approximately 600 litres - align with acts like raising the dead, feeding the hungry, walking through locked doors to show the scars on his hands, feet and side, and proclaiming victory over death? Unlike healing lepers or saving a woman accused of adultery from stoning, this act lacks an obvious

ethical or moral dimension. Some might even find it troubling, as it could be misconstrued as encouraging excess. So, what does this "sign" signify?

In Scripture, marriage and wedding feasts frequently symbolise God's salvation and participation in his Kingdom. Today's reading from Isaiah likens the return of the exiled people to a wedding, celebrating the joy of God's people as akin to that of a bride and bridegroom. Jesus himself often used wedding imagery in his teaching, in some of his best-known parables: invitations to a wedding ignored by some; a guest improperly attired; wise and foolish bridesmaids, some prepared for the arrival of the bridegroom and some not. When questioned about fasting, Jesus likened his presence among his followers to a bridegroom's presence at a wedding - a time for joy, not mourning. These teachings foreshadowed a deeper fulfilment. Here, at the start of his public ministry, John's Gospel announces Jesus as reinterpreting and fulfilling God's promises. Jesus will proclaim the arrival of the Kingdom of God, where scarcity is replaced by abundance, shame by joy.

God's nature is not to provide merely enough. As Paul writes, God is able 'to accomplish abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine'[1]. God is a God of overflow whose purpose is, in Jesus' own words, 'that we may have life: life in all its fullness'.[2]

Shouldn't this challenge us to respond generously to human need today, trusting that God can transform even our modest efforts into something extraordinary, bringing the Kingdom closer to fruition?

[1] *Ephesians 3.20*
[2] *John 10.10*

Interestingly, John's Gospel omits the story of Jesus' Transfiguration – the moment when some of his disciples (John being one of them) were given a glimpse of God's glory radiating through Jesus. In this Gospel, before God's glory is revealed fully in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, it is already present here at the wedding in Cana.

It is glory manifested in the midst of human concerns: in preparations, expectations, disappointments, embarrassment, and joy. In the ordinariness of life, Christ's presence is to be found. Here, in the poverty of our nature we are to see the riches of God's grace, as the collect prayer so beautifully puts it this morning.

In the waters of our human frailty, we can encounter God's grace; in our failures, we taste the wine of Christ's presence. Glory, it seems, often appears in unexpected ways – made known through love, service, community, and grace.

This quiet sign at Cana owes much to Mary's role. Amid celebration and distraction, she perceives the need and persists despite Jesus' initial reluctance: 'They have no wine.' She didn't tell him what she wanted done. Instead, she communicated her trust in Jesus' loving, generous nature, and invited the servants to practice the obedience that makes faith possible: 'Do whatever he tells you.' Mary acts as a catalyst, turning potential into action: 'Do whatever he tells you.' Seeking to know what Jesus Christ asks of us - this is the essence of discipleship.

In this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Mary offers a model of intercessory prayer that can unite us, regardless of our theological differences about her role. We can emulate her example by presenting the world's needs to God: 'They have no food,' "They have no justice,' 'They have no home,' 'They have no one to care for them'. And we

must also acknowledge, ‘There is no unity among us as Christians; there is only division.’ Or even: ‘There is no love’.

Mary simply presented the need and waited with expectant faith, preparing for the moment when Christ will act.

No matter how insurmountable or hopeless the situation, we can approach God with honesty and persistence – even in moments of celebration, as those this Week of Prayer will provide. We can join together in anticipation, ready to participate in the new life that God makes available now.

Our divisions as Christians, though painful, have the potential to humble us and make us more attuned to the quiet workings of grace. As the Church is increasingly silenced in the world, may it grow more open to the Spirit of unity that moves where it wills.

At the Last Supper, Jesus prayed: ‘May they all be one.’[3] It is our faithfulness and response which may be exactly what God requires to make possible the signs needed in our own day. There is an abundant future of blessing and glory that Christ makes possible. So our response, like that at Cana, can be to do together whatever he tells us.

Amen.

[3] *John 17.21*

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Third Sunday of Epiphany

26th January 2025

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

Last week Donald Trump was inaugurated as 47th President of the United States. Predictably, the day had a polarising effect. His supporters cheered wildly, while his critics spoke of a looming dread. It is interesting to place alongside the events in Washington our readings for today, set by the Lectionary. They too record words that had a polarising effect.

Our Old Testament and Gospel readings both describe defining moments when an old text and its interpretation together created a new order of religion. Around 500 BC, Ezra and his colleagues read out the Jewish Law and explained it to their hearers, creating a new form of Judaism for the time that followed the return from exile in Babylon. Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah in Nazareth, setting the stage not only for his own ministry but also, to some degree, for his followers ever since. Both were dramatic moments: the first involved reading the Law to a community and defining them as God's people in a new way; the second involved reading prophecy which spoke of future blessing and declaring that it was happening already. Ezra's message provoked both weeping and celebrating. Jesus's sermon provoked both antagonism and loyalty.

Our Gospel reading ends at the moment Jesus announces that Isaiah's prophecy is being fulfilled. But the story goes on. His words were initially well received, but when the people began to express scepticism of how a carpenter's son could say such things, Jesus compared their unbelief to the difficulties encountered by the prophets Elijah and Elisha, who found more faith among strangers than in the communities to which they had been called. At this point in the Gospel story the mood changes. The congregation turn on Jesus and, in a foreshadowing of the Passion, take him up to the brow of a hill to throw him off.

Commentators have speculated about the reasons for the abrupt change of mood in the Nazareth congregation. Some note that Jesus doesn't exactly quote chapter 61 of Isaiah, but leaves some sentences out and imports one from another chapter – changes that emphasise how his mission will focus on the hospitality of God to everyone, a gospel of acceptance and inclusion. Other commentators note the economic implications of Jesus's call for a 'year of the Lord's favour', a year of Jubilee in which debts would be forgiven and confiscated land restored – if implemented literally, it would have disrupted the local economy. As his message is absorbed, initial approval turns to rejection and violence, as it will again in the final dramatic week in Jerusalem. Whatever the reasons for the mood change, this brief scene sets the pattern for Jesus's future ministry.

Paul's exposition of the unity of Christ's body, in his first letter to the church in Corinth, is a good reading for us at the end of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. In Marseille, Aix and the Luberon, we have enjoyed sharing our faith with our Christian neighbours, as friendships and understandings have deepened. Yet if Paul's Letter were read out before the more usual mutually suspicious Christian groupings of our time – not least within the Church of England itself –

would we weep in sorrow at our failure to live by it, or rejoice at the recognition of our real identity and mutual belonging? It is something to reflect on. Paul urges the Corinthians to learn to think of themselves as one entity, one body, whose life and health depend on co-operation and connection. We cannot pretend this is a lesson we have learned, in church or politics.

Which brings us back to President Trump and the polarising impact of his inauguration. All three of our readings are about the importance of community, justice and compassion. None of those were apparent in the President's speech and actions on Monday. One of the most disturbing things about his method – by no means unique to him - is his use of scapegoating to gain support for his views.

You will have heard me speak before about scapegoating. By this mechanism, our uncomfortable feelings about ourselves, such an envy or guilt, are displaced and projected onto another more vulnerable person or group. It works like this. I feel bad about myself, so I pick on someone who is demonstrably 'worse' than me, and then I feel better because I am not as bad as *them*. Scapegoating also works to overcome my sense of powerlessness in the face of circumstances in my life that cause me unhappiness. I can say that it's all 'their' fault, whoever 'they' are.

In Western societies, we seem to be in the grip of an epidemic of scapegoating. Mostly it is those who are 'different' who are scapegoated - those of different nationality, ethnicity, social status or sexual identity. Across the Western world, politicians are trying to outdo one another in being toughest on immigration. For surely it is the immigrants who are to blame for everything. And if not them, then perhaps the LGBTI+ community, against whom new laws are being passed in different countries to authorise discrimination. Those were two of the groups

targeted by Trump on the first day of his new presidency. They were also two groups mentioned in a sermon which the Bishop of Washington, Marion Budde, gave at the service in the National Cathedral which followed the inauguration. She asked the President to show mercy on the groups he had singled out. In media reports that followed the service, while the President was dismissive of Bishop Budde, there was a degree of awe at her willingness to speak truth to power.

Scapegoating needs to be called out. Not just in others, but also – especially - in ourselves. Tomorrow is designated by the United Nations as International Holocaust Remembrance Day, when the terrible consequences of this way of thinking are recalled. 27th January is the anniversary of the day on which Auschwitz was liberated in 1945. Last week one of the last living French witnesses to have survived Auschwitz died. We must continue to learn from their testimony.

The British Jewish author Gillian Rose, a respected philosophical voice of the last century, wrote powerfully about the Holocaust. She also criticised films like Schindler's List (which was shown again last week on French TV) because they place the viewer in the role of innocent bystander or remote judge. Such works, she wrote, seek to absolve us of our own complicity in the world's evils. Gillian Rose argued instead for a 'solidarity of the shaken' - those who are acutely aware not only of the sins of the world but also of our collusion with them. Unfashionably perhaps, she concludes that the way to avoid such complicity is the path of prayer, where we are confronted by a depth before which we must be contemplative, the mystery of God. The infinite Love that has the ultimate power to dissolve hatred and extremism in all its forms. I would like to suggest

that this is how we might begin responding to the pronouncements of the 47th President of the United States.

Meanwhile we should be shaken that extremist views – including racism, antisemitism and homophobia - are once again gaining credence across the democratic world. It is not OK to express such views, and it is not OK to be bystanders. Holocaust Memorial Day reminds us of that. So does the Gospel.

None of us is innocent of complicity in the evils of the world. But we do have it in us to challenge injustice and prejudice wherever we find it. In the name of the one who lived and died and rose again to restore our humanity, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Chaplaincy of All Saints' Marseille
with Aix-en-Provence
and the Luberon

2nd February 2025
Presentation of Christ in the Temple
Candlemas

Reflection

There are moments in our lives when our senses awaken, when we perceive more deeply, when we glimpse a reality larger than ourselves, opening us to a fuller life. These are moments of encounter, when divinity and our humanity touch. That is what we celebrate today on the Feast of the Presentation of our Lord in the Temple, Candlemas.

In the Orthodox and Oriental traditions, it is called the Feast of the Encounter - the meeting of Jesus with his people, represented in the Temple by Simeon and Anna. These two elders are bearers of Israel's long-held hopes, stretching back to the promise made to Abraham: "In you will all the nations of the earth be blessed"[1]. This promise was never meant for Abraham's descendants alone. It was a gift for all humankind, an invitation into the boundless love of God.

Among the many righteous and devout people of their generation, what set Simeon and Anna apart? What prepared them to recognise that "the Lord whom they sought, has suddenly come to his Temple"[2]? It was a lifetime of patient, hopeful, trust-filled waiting for the consolation and redemption of their people. Could they serve as models for us today?

[1] *Genesis 22.18*
[2] *Malachi 3.1*

We all know what it is to wait – to wait for life to change, for grief to subside, for prayers to be answered, for joy to return. We wait for forgiveness and reconciliation, for clarity, for purpose, for healing, for new beginnings.

"Good things come to those who wait", the saying goes. Yet waiting is difficult. Even more so in an age of instant communication, same-day delivery, and high-speed travel, when everything around us fuels impatience. The relentless pace of life, the demands of technology, the pressure of constant obligations – waiting feels like an affliction. We devise strategies to endure it, seeking to avoid the frustration, resentment and uncertainty that so often accompany delay.

Yet the very foundation of the Christian life is built on waiting. Endurance, steadfastness, hope, trust, faith – they all imply waiting. From the beginning, waiting for God has defined humankind's relationship with the divine. Abraham was promised that he would be the father of a great nation, yet that promise was fulfilled long after his death. The Hebrews wandered the wilderness for forty years before entering the Promised Land. Later, they endured seventy years in exile in Babylon before returning to Jerusalem. And the last prophetic voice of the Old Testament, Malachi from whose book we read today - regarded in the Eastern Churches as the 'seal of the prophets' - spoke some four centuries before Christ's birth. Four hundred years of prophetic silence.

By the time Jesus was born, many of his people felt the weight of waiting as absence. The God, who had once seemed so near, now felt distant. They surely echoed the psalmist's cry: "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?"[3]. Once a window, the heavens seemed to have become an impenetrable wall.

And yet, Simeon and Anna did not take God's apparent absence as cause to turn away. Instead, they held fast, their hearts inclined toward him, their prayers ascending to the One they could neither see nor hear.

A writer once observed that only those who know how to wait will find that "the world discloses its power of meaning" – that they become "sharers with God of a secret"[4]. In an unremarkable bundle wrapping the frail form of a child, the son of a poor couple, Simeon and Anna saw God secretly at work. They saw more than an infant; they saw salvation, the fulfillment of divine promise, the light of God's glory, the peace that sets hearts free, the fullness of their own lives. Waiting purifies the heart, making it humble, open, and ready. Only the eyes of faith could recognise, in the fragile, small humanity of Jesus, the Saviour announced by the angel[5].

[3] *Psalm 13.1*
[4] W. H. Vanstone, *The Stature of Waiting*
[5] *Luke 2,11*

This child, like all children, is a living symbol of hope - a new beginning, a new life, a future brimming with possibility. Looking back, this child is the fulfilment of God's promises. Looking forward, he is the hope of the world, a light in the darkness. This child is the God of newness and surprises.

But what good is it to us if Simeon receives this child into his arms, yet we do not? What good is it to us if Simeon and Anna's eyes see salvation, yet we remain blind? What good is it to us if Simeon is free to go in peace, yet our hearts remain restless?

The encounter in faith with God, present in the history of each human being, is not only for Simeon and Anna. It is for us. Deep within, this is what we long for. It is the desire that shapes our lives: to hold the child, to see the salvation, to know the fulfillment of God's promises in our own lives, to be set free to go in peace.

This is my hope for all of us: That we may allow ourselves, like Simeon and Anna, to be led by the desires of our hearts, moved by the Spirit. That we may have the eyes of faith to recognise God at work in the unnoticed and the unexpected. That we may see God's presence in the small, the hidden, the ordinary. That we may have the courage to proclaim what we see. That we may glimpse the light - so that we may become a light for others. So that, in the words of the American Baptist pastor and civil rights leader Howard Thurman, the work of Christmas - the work of God becoming flesh and dwelling among us - may begin:

> "To find the lost,
> To heal the broken,
> To feed the hungry,
> To release the prisoner,
> To rebuild the nations,
> To bring peace among people,
> To make music in the heart."[6]

Amen.

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

[6] Thurman, *The Work of Christmas,* in *The Mood of Christmas and Other Celebrations*

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Fourth Sunday before Lent
9th February 2025
All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

Isaiah, Paul and Peter – a Hebrew prophet in the Temple built by Solomon; a Pharisee, once a fierce persecutor of Christ's followers, reflecting on becoming a Christian convert; and a Galilean fisherman astonished by an abundant catch. What do their stories, which we have just heard this morning, have in common? A thread runs through them: each experiences an encounter with the divine, in which they are called and commissioned.

Do we believe in the God of the encounter? When we read theophany stories in Scripture - accounts of encounters with divine manifestations - we may feel wary, wistful, or even envious. Surely, such experiences cannot happen to us.

Paul briefly alludes to his dramatic transformation in his first letter to the Corinthians: 'Last of all, [the Risen Christ] appeared to me', The Acts of the Apostles provide a more vivid account: Saul of Tarsus, a zealous Pharisee and persecutor of Christians, sees a blinding light, and hears a divine voice[7]. This encounter compels him to abandon his mission of persecution and become himself a follower of Christ, later known as the apostle Paul. His story is a striking reminder that no one is beyond the reach of God's boundless grace.

Isaiah's vision in the Temple is one of the most awe-inspiring moments in Scripture. In the presence of a reality greater than anything he had ever imagined; he is overwhelmed by reverence and adoration. The encounter with the Wholly Other is a mysterium tremendum et fascinans[8] – a mystery that both terrifies and fascinates, humbles and comforts, daunts and delights, drawing the soul into its fullness.

Likewise, the fisherman Simon, later called Peter, brother of Andrew and companion of James and John, experiences something that evokes in him a reaction akin to Isaiah's vision of glory. When Peter witnesses the immense catch of fish, he is struck by the presence of holiness.

In the face of the divine manifestation, Isaiah, Paul and Peter each experience profound unworthiness. Peter, overwhelmed by the abundant catch, falls at

[7] *Acts of the Apostles, 9.3-9*
[8] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea Of The Holy*

Jesus' knees and says, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.' Paul, reflecting on his conversion, confesses, 'I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle.' And Isaiah, for all the intensity of his vision, cries out, 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips.' These encounters are anything but mild. When we hear Isaiah, Paul, and Peter express their human frailty before a transcendent God, we recognise a singular theme. Saint Augustine once articulated it with both fear and comfort: 'Where I'm terrified by what I am for you, I am given comfort by what I am with you.'[9] To gaze upon God's holiness is to become acutely aware of one's shortcomings - yet God acts to bridge the gap between divine perfection and human brokenness.

An angel purifies Isaiah's lips with a burning coal. Then God speaks: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Isaiah now responds without hesitation: 'Here am I; send me!' says Isaiah. Our frailty, failure, and inadequacy are not obstacles to God's love. He does not require a perfect messenger for his message. A 19th-century Polish rabbi, the Kotzker Rebbe, known for his sharp and down-to-earth teachings, once said: 'Let your holiness be human — the holiness of those moulded out of clay, not the holiness of angels, for God has plenty of angels.' Though the chasm between divine transcendence and human limitation and imperfection is vast, we can still offer ourselves to God, as Isaiah did: 'Here am I, send me.' Without hesitation or reserve, we can follow the example of Peter, James, John, and their companions, who 'brought their boats to shore, left everything, and followed Jesus.' And like Paul, we may take joy in the truth: 'By the grace of God I am what I am.'

God often meets us in moments of failure, vulnerability and need. 'We have toiled all night long, but have caught nothing,' Peter laments. Yet God does not leave us in desolation. He calls us beyond mere receptivity into sharing in his mission – a work of healing, renewal, justice, peace and restoration.

Just as Christ chose to step into Peter's boat, so does he too step into the boat of our lives – even when we believe it to be empty. He enters our barrenness to fill it with his presence, transforming our poverty into a channel for his mercy.

From our boat, Christ calls us to 'put out into the deep water' - to venture into the depths of truth, repentance and action, into the deep, turbulent, and often daunting waters of our lives, communities, cultures. He summons us to delve deeper into our capacity for love – not only for those who are familiar or like us, but for all. The abundant catch of fish signifies the vast embrace of God's kingdom, where all are gathered in love and dignity, regardless of race, status or origin. If our faith - our journey with Christ – does not make us more generous, hospitable, forgiving, and compassionate, then what, indeed, is its worth to us and to the world?

[9] *Sermon 340, 292*

From our boat, Christ calls us to step forth in faith and freedom, to surrender our prejudices, to think and live with depth, to face our doubts and fears, and to abandon ourselves to the inexhaustible depths of God's abundant life.

To Isaiah's dread, to Paul's regrets and painful memories, to Simon Peter's fears, and to our own deep insecurities, God whispers the same words Jesus spoke to Peter: 'Do not be afraid'. Then, with the psalmist, we may pray: 'Though I walk in the midst of trouble, [I trust that] the Lord shall make good his purpose for me.'

May we, like Peter, take the leap of trust: 'If you say so, I will'. If you say so, I will try again. If you say so, I will be faithful to my calling. If you say so, I will venture into the deep rather than linger on the shore. If you say so, I will cast my empty net into the water and wait with hope for your kingdom to come.

For we can trust that after a night of struggle comes a morning of mercy and a tomorrow of promise.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Fourth Sunday before Lent
9th February 2025
Eglise du Sacré-Coeur, Oppède

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

'Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.' Those words of the fourteenth century mystic, Catherine of Siena, opened a sermon given by the former Bishop of London, Richard Chartres, at the wedding of the Prince and Princess of Wales in 2011. They also offer a profound commentary on what the word 'vocation' means.

When vicars speak of vocation, people sometimes assume they are talking only about ministry in the church. I was once asked to give a talk to some school leavers, and when I said that I was planning to talk to them about vocation, a look of panic crossed the face of the person who had invited me. I reassured them that I meant 'vocation' in the widest sense, of what people feel called to do with their lives. We use 'vocational guidance' to mean helping people discover what their gifts might best fit them for in the world of work.

Sometimes the activity is the last thing their loved ones might have wanted them to do, but the pull of it is stronger. We might spare a thought for Zebedee, the father of James and John. Would he have taken comfort from Catherine of Siena's words as he watched his sons walk away from the family business to a life of risk and uncertainty, following an itinerant preacher with nowhere to call home?

In Mark and Matthew's accounts of the beginning of Jesus's ministry, he simply calls Simon and Andrew, James and John, and they follow him. Luke's Gospel

interweaves the call of the first disciples with the story of the miraculous catch of fish. In the Bible, miraculous harvests are signs of the coming kingdom of God. John places the story of the catch of fish at the end of his Gospel, after the resurrection. The fish are cooked and shared, and the mantle of ministry is passed to Peter, despite his overwhelming sense of failure at having betrayed Jesus after his arrest.

In Luke's version, Peter's sense of unworthiness is articulated from the outset. Having been surprised by Jesus in the middle of a working day (God has a way of interrupting us as we go about our ordinary lives), he at first protests that they have fished all night and caught nothing. But something about this stranger, whom he has observed over the previous days - preaching in the synagogue at Capernaum, healing his mother-in-law, teaching from his own borrowed boat – makes him comply with the request to 'put out into the deep water' and let down the nets.

As ever with the Gospels, there are echoes of the Old Testament. The 'waters of the deep' in Genesis are a metaphor for chaos, something that threatens God's purposes. Yet the result of confronting the chaos is an extraordinary harvest of fish – a sign of the abundance of God's coming reign. Then, following a familiar pattern in the Bible, a miracle story becomes a call or commissioning. The call of Moses at the burning bush. The call of the prophet Isaiah, which we heard in our Old Testament reading.

At the sight of the miraculous catch, Simon Peter is overwhelmed by a sense of proximity to the divine. Like Isaiah before him ('I am a man of unclean lips'), he protests his unworthiness ('Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man'). Paul,

writing to the early church community at Corinth, expresses a similar sense of shame ('I am unfit to be called an apostle'), aware that before his conversion he had persecuted Christians for their faith. But for Isaiah, Paul and Peter, and countless others since, it is at the very moment of painful self-knowledge that the commission comes. 'Do not be afraid', says Jesus to Peter, 'from now on you will be catching people'. The prophet Jeremiah had used the image of 'catching people' to speak of those who served God's purpose. (Jeremiah 16.16-18.) Here, these young fishermen are invited to do the same. The pull of their vocation is such that the boats, the fish and the mystified Zebedee are left on the shore.

We see a pattern of call and response throughout the Bible. In what the Christmas bidding prayer calls 'the tale of the loving purposes of God', we are taught that somehow God needs our response to complete those purposes. Isaiah, called to be the prophet who will warn Israel of impending disaster, terrified of the responsibility, yet answering: 'Here am I; send me.' Simon Peter, taking on the mantle of ministry from Jesus: 'Feed my sheep'. Next month we will celebrate the greatest call and response of all, the Annunciation of our Lord to his mother Mary. 'Be it unto me according to your word.' Last week, at Candlemas, we pondered on the enormous cost of her response, as Simeon foretold how a sword would pierce her soul.

Vocation is about a sense of who we really are, what we are here to do. Mostly it involves a series of responses rather than a single moment of decision. Being open to God in our lives, trying to discern what our response should be to any set of circumstances. Letting down our nets into the chaos of our times.

The times may feel unpromising or threatening, as they do now. I once read an article by the late Bernard Levin, reflecting on the courage shown by a Dutch couple who had decided to shelter a Jewish family in wartime Amsterdam. Their initial decision exposed them to ever increasing risk. Yet, Levin noted, somehow they found the courage to say to themselves: 'We have said A. Now we must say B.' I wonder if those fishermen found themselves thinking something similar, as they walked with Jesus to Jerusalem, towards arrest, trial, execution and death. A series of responses rather than a single moment of decision, as their vocation unfolded. 'We have said A. Now we must say B.'

Yet sometimes there <u>are</u> defining moments of vocation that change our lives and the lives of those around us. In 2018, a gunman entered a village supermarket near Carcassonne and took three hostages. Two were later released, leaving one still held at gunpoint, a woman who worked as a cashier. Arnaud Beltrame, the most senior police officer called to the scene, who had recently been baptised as a Christian, offered to change places with her, thereby saving her life. He lost his own in the shooting that followed.

At the end of this service, through Christ, we will offer our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice, asking God to send us out to live and work to his praise and glory. We may never be called upon to do anything like as courageous as what Arnaud Beltrame did. But we do each have a vocation. And if, by grace, we are able to discover who God means us to be, it is not impossible that, as Catherine of Siena observed, we may - each in our own small way - set the world on fire.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Third Sunday before Lent
16th February 2025
All Saints' Marseille

Christine Portman, Reader

I wonder how you're feeling this cold February morning? What seems like a long winter has perhaps been made even gloomier by the daily news. Today's Collect has it about right when it talks about *the unruly wills and passions of sinful humanity!* So I hope you found some comfort in today's readings. They're all so full of hope and promise. A 'Jeremiah' is defined as a miserable pessimist, but listen again to the prophet's words:

Blessed are those who trust in the Lord,
whose trust is the Lord.
They shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.
It shall not fear when heat comes,
and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious,
and it does not cease to bear fruit.

Then we recited Psalm 1:

Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and who meditates on his law day and night.
That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.

This reminded me straight away of words from *Letters from Westerbork.* From this Nazi transit camp, Etty Hillesum wrote*, "There is a really deep well inside me. And in it dwells God".* In one of the darkest periods of recent human history, Etty made an extraordinary spiritual journey of self-discovery. Her last written words were found on a postcard thrown from a transport train. Although on her

way to Auschwitz, they reveal her joy, thankfulness and confidence in God's goodness and ultimate power. She had found him, even as she travelled with thousands of others to her death.

We're not in those darkest places yet, but many people with knowledge of world history are rightly disturbed by current trends. But we could take a longer view by looking back into biblical history. Even a cursory glance through the Old Testament might lead us to reflect, *plus ça change.* We see wars and hatred, a profound failure to follow God's laws. Over millenia, prophets cried out for peace and justice, longing for a time when swords would be beaten into ploughshares and God's peace reign on earth.

We may be passing through difficult times, but today's Collect points us in the right direction. It acknowledges the constant change that many of us find unsettling, but asks for God's grace:

> so to love what you command
> and to desire what you promise,
> that, among the many changes of this world,
> our hearts may surely there be fixed
> where true joys are to be found.

Jeremiah's words and the psalm speak of this grace, experienced by those who choose to *delight …in the law of the Lord.* Their choice makes them truly *blessed.* Sometimes we recognise how blessed we are - but for most of us, not always. Things go wrong in our families or at work, we regret our actions or thoughts, we weep for others or worry for humanity's future and we can feel weighed down by sorrow. God can feel far away. Of course, he's still there – but we have entered a place where it's hard to feel his presence. It's quite normal that Christians often suffer in this world. We long for justice, for the coming of God's kingdom here and now, as in heaven, so it hurts when we see how humanity continually falls short of the good God wills for us. At the end of Matthew chapter 11, Jesus tells the crowd: *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.* To find that rest, he adds, *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* ((Matthew 11, 28-30).

In this morning's gospel reading, looking at his disciples, he says:

"Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are you who hunger now,
for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.
Blessed are you when people hate you,
when they exclude you and insult you
and reject your name as evil,
because of the Son of Man."

What do you hunger for, who do you weep for? Have you been excluded or insulted for standing by what your faith compels you to say or do? Jesus never promised an easy road. In a later chapter of Matthew he warns of the cost: *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it"*. Because the hurts we may experience are in fact blessings. So, Jesus tells his disciples, it doesn't matter if you have to face harsh conditions, because come what may, your roots will continue to tap into the living water which is the knowledge of the presence of God. In his presence we won't *fear when heat comes*, our leaves will always be green.
But of course, we have free will. We can and do decide not to accept his grace, not to love what he commands, not to desire what he promises, not to fix our hearts where true joys are to be found. Aren't Jeremiah's words so true?

Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals
and make mere flesh their strength,
whose hearts turn away from the Lord.
They shall be like a shrub in the desert,
and shall not see when relief comes.
They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land.

It's not that some cruel god is punishing them: they have simply so blinded themselves that they can't *see when relief comes.* They live in a hell made by their own turning away from God.

Psalm 1 continues *The heart is deceitful above all things.* Etty Hillesum wrote about experiencing the deep well inside her where she felt God's presence within her. But she went on to say: *Sometimes I am there, too. But more often stones and grit block the well, and God is buried beneath. Then he must be dug out again".* She knew that the path back to God was through prayer. We should thank God that we know that's always an option. Whenever we recognise our need to turn back to God, we are always *forgiven, loved and free.* The way back home is always open: we have a Resurrection faith.

This reminds me of the despondent disciples on the road to Emmaus as they encounter the risen Lord. When he leaves, "*They said to each other, "Weren't our hearts on fire when he spoke to us along the road and when he explained the scriptures for us?"* (Luke 24.32).

Writing to the Corinthians, Saint Paul insists that our faith in Christ's Resurrection is essential: *if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.* So in this 1700th anniversary year of the Nicene Creed, we have a good opportunity to think about what we're declaring as we recite it. Today we might focus on what we say about Christ's death, Resurrection and the life of the world to come. This chaplaincy will be following Bishop Robert's suggestion and our online Lent course will examine the creed. Lent leads us up to Easter, the high point of our Christian year. As we celebrate Christ's Resurrection, I wonder, what will it mean for us all? Pondering what's at the very heart of our faith will surely enrich our Easter life. Let us pray again that, *among the many changes of this world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found.*

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Third Sunday before Lent
16th February 2025
Eglise Protestante Unie, Manosque

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

One of the beautiful things about the Gospel is the different perspectives we are given of the teachings of Jesus from the four different authors – like a diamond revealing its colours and depth as we turn it in the light.

Today we heard Luke's version of the Beatitudes, the teaching known by that name because, in the Latin version of the Bible, each sentence began with the words '*beati sunt*'. Most of us are more familiar with Matthew's account of these sayings of Jesus: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven', 'Blessed are those who hunger for justice, for they shall be satisfied'. Matthew's Beatitudes are part of what is known as the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus is portrayed like the new Moses, on top of a mountain between heaven and earth, speaking directly to God. The equivalent in Luke's Gospel is known as the Sermon on the Plain, where Jesus is portrayed coming down from the mountain where he has been praying, to a 'level place', coming among the people who are in need. Luke the physician, preoccupied with the relief of suffering.

Both Sermons are a description of life in the Kingdom of God, that vision of what the creation will be like when God's purposes are fulfilled. Hence each of the Beatitudes offers a contrast between how things are and how they will be. For the Gospel writers, the good news Jesus proclaimed was that the kingdom was

already breaking in on the present, so people could begin to experience the ultimate blessedness now.

We hear foretastes of it too in our Old Testament reading from the prophet Jeremiah – 'Blessed are those who trust in the Lord … They shall be like a tree planted by water', and in the Psalm – 'Blessed are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked … Like a tree planted by streams of water … whatever they do, it shall prosper'.

The differences between Matthew's and Luke's versions are a study in perspective. If we are looking up at Jesus on the mountain, the Beatitudes seem like a higher law, a covenant with a community to which we might aspire to belong. We are invited to go up and see to the horizon – the possibilities of the kingdom of God. If Jesus is down on our level, looking up at us because he is on the ground tending to someone in need, the Beatitudes seem like a call to action – what are <u>we</u> going to do about it? In Luke, those described as blessed are simply poor and hungry. If Matthew things are more spiritualised – those who are blessed are poor 'in spirit' or hungry 'for justice'. Notice, too, that there are only four Beatitudes in Luke, whereas Matthew has eight. There are no 'pure in heart' on the Plain. This is the mess and grind of everyday living, in poverty and pain.

From the outset of his Gospel Luke emphasises that in the Kingdom of Heaven there will be a reversal of the world's values, of power and wealth. The Beatitudes continue the trajectory of Mary's song of the Magnificat and Jesus reading from the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth, announcing the release of captives and the oppressed going free. Luke's Beatitudes are not about wanting to be godly. They are about a community of followers standing with the dispossessed, the marginalised, the grieving. Practising the presence

of Christ where the world is hurting. For Luke, faith begins with compassion and care, not a system of belief.

Jesus is not saying that we need to be poor or hungry in order to be blessed. But he is pointing out that the person most appreciative of a feast is the one who was hungry. It's part of the mystery of being human that we only learn to appreciate things fully when we lose them – health, resources, people we loved. The Beatitudes point out that it's when we feel our lack that we appreciate God's blessings more. It makes us live more gratefully, which is also to live more freely. In Jesus's proclamation of the Kingdom, the advantage belongs to those who approach it with the greatest sense of need for its riches, undistracted by the fleeting pleasures of the world.

The head of a college which runs courses on stress management training once commented as follows: 'People buy smart cars, big houses and all that, but they don't really have a life. They are so busy, so stressed, so guilty and so pressured. They have no time to see their friends. They think they are rich. But if these things are bought at the expense of social, natural and spiritual values, then I'm afraid I have to call that poverty.' That's a pretty good 21st century translation of Luke's Beatitudes.

The comment also highlights that fact that 'poverty' in practice includes spiritual poverty, of which there is a great deal around. It's why we need Matthew's take on the Beatitudes as well. For it is when we glimpse something of the Kingdom of Heaven that we are better able to put things into perspective.

The message of the Beatitudes is ultimately about where we put our trust. If we trust in the power of God to renew and to comfort, if we believe that the suffering of Christ ended not with the cross but with resurrection and new life, then we will have something valuable to say (as Paul was emphasising to the church in Corinth in our New Testament reading). The trouble is that the power

of God is not something we instinctively recognise, unless we realise how powerless we are ourselves. It is when we are ill, or poor, or hungry, that we learn again how that trust works. It's why Luke pairs his blessings with woes – usually we haven't needed to think about any of this, as we have had our blessing from the things we chose to put our trust in. But when they are taken away, things are different. And yet, curiously, it is often then that we find we are closer to God than we felt before. The people of Israel discovered this, not when they were living in the promised land but after they had lost it and were exiled in Babylon. The Psalms are full of that realisation.

Luke's radical vision, the turning upside down of a world order so that no one will be left behind, is no less radical today. Jesus's teaching continues to draw us, as the Sermons on the Mount and Plain continue to challenge and inspire his followers across the world. They remind us we are dealing with a God who is not remote, but fully engaged in the mess and the muddle of our human lives. A God who offers the vision of a world where the poor will be satisfied, the hungry fed, the captives released and the broken restored, where all will be one with Christ in the glory of God's Kingdom.

The vision is ours to share. The message has been entrusted to us to give. And, by grace, we will.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Second Sunday before Lent
23rd February 2025
All Saints' Marseille and Aix-en-Provence

Jane Quarmby, Licensed Lay Minister

Our readings today all emphasise the power of God shown in creation. Genesis, whilst it might conflict with modern day understanding of the immense timescales inherent in how this beautiful planet of ours came into being, does have important points to make to us. We may think we are masters of the universe, but nature has her secrets and immense power which we don't understand and cannot control. We are helpless in the face of floods, wild fires, avalanches and storms. We have very little idea of what lies beneath the waves of our oceans – or even our soil - research is now showing that trees have an underground communication and pastoral care system. They can alert their neighbours to attacks from insects and birds, telling them to produce toxins, channel nutrients to sick trees, and work together for the good of the forest. Whales, the Bible's Leviathans, sing to each other across vast distances. We are still finding new species of plants and animals, whilst busy destroying those we do know about.

One of the lessons from Genesis is that God, having created a beautiful fertile Garden, placed the man that he had made into the garden to tend and watch over it. As I know only too well, gardens don't stand still, they are constantly changing and need a lot of hard work to keep them looking good. And that was the job God gave the man. Our French friends regard our garden with a mixture of admiration and head shaking – they love the spectacle but are horrified by

the amount of work involved. For us though, to be outside in the fresh air, listening to the birds singing, nurturing plants so that they will reward us with colour, beauty and scent, or good things to eat, is a real pleasure. Even at this time of year, when it's all about cutting back dead growth, weeding and hauling wheelbarrows of manure to spread on my flower beds, I get an enormous amount of satisfaction seeing order come from the mess left over from last year; and from seeing the spring bulbs pushing through, catching the scent of the winter honeysuckle, and seeing seeds germinate in the glasshouse. It's also a good reminder to me that I am just the caretaker – I don't control the weather, I can't make a seed germinate or a bulb put up new leaves and buds. And Adam, that first man, couldn't either.

But he did have a very close and personal relationship with God. God brought him the animals to name, giving him responsibility; the Garden was a holy sanctuary where God walked with Adam, he talked to him directly and was concerned that Adam had no helper that was just right for him. This God who had created all things, was worried. That is so like a parent isn't it – to worry that your child is lonely and doesn't have a partner? So God not only creates woman to be at Adam's side in his life and work, but also creates the first marriage and binding covenant – he gives a bride to Adam, and Genesis explains that this is why when a man marries, he leaves his parents and becomes one with his wife.

So Adam and his wife are both custodians of the Garden for God – and their descendants of this planet.

Our psalm today sings of how God made the mountains, quieted the raging oceans, and continues to take care of the earth, watering it, making it rich and

fertile (I'm still waiting for that particular miracle in our garden), sending rain, and blessings of wonderful harvests and flocks of sheep. It's a real song of praise for God the Creator, and very respectful of the power inherent in all that God does. With God doing all the hard work, it then begs the question what are we doing as his custodians?

Why are we polluting our world with toxic gases, heating it to the point of no return if we don't get a grip right now, doing so much damage that fires rage across hundreds of kilometres, chopping down or digging up the very plants which give us our oxygen and enable us to breathe? The Amazon forest is shrinking, peat stores dug up and carbon released, storms batter every part of the world, fiercer and more frequent, glaciers and the Arctic are melting, extreme heat is being endured in Canada of all places, grapes are being planted in Scotland, islands are disappearing, homes flooded, farmland rendered useless by floods or fire. From my tranquil garden I can see a band of pollution if I look towards Marseille. What sort of gardeners are we? Is God happy with us? How will he judge us? How will our children and grandchildren judge our generation?

It's tempting to see our Gospel reading as telling us not to worry, God will make it all ok in the end. This short story about faith has an undercurrent of showing just how powerful God is. The disciples are in a boat on the Sea of Galilee which is surrounded by high hills so when the wind gets up it can really whistle through creating dangerous storms. It wasn't a tiny rowing boat, but it was in danger of sinking. Some of the disciples on board were fishermen, sailors who knew these waters and for them to panic then they really were in trouble. Whilst they are dashing about bailing out and trying to save the boat and those in it, Jesus is curled up having a well earnt nap. He's been preaching and healing, and that takes a lot of energy, even for the Son of God. I would love to know what the

disciples were hoping for when they woke him up. Was it as a last resort, or to make sure he was awake and could help in some way save the boat? Or for a final blessing before they all drowned? What they got wasn't what they expected – they received a telling off for not having faith in him. He calmly rebuked the waves and the wind, and the storm stopped. All was calm. Did he then go back to sleep as in all in a day's work? Leaving the disciples to work it out for themselves as to what had just happened. Did they pinch themselves to see if it hadn't all been a horrible nightmare? Or did they suddenly grasp that this was no ordinary man. This really was God in human form because no other explanation would fit. Only God could have done this, only God has such power over creation.

We humans can use the power of wind and waves, but we can't control it. Garry and I could only watch aghast as our newly installed and heavily weighted solar panels gracefully blew flat on their faces in the Mistral. Nothing we could do about it. A reminder of just how powerless we humans are in the face of the natural world.

But the disciples' reaction is only too common in the face of impending catastrophe. All too often we leave it too late to ask for God's help and intervention, we muddle along relying on ourselves – it doesn't occur to us that whilst we don't have the power to resolve a crisis, God does. Jesus told us just to ask in his name and it will be granted. But to do that means keeping him fully in mind and alongside us, not trusting in our own capabilities. If the ship is sinking then only God can prevent it, regardless of how much bailing out we do. Faith should be at the forefront of our minds, not a last resort.

But we also need to keep in mind that in the words of St Teresa of Avila “Christ has no hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which he looks with compassion on this world. Christ has no body on earth but yours.” So we do all need to do our bit in times of crisis – and to be better custodians of this wonderful, beautiful planet on which we live, with God’s help and direction.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Sunday next before Lent

2nd March 2025

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

'Christmas comes but once a year', as the old saying goes. But in the Church's year the Transfiguration comes twice – once on the Sunday before Lent begins (which is today), and again on 6th August. An account of the Transfiguration appears in three out of the four Gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke. Why is the event considered so important?

One word that resonates through the Transfiguration accounts is 'glory', and one meaning of 'glory' is 'revelation'. On the mountaintop, Peter, James and John, Jesus's closest friends, become aware of who he really is – both human and divine, as we shall be exploring in our Lent course. John, the fourth evangelist, who doesn't include the Transfiguration scene, uses the word 'glory' in connection with the cross. It is through the cross, he suggests, that people become aware of who Jesus really is. The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsay, wrote that 'God is Christlike, and in him is no un-Christlikeness at all'. In other words, if we want to know what God is like, we have to look to Jesus. And it is on the cross that we see the full significance of his self-outpouring – the self-sacrificial love - that tells us so much about the nature of God.

It is worth pausing to look at the language used by the Gospel writers to speak of Jesus's significance, as revealed at the Transfiguration, for the symbolism they use is important.

When Moses and Elijah appear, we are being invited to remember that they both went up a mountain, both brought messages that were rejected, and both passed directly into the divine presence. We are being reminded that Moses represents the Law and Elijah the prophets, but that Jesus is the beloved Son who completes the Law and fulfils all that the prophets foretold.

What was unveiled through a cloud looks back to what was revealed through a cloud in the waters of Jesus's baptism: the glory shared by the Son with the Father. What we have in both Jesus's baptism and the Transfiguration is a reference to the two primal elements of creation in Genesis: water and light. What was signified through baptism in the primal element of water is now unveiled by the Transfiguration in the primal element of light. As so often, Scripture works as a sign language, drawing our attention to what is significant: the sign of water, the sign of light and the sign of the cloud, which is water and light together.

The Transfiguration is mediated through the sign language of light. Light comes first and last in Scripture, as we move from the first creation of light in Genesis to the light of the world in John's Gospel, the light that shone in the darkness and which the darkness did not overcome, to the light of Revelation that shines at the centre of the heavenly city. Then we have the sign language of water. We move from the water that was the first source of life to the water that generates

new life in baptism, to the streams that flow from the heavenly city. Lastly, the sign of the cloud. We move from the cloud that went before the people as they travelled to a new country, to the cloud that enveloped Moses as he received the Law and entered the divine presence, to the cloud that revealed the divine presence in the face of Jesus on the mountain.

Pascal wrote that what we understand of God from the powers of nature is small in comparison with what is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. In the sign language of Scripture, the nature of God is revealed in that face.

So there is lot of symbolism at work in this passage, as the writers seek to convey the full significance of what the three closest disciples had understood - Peter, James and John, who before long will be alone with Jesus once more in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Our Gospel reading also reminds us that we cannot stay on the mountaintop. Christian discipleship means returning to the world's struggles, carrying with us the light we have seen. Like the disciples, we may seek security in spiritual highs – Peter offers to build dwellings so that everyone can stay there - but true faith means embracing both the beauty and the pain of life. Faith is not an escape from suffering, but a way of living through it with hope.

So the disciples return to the valley, a reminder that God's presence is not only to be found in moments of revelation, but also in the messiness of everyday life. And the most significant thing of all is that Jesus goes with them. He lays aside his transfigured glory, the radiance fades from his face and he descends again to

the world of suffering, in a demonstration of the Incarnation – Emmanuel, God with us.

What happens after our Gospel reading is that Jesus and the three disciples are immediately plunged into the reality of human distress in the case of a child who is not responding to attempts at healing. Jesus steps forward and heals the boy, then begins the long walk to Jerusalem, where he will be confronted with the worst that human beings can do.

As I said earlier, the other day on which the Transfiguration is remembered by the Church is 6th August. This year it will mark the eightieth anniversary of the time when a radiance burned above Hiroshima three times brighter than the sun, and every material substance, every created thing was changed – not in the re-making but in an un-making of the creation. Forty years ago the late Bishop John V Taylor wrote that on this anniversary we are confronted always with the choice between two fires – the fires of nuclear destruction, or the fire of self-sacrifice, burning love and renewal in the Holy Spirit. Given the geopolitical shifts taking place at the moment, his observation seems to have particular relevance again this year.

Yet the extraordinary thing about this faith of ours is that it bears witness to the fact Jesus did go to the place of destruction, of un-making, on Calvary. He did absorb the worst that humanity can do - and he transfigured it. His story ends not in tragedy but in resurrection, and through it we are given the conviction that suffering and death do not have the last word. If we have one thing that we can say to the world as Christians, it is surely that. The Transfiguration we celebrate today assures us of it, as it did to Jesus's friends.

We will share in Christ's sufferings through Lent and Holy Week, and we will share in his resurrection at Easter. And we will share in all the joys and sorrows of those we meet on the way. May those people, as Paul suggests in our New Testament reading, somehow glimpse in us a reflection of Christ, as we travel with them on the road.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

Ash Wednesday – 5th March 2025

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

A friend of mine who worked as a head teacher was once commiserating with her successor about a difficulty that had arisen at the school following her retirement. Afterwards she reflected: 'The thing my successor hasn't yet understood is that a large part of the job involves thanking people for things they haven't done, and apologising for things that aren't your fault!' When she said this, I remember thinking how frequently we fail to say those too essential words: sorry, and thank you. How often do we manage to say them to God?

Lent is, above all, a time for honesty. We know in our hearts how many things we get wrong, and yet we find excuses for our failures. It's a good time to apologise for the things that <u>are</u> our fault. And to ask for God's help and guidance to do better. The sign we will receive in ash on our foreheads in a few minutes is a reminder that 'we are dust and to dust we shall return'. Our time in this world is limited, and we must use it well. That is what Jesus offers us – life in all its fullness: 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly' (John 10.10). But such fullness of life can only be appreciated properly once we have learned to acknowledge our faults, in honesty and repentance. Learning how to say sorry.

It's worth reminding ourselves of the meaning of 'repentance'. Literally, it means a turning around, or a change of heart. Determining to do things differently from now on, even if we have failed so many times. Lent is not a time for beating ourselves up. In my experience, those who come to churches are often already in the grip of their fiercest critic - themselves. But the God we have to do with is the God of the story of the prodigal child, who has barely had time to utter the words of repentance before he finds himself enveloped in a hug and tears of joy.

It's why I love tonight's Gospel reading. If I could only take one Bible passage to a desert island it would be this one. Faced with a gruesome scene of human scapegoating, Jesus embodies the love of the Father of whom he speaks, whose judgment is mercy and whose name is Love.

Our reading shows what happens when human sin meets God's love. We live in a society that is increasingly judgmental. By contrast, the Christian faith teaches that God's judgment is merciful. It's because God loves the dust of the earth that was made human, and wants each of us to be the people God knows we can be - our lives not marred by sin, separated from Love. To be freed to love - generously, unconditionally - and to live our lives in the light of that love, made whole again.

Our reading shows an ugly moment of physical and verbal violence. The woman has apparently been dragged by a group of men from her bedroom or someone else's. (Notice that the man she was with is absent.) She has been dragged along to the most public of places to be shamed, the temple. She is forced to

stand before Jesus, a stranger whom she understands is somehow being asked to seal her fate, threatened with death by stoning for what she has done. She does not know it, but she is being used as bait to trap Jesus: 'In the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say? They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him.' At which point there is a long pause, while Jesus writes with his finger on the ground.

In that pause we, the hearers of her story, are faced with some uncomfortable questions. How often do we rush to be judgmental, especially when someone else has been caught in an act that is wrong? How often do we run with the crowd, relieved that someone else is in trouble? But which part of ourselves would we not like to have dragged into the limelight for all to see? These are some of the questions this story asks of us.

Jesus's words silence the crowd, who begin to drift away. He sees them for who they are. He sees us for who we are. We live in a blame culture. God does not. In Jesus we encounter the true nature of God, reminded that God's judgment is matched by God's mercy. Reminded, too, that we are all in need of that mercy.

'Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, sir.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.' Hear those words as you receive the sign of his forgiveness on your forehead. And remember that this Gospel is about one who lived and died, loved and taught, to reveal the truth of God's inexhaustible love for each of his creatures, including you and me. And that in the light of that love we are set free from the errors of the past, free to live not just as we are, but as by God's grace we shall be.

We have reflected on how to say sorry. How are we to say thank you? Lent is about many things – giving up things we find pleasurable as we reflect on what Christ gave up for us, taking time to contemplate the Gospel, alone or together, and making a point of giving to causes that need our support (including, as our reading from Isaiah suggests, helping those who work to loose the bonds of injustice, share bread with the hungry and care for those with nowhere to call home). Lent is also about learning how to appreciate the things we have, not minding about the things we lack. It is now commonplace to say that practising gratitude makes people feel happier. Why don't we try it during the weeks of Lent? Writing down one thing each day for which we are grateful, then reading the list back at Easter. It may surprise us what brings us joy, sometimes in quite simple ways.

As I said earlier, above all it is about being honest about what we need to change in order to live better in the world. Bringing ourselves back to God to be healed. Remembering that we are dust, and to dust we shall return. Let us turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ. And learn how to say sorry, and thank you, from the depths of our hearts.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

First Sunday in Lent – 9th March 2025

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you will return." These are the words spoken on Ash Wednesday, as ashes are pressed onto foreheads. They open the way to a bewildering paradox: we are God's beloved, and yet we will return to dust.

This is the same paradox Jesus faces in our Gospel reading. At his baptism - which, in Luke's account, has just taken place - Jesus hears these words: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."[1] This is the foundational truth of his identity: he is God's Son, cherished and precious. Yet when the Spirit leads him into the wilderness, that truth is tested. Jesus must learn to experience love in place of desolation. He must trust that he can be beloved and famished, precious and insignificant, valued and vulnerable at once. He must learn that to be beloved is not to be exempt from the reality of dust and ashes.

The devil offers Jesus three chances to turn away from this lesson - three temptations. But could they also serve as invitations for us, calling us to trust God's love even in the barren places of our own lives?

The first temptation targets Jesus' hunger. "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." The Tempter suggests that God's beloved should not suffer hunger, that unmet desire is an unnatural affliction. The devil tempts Jesus to deny the reality of the incarnation, to take a shortcut to satisfaction instead of waiting, instead of listening to his hunger and leaning into God for lasting fulfilment.

[1] *Luke 3.22*

Many people give up something for Lent - chocolate, wine, television - hoping to sit with their hungers and learn from them. But what is the hunger beneath the hunger? Where is God when we are famished – not just for food, but for friendship, meaning, a home, or family? To sit patiently with longing, with lack, and still hold fast our identity as God's beloved, is no easy task. And yet, we can be loved and hungry at the same time. We can hope and hurt at the same time. And we can trust that when God nourishes us it will never be manipulative.

The second temptation targets Jesus' ego. The devil shows him "all the kingdoms of the world" and promises him glory, authority - power. "It will all be yours," the Tempter says. The allure of fame, visibility, and recognition. The suggestion that to be God's child is to be exalted - admired, envied, never insignificant.

This is a temptation that few, if any, politicians would resist: the offer of authority and power in exchange for worshipping power itself – along with greed, pride and arrogance.

Dutch priest and writer Henri Nouwen observed: "One of the greatest ironies of the history of Christianity is that its leaders constantly gave in to the temptation of power even though they continued to speak in the name of Jesus, who did not cling to his divine power but emptied himself and became as we are."[2] Perhaps they grasped for power because, as Nouwen writes, "it seems easier to be God than to love God, easier to control people than to love people, easier to own life than to love life."

Can we embrace Jesus' understanding of significance - a significance rooted in humility and surrender? Do we trust that our lives, as God's beloved, can flourish in quiet, hidden places? Authentic Christian power is found in weakness. Jesus was lifted up — but he was lifted up on a cross.

The third temptation strikes at Jesus's vulnerability. "[God] will command his angels concerning you, to protect you," the devil assures him. The implication is clear: if we are God's beloved, then surely God will shield us from harm - physical and emotional, from frailty and disease, from accidents, from death itself.

It is a seductive lie because it preys on our deepest fears about what it means to be human in a broken world. We long to believe that our belovedness can

[2] *In the Name of Jesus*

become a fortress, that faith can grant us immunity from suffering. But the cross teaches otherwise. It tells us that even God's most precious children bleed, ache, and die. We are loved in our vulnerability, not out of it.

The Gospel reminds us that Jesus did not choose the wilderness. The Spirit led him there. Yet Jesus chose to stay. He stripped himself of every comfort that might have dulled his sense of vulnerability, of dependence, every security that could have shielded him from the call to surrender. He remained until the wilderness had done its work.

We do not always choose our wilderness, either. We do not volunteer for suffering, loss, uncertainty, or fear. Yet, the wilderness finds us. It arrives unbidden and unwelcome – in the waiting room of a hospital, in the unravelling of a cherished relationship, in the sudden weight of grief, in the silent grip of anxiety. And yet, even here, God's grace is at work. Even here, redemption is possible – if we are willing to stay, to listen, and to pay attention.

As we enter this season of Lent, perhaps it is time to follow Jesus into the wilderness – not for the sake of suffering, but to discover, even in the unknown, the deepening love of God.

Lent can be a time to linger in the wilderness, to watch and listen, to look evil in the face, to recognise its allure, to confess its appeal.

If those forty days in the wilderness were a time for Jesus to understand who he was and how he would live out his calling, then this is what he chose: emptiness over abundance, obscurity over honour, vulnerability over rescue.

Lent can be for us a time of choosing as well – a time to remember who we are and whose we are. A time to embrace the full paradox of our humanity: human and hungry; human and vulnerable; human and beloved.

May the God, who brings life even in the wilderness, grant us a holy and meaningful Lent.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

First Sunday in Lent – 9th March 2025

Église du Sacré-Coeur, Oppède

Jane Quarmby, Licensed Lay Minister

"I can resist anything except temptation" wrote Oscar Wilde in Lady Windermere's Fan. We are all tempted by all manner of things during our lives. It can be as minor as having started a bar of chocolate one has to finish the whole thing, to get that wonderful sugar rush. Unfortunately what goes up must come down and so does your sugar, leaving you worse off than before you had that first yummy square.

Or temptation can have world reaching effects, when someone gets to be the leader of their country. It can go well or it can end in war and general suffering. We have only to look at President Putin's actions in invading Ukraine, or President Trump's actions in cutting foreign aid, putting thousands of his own people out of jobs and threatening his neighbours with annexation or trade tariffs. Just because you have immense power does not mean you can play fast and loose with other people's lives, tempting though it is to let power go to your head.

Jesus's struggles with his own conscience and the way forward for him after his baptism when God acknowledged his as his Son are in many ways a template for us to follow. He is at a crossroads in his ministry. He has been affirmed but what

now? How does he go on with his ministry and the immense power he has been given?

Luke's account of this internal battle has echoes with Adam and Eve, and the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness after escaping from Egypt.

Adam has been told not to eat the fruit of a particular tree, because if he does, he will die. Adam probably doesn't have any idea what dying means but nevertheless, he knows not to eat that fruit. He has a whole world of other things to eat, so there's no need. But as the Old Testament has it, he and Eve listened to the whispering of the serpent and gave in to temptation. The serpent is a metaphor for the devil, the tempter, and his success so early in the history of mankind led to an unleashing of a Pandora's Box of death, evil, violence, greed and heartbreak, along with mortality and fear. All because one man gave in to temptation.

The mention of 40 days in the wilderness recalls the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness when the Israelites were led by Moses, putting down the foundations of many of their laws and regulations. During these 40 years they repeatedly lost faith in God, ignored Him in favour of making themselves idols to worship and generally behaving as badly as they could, giving into temptation.

Which makes for a whole world of pressure for Jesus, the second Adam. He has to discern what he is being called to do by God and what he is being tempted to do by the thoughts being put into his head. He takes himself off into the wilderness to discern his path. Many people feeling the call to ministry in Christ's church do the same – it's life changing and such a choice requires silence and solitude.

So Jesus is alone in the countryside, where he can think without people distracting him. He's all too aware of the stories in scripture of the temptations Adam and his forebears failed to overcome. But what of him? He has immense power, he is the new Adam, he can do anything he likes. The first temptation we hear about is about food. There's not much to eat in the wilderness, but Jesus could, if he wanted to, make bread out of a stone. One of the miracles he performs later for a whole crowd of hungry people is to make a few loaves and fish feed thousands. His first miracle we know about was to turn water into wine. So he could use that power for himself now. But he doesn't – hunger is to be endured as he thinks, and pondering on the will of God is more important – he quotes from scripture to himself. To still those annoying little whispers, tempting him to take the easy path in his mind. And where are those whisperings, those temptations coming from? Yes, from the devil himself.

If God really wanted Jesus to rule the world, as Gabriel had told Mary he would, wasn't there an easy way to just take over? The path which Jesus would eventually choose wasn't the obvious one – he chose humble service and an agonising death, rather than the far more tempting one of following human ways of dictatorship. And why test God by acting stupidly to force him into a rescue? Again and again Jesus returns to what is written in scripture. He doesn't argue with that insistent little evil voice whispering in his ear, he goes straight to scripture to indicate his path. That's his final word in many ways – and the huge difference between him and all the false prophets and kings before him.

To really fulfil God's will, to rescue us from the morass of evil and death that followed Adam's capitulation to temptation, Jesus has to be very sure of what to do. Those days on his own helped him to face up to all that lay ahead, to choose the difficult path, to really sort out who he was and what he was being

asked to do, without all the noise and distractions of everyday life. To focus on the wisdom to be found in scripture, to strip away the niggly little doubts, the oh so human reaching for a quick win.

That is something we all need to do sometimes, to have time alone, away from all the noise and demands upon us, to think about who we really are and who God wants us to be. To have a spring clean of the attic that is our mind, with all the stored memories and thoughts and ambitions, to nudge us back on track if we have been wandering away. To go back to scripture and study it carefully and consider how it applies to us today. Perhaps this Lent, we can give ourselves the discipline to do just that – we may miss our chocolate or wine or whatever it is we give up to remind ourselves of our Christian calling and Christ's suffering – but what God really wants is our hearts and souls, to follow the path he signposts for us. All too often we go straight by His signposts. It may lead us to unexpected places but He'll be there with us. And we will be where He wants us to be – and who He wants us to be.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Second Sunday of Lent

16th March 2025

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

The former archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, wrote that small Gospel events like the one in today's Gospel passage "remind us that the whole story is one in which the human map is being redrawn, the world turned upside down."[3]

The path has been set; there is no turning back. Jesus has walked through towns and villages, teaching people in parables, drawing crowds, and revealing the presence of God's kingdom through acts of healing and deliverance. Now, he moves with steady purpose toward Jerusalem.

[3] *Christ on Trial*

There is no turning back, though he knows what awaits him. In the city where his destiny as the Son of Man will be fulfilled, hostility will meet him at every turn. Jerusalem has long resisted those whom God has sent to guide and admonish - prophets who called the people back to faithfulness, only to suffer rejection. Isaiah and Jeremiah endured persecution; Zechariah was slain. In time, early Christian witnesses, including Stephen and James, will meet the same fate. The city remains unmoved, deaf to divine correction, blind to the future God offers. And so, to this unyielding city, Jesus speaks - not in anger, but in sorrow, with words of lament and aching tenderness: “How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

We, too, often refuse to see, resist the call, and turn away from what is promised. We do so when we hold on to resentment, withhold or reject forgiveness, and elevate our own judgments as final. We do so when fear overtakes us, and we seek refuge in power, security, and control. It is there, in the illusion of self-sufficiency, in the conviction that our way is the only way, that we close ourselves off from the impossible - refusing even to dream it. Despair silences hope. We cease to see, cease to listen. We close ourselves off from the future. And where there is no hope for the future, there is no life.

Christ’s lament is fierce and tender, a cry of longing to protect and nurture the people of Jerusalem – a reflection of God's love and patience. Yet the image he invokes is startling! He does not present himself as the warrior-king many people had expected, but as a mother hen, gathering her young beneath the shelter of her wings. In this moment of sorrow, he offers not the might of conquest but the refuge of love.

Anyone who has seen a mother hen defend her brood knows the strength in such vulnerability. When danger nears, she fluffs her feathers, swelling with indignation, fear, and courage. She stands firm, unyielding. She will die if she must, shielding her young beneath the warmth of her body. Strength, resolve, selfless boldness—this is the love that risks everything for the beloved. Could there be a more radical image of God?

In the eleventh century, St Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote a hymn inspired by Jesus' image of the mother hen:

Jesus, as a mother you gather your people to you:

You are gentle with us as a mother with her children;

Often you weep over our sins and our pride:

tenderly you draw us from hatred and judgement.

You comfort us in sorrow and bind up our wounds.

[…]

Despair turns to hope through your sweet goodness:

through your gentleness we find comfort in fear.

In the image of the mother hen, Jesus reveals a love that is unassuming yet unwavering, a protection that is tender yet resolute.

There is warmth and shelter beneath her wings, but the dangers beyond them remain. The foxes still prowl. Jesus mocks Herod by calling him a fox, yet he does not deny Herod's cunning or his threat. A fox determined to devour a brood of downy chicks will find a way. Christ does not offer immunity from harm; he does not promise a world without danger. Instead, he offers himself - unguarded, open-hearted, wholly vulnerable in the face of all that would destroy us. He gives us his own body, his own life. His promise is not escape, but refuge: a place to return, even for those who have turned away.

Could we embrace such vulnerability as strength? Can we relinquish our images of a conquering God for the mother-hen God of this Gospel verse? Perhaps what we need this Lent is precisely such a God - one who calls to us with longing and desperation, wings held open in patient mercy, planting himself at the very heart of our fears and offering refuge there.

When reading the Gospels, one cannot help but be struck by the steadfast courage that Jesus displays as he journeys toward Jerusalem and the cross, for the sake of a world so deeply loved by God. Yet, what may be too countercultural for us to fully grasp is the role that vulnerability plays in this courage. We do not often associate vulnerability with strength or bravery. We may link it to care, love, and compassion – but rarely to courage. And yet, to face challenge and suffering without turning away is to make oneself vulnerable for the sake of others.

Jesus reveals that vulnerability is at the very heart of the Christian life and invites us to recognise the quiet strength that comes from

openness to the needs of others. God becomes vulnerable to all the vicissitudes of human life by becoming one of God's children and one with them through the Incarnation. And Jesus presses forward to Jerusalem not to prove his fearlessness or heroism, but to take up the cross that awaits him - out of a love as fierce and unyielding as that of a mother who will stop at nothing to protect her children.

"How often have I desired to gather you!" - a lament for all that might have been in this restless and broken world. A lament for wounds that will not heal, for hopes that have come to nothing. Time and again, we have failed to recognise or respond to God's love. Time and again, we have twisted God's word of love into a life of division and enmity. Time and again, we have turned God's call to repentance into a pretext for judgement rather than mercy. The foxes of the world draw us away from what is good and eternal, luring us toward fleeting satisfactions that cannot lead us into eternity with God.

Can we still translate Jesus' longing into our own lives, into our Church community? How about: "We yearn to gather people as a community of love and belonging" – a place planted at the heart of human fears, offering refuge. A place of dignity and respect, where no one is ridiculed, rejected, or dismissed. A place that breathes life into each of us, nourishes our souls, and allows us to grow into the fullness of who God calls us to be. A place where hope overcomes despair. A place where we can hear the promise of new life. A great challenge indeed.

"How often have I desired to gather you!" In this season of transformation, may Christ's longing become our own. May the path of vulnerability, sorrow, hope, and eternal welcome lead us home.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Second Sunday of Lent

16th March 2025

Eglise Protestante Unie, Manosque

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

Some years ago, a clergy friend of mine was diagnosed in his thirties with an incurable illness. At the time, he published a moving reflection about it in which he wrote: 'Right down deep in the middle of all that is weak and vulnerable and fragile is something absolutely permanent and constant, and which speaks of hope.'

Our readings today are all about trust, against the odds. Faith means two things: belief and trust; the first is about head, the other about heart. The opposite of belief is doubt and the opposite of trust, fear. Given all that is going on in the world at the moment, there is a lot of fear around. And when my atheist friends ask (as they often do) why I bother reading texts written millennia ago at a time like this, rather than sitting anxiously in front of a TV screen (which I also do), I

would want to reply that this morning's readings speak well into these times. Trust against the odds.

Abraham is frequently held up as a model for faith. The first of the patriarchs, revered by the three great monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Abraham sets out from his home at God's prompting, aged 75, with no security, no fallback, willing to trust God's promises that 'in him all the families of the earth shall be blessed'. Our reading from Genesis today comes later, when Abraham is still waiting for the fulfilment of the promise, and he tells God that the wait has become too long. Specifically, he points out that what has been promised will only come about if he has an heir.

We see in these chapters of Genesis a pattern of promise, challenge, and promise again. We will hear a similar pattern in the conversation between Mary and the Archangel when we celebrate the Annunciation in ten days' time. The human response to extraordinary news, extraordinary calling. But this time too there is revelation. God takes Abraham and says: 'Look towards the heaven and count the stars… So shall your descendants be.' There's no record of Abraham's reply. No 'Be it unto me'. But we are told that 'he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness'. His response to his calling was trust.

Fast forward two thousand years, and in his letters to the young churches of Rome and Galatia the apostle Paul quotes this sentence with approval: the fact that Abraham trusted God and 'it was reckoned to him as righteousness'. Fast forward again fifteen hundred years, and the same sentence became one of the foundation stones for the Reformation when the young Martin Luther found in it the assurance that having faith in God was enough for salvation. An over-

conscientious monk, racked by guilt at the sins he might have committed, Luther was increasingly unhappy in a medieval church environment that kept the keys to forgiveness locked tight unless a sum of money was paid. So our Old Testament reading today turns out to be foundational, in more ways than one.

What of our Epistle, the reading from Paul's Letter to the Philippians? It, too, is about unfufilled promise. Paul writes that, for those who set their minds on earthly things, 'their god is the belly' – they are not looking higher than their navels. But he explains that the Christian faith works differently: 'our citizenship is in heaven'. Christ 'will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory'. Christ takes into himself all our shortcomings and sufferings and transforms them, giving our scarcity back to us as abundance. It is what happens at the Eucharist: we bring our bread and our wine, and we are given them back as the body and blood of Christ. The modesty of our offerings is given back in the superabundance of the food that lives for ever. That is how Christianity operates in human experience. We put in all our suffering, frustration, tears and helplessness, and we receive back God's promise to be with us for ever, never to let us go. It doesn't make the waiting any less painful, and in the humanitarian and political crises facing our world at present there will be much suffering, frustration, tears and helplessness. But the Christian experience of transformation teaches us to trust. Like Abraham. Like Jesus himself.

Which brings us to our Gospel. It, too, is about trust, though in a different way. The passage includes Jesus's 'Lament for Jerusalem', pointing to how difficult life becomes when trust breaks down. It's a reminder of how difficult it is to trust, and of how the whole of the Scriptures are really about trust, a gift to us to

encourage and restore us in trusting God even in the face of great adversity. The American author and civil rights leader Howard Thurman wrote that the Bible was written for those with their backs to the wall. Most of the people it is about are in a minority context – living through exile and persecution, social and ethnic outsiders – all through the Gospels right up to the Book of Revelation where the writer is surrounded by the force of the Roman Empire and it seems as though the fledgling church has come to nothing. That is the context of the Bible. For the last few weeks we have been reminded that it is our context too. Abraham and his wife are two people surviving against the odds. Jesus of Nazareth knows that the next time he goes to Jerusalem it will be to his death. From the cross he will quote the opening words of Psalm 22: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' Yet perhaps internally he was also reciting the rest of the Psalm, which goes on: 'Our forebears trusted in you … they put their trust in you and were not confounded.' Trusting God, against the odds.

The scene in our Gospel reading is filled with gathering menace. But the words in verse 32 point to something else: 'On the third day I finish my work'. The third day. The day that changed everything. The day towards which the preparation of these weeks of Lent is pointing. The day on which all human suffering, frustration, tears and helplessness are gathered up and transformed for ever. Easter Day.

Yes, these texts were written a long time ago. No, they don't have nothing to say to us now. For faith, hope and love sustain us, against the odds. Let us live in the light of that knowledge, that trust, today and always. The trust that 'right down deep in the middle of all that is weak and vulnerable and fragile is something absolutely permanent and constant, and which speaks of hope.'

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Third Sunday of Lent

23rd March 2025

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

In their different ways, our three readings today are about God's abundance.

Chapter 55 comes at the end of the second part of the Book of Isaiah, generally agreed to be by a different author from the other two parts. At the heart of the chapter is the picture of God's extravagant invitation to a banquet. There is no cost - all are welcome. Running parallel to it is the theme of forgiveness. There are still those who are trying to *buy* food and wine, although they can see the free riches spread out on God's banqueting table. It is almost as if they are afraid to believe in the generosity of God. There is no catch, Isaiah assures them. The invitation is for all God's people and, through them, for all the world. All who ask for God's mercy will receive it. The only step is to accept God as he is, and trust in his abundance.

We then move to Paul's first Letter to the Corinthians, which on the face of it seems a very different sort of reading - a sombre passage where he warns them: 'If you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall.' Paul holds up for the Corinthians the salutary picture of others who believed themselves so secure that they no longer bothered to attend to the character of God. Perhaps there is not such a great contrast, therefore, between our readings from Isaiah and

Paul. Isaiah reminds us that God's ways are not our ways, and Paul recasts that reminder in sterner language. Turning to God is the work of a lifetime, learning his nature and his will, patiently and humbly, over and over again. The temptation is to short cuts that lead to more immediate gratification, but as Isaiah asks, 'Why … spend your money for that which is not bread?'

Let's look at our Gospel reading, which refers to two events that were in the news at the time. The first is about human violence. Herod had recently murdered a group of pilgrims from Galilee as they were offering sacrifices in the temple. The second event is about human misfortune. A tower had collapsed onto a group of people standing underneath it, and eighteen people were killed. Some in the crowd surrounding Jesus were speculating that, in both cases, the tragedy occurred because of something the victims themselves had done. In our time, it would be like suggesting that the suffering of individuals – through violence, natural disaster or illness - had been caused by their sinfulness.

Jesus says: no, that is not how it works. He is aware of the human tendency to try to rationalise suffering, of the ways we instinctively look for an explanation, perhaps derived from the sort of lessons we were taught as children in our best interests ('If you do that, this [bad thing] will happen'). Jesus is also aware how we subconsciously try to distance ourselves from other people's suffering by suggesting to ourselves that it won't happen to us because we are not 'bad' people like they were. He points out that each one of us is as bad as the next person, and that any thinking which suggests otherwise is self-deceptive and leads to pride. Instead, we should be looking at our own flaws and failings, and asking God's forgiveness. One can see why this reading is set for a Sunday in

Lent. For it is partly an encouragement to us to examine our own consciences rather than spend time speculating about other people's.

At first, it is puzzling to find the account of these two events followed by the apparently unconnected story of the fig tree that bore no fruit. However, in Jesus's time sudden death was commonplace, so on one level the story was pointing out to his hearers that, having examined their consciences, there was still time to produce good fruit, but it might not be much time.

The story of the fig tree contains other resonances too. On another level it's about ancient Israel, for which the fig tree and vineyard were often used as symbols. Jesus urges his hearers that unless they produce the fruit of repentance, turning back to God, they will face destruction – as had indeed happened by the time the Gospels came to be written: following a rebellion against the occupying Roman forces in the year 66 CE, Rome inflicted great suffering on the people of Jerusalem and the temple was destroyed.

What might we learn from the fig tree? If we think about it, what a tree does is take all the dirt that surrounds it and turn it into fruit. The first verses of today's Gospel reading are about the ugliness and messiness that surround us, both the evil intent and the misfortunes of our lives – war, earthquake, illness. We don't go looking for any of it, but when it happens we somehow have to allow a process to take place within us that, like the fig tree, turns it into something fruitful. That's a very hard thing to come to terms with, but I suspect most of us will have had some experience of it in our lives. So one question which Jesus's story of the fig tree asks of us is: can we find ways of yielding up our suffering through transformation so that it becomes a source of blessing to others?

Finally, this story raises the question of the difference that Jesus makes. We notice the dialogue between the owner of the vineyard and the gardener, which is often read as a conversation between God the Father and God the Son. (It was Mary Magdalene who encountered the resurrected Christ 'thinking him to be the gardener'.) As in a number of Jesus's other parables, here it is the gardener who is asking for a period of grace, like the manager who asks to go and settle accounts with his creditors. In those parables there is often a Jesus figure who makes things better.

Maybe there is something more fundamental still about this image, for it is a story about transformation that happens through a tree. The Christian faith itself is a story about transformation that happens through a tree. Looked at in that way, this story is a sort of mini-Gospel in which we are invited to allow the crucifixion to transform the ugliness and mess of our human lives and the limitations of our broken world into the glory of God's abundance.

Perhaps, then, the parable of the fig tree is partly a story about us (can we find ways in which our suffering, however painful, might become a source of blessing to others?) and partly a story about God (can we see how Christ's ministry and death does that on behalf of the creation as a whole?). The first is beautiful, the second extraordinary.

Three readings about God's abundance. We must learn to look for it in unexpected places. When we do, we will find it transformative.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Fourth Sunday of Lent

Mothering Sunday

Baptism of Anatole Quentin Douglas Quint Liddle
30th March 2025
All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

It is rare to find so many reasons for celebration converging on a single Sunday. The fourth Sunday of Lent, known as Laetare Sunday or 'Rejoice' Sunday, coincides with Mothering Sunday in the Church of England. Today, it also marks a moment of special joy for our community, as we prepare to witness the baptism of Anatole.

Traditionally, this Sunday offered a brief respite from the austerity of Lent, earning it the name Refreshment Sunday. The term 'Laetare,' however, originates from the opening words of the Latin introit for the day, drawn from the book of the prophet Isaiah: "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her… that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast." [4] In keeping with this image of a nurturing mother, a medieval tradition arose in which people returned to their 'mother church' — the place of their baptism. Those who undertook this journey were said to have gone "a-mothering." This homecoming became an occasion for family reunions, allowing children and young people,

[4] *Isaiah 66 :10-11*

often working as live-in servants or apprentices far from home, to return for a rare day of rest and togetherness.

By the early 20th century, Mothering Sunday had largely faded from popular observance. It was through the dedication of Constance Penswick-Smith, the daughter of a vicar, that interest in the tradition was revived. She reimagined it as a day to honour not only the Mother Church but also earthly mothers, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the life-giving gifts of Mother Earth.

And so, year after year, we gather to give thanks for the many forms of mothering—biological, spiritual, and communal—and to honour those who have nurtured us, shaping us in love and faith.

It is fitting, then, that today we turn to Scripture to reflect on stories of motherly love. We have heard how Moses was blessed with the love of three remarkable women: his birth mother, whose courage and selfless devotion secured his survival; his vigilant sister, who watched over him with unwavering care; and the compassionate Egyptian princess, who welcomed him as her own and provided him with a place of safety. This is a beautiful image of mothering — one that transcends biological ties, embodying instead an act of love, protection, and sacrifice.

This theme resonates in the story of Mary, the mother of Jesus. In today's Gospel, we hear Simeon's prophecy that a sword would pierce her soul as she witnessed her Son's destiny unfold. To love is to risk suffering. Motherhood is often shaped by both deep joy and deep sorrow. Though she appears only briefly in the Gospels, Mary is portrayed as a woman of courage, resilience, endurance, and hope. Many can see themselves in her—a woman, tested to the limits, who bore the weight of love with strength and faith.

Like Moses and Jesus, we are all shaped by the experience of being mothered, however that care has come to us. We owe much to those who have protected us, helped us discern our purpose, loved us enough to grant us freedom, been examples of trust and faith, shown us where we are rooted, and given us life. Those who have forgiven us, tended to our wounds, and stood beside us in difficult times have, in their own way, reflected the heart of a mother's love.

In all the mothering we have received, we glimpse the grace of God. It is fitting, then, that today we also celebrate the motherly love of God. We know ourselves to be God's children, and Jesus taught his disciples to address God as 'Father.' Yet Scripture also reveals God as a nurturing presence, tender and protective as a mother. Julian of Norwich, the 14th-century English mystic, expressed this beautifully when she wrote, "The dear gracious hands of God our Mother are ever about us." The Old Testament offers striking images of this divine mothering: God as a fierce, protective mother bear [5]; as a soaring eagle sheltering her young [6]; as the loving mother of a thriving child [7]; as a skilled midwife bringing life into the world [8].

One of the most moving depictions comes from the book of Hosea: "I taught [the people of] Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms. I led them with cords of human kindness; I bent down and fed them." [9] It is a poignant image—God as a loving parent, guiding hesitant steps along new paths. As Anatole begins to take his first steps, may we remember that God delights in us and watches over us throughout our lives. He lifts us when we stumble, nourishes us with his word and his bounty, and reveals the way we are called to live—both for ourselves and for others. Those who have known love are able to share it, and we who have been touched by the love of God are entrusted with reflecting that love in the world.

[5] *Hosea 13 :8*
[6] *Deuteronomy 32:11-12*
[7] *Psalm 131:2*
[8] *Psalm 22:9- 10*
[9] *Hosea 11 :3-4*

God calls each of us into a role of mothering — one that at times demands the same fierceness, compassion, resilience, generosity, and selflessness as the mothers we encounter in today's readings. To be God's people for God's world is to share in its joys and sorrows, to feel the weight of its suffering, and to be willing to give of ourselves so that God's purposes may come to life among us.

Anatole, too, will need much mothering throughout his life. His parents will have a unique and irreplaceable role, but they will not journey alone. Grandparents, godparents, family, and friends — those who have accompanied this child to the waters of baptism — will share in the responsibility. In a moment, they will make a solemn promise, not only for this day but for a lifetime: to walk alongside Anatole and his parents in faith, reminding them that God is ever present, pouring out blessings too abundant to count.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul exhorts the faithful to "clothe themselves with compassion, kindness, patience… and above all, with love." At this moment, Anatole cannot dress himself. But as he grows, he will learn not only how to pull on his socks and fasten the buttons of his shirt, but also how to clothe himself each day in virtues of the heart — compassion, patience, kindness, and more. Like all of us, he will find some easier to wear than others. Yet his family, godparents, and friends will be there to guide him, encouraging him in his own calling to nurture and care for God's world.

No one should be left out of today's rejoicing. To all who offer acts of mothering — thank you. The world would not be the same without you. A blessed and joyful Mothering Sunday to all!

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Passion Sunday

6th April 2025

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

The scene is our Gospel reading today is as powerful as it is short. Today is Passion Sunday, the day our Lenten focus begins to contemplate Jesus's journey towards Jerusalem, and to the suffering and death it will bring. In our imagination we travel with the disciples, who are at last beginning to realise the significance of what is about to happen. It is apt, therefore, that the Lectionary today gives us the story of the anointing of Jesus.

Both the Gospels of Matthew and Mark include the story of an unnamed woman who anoints Jesus's head with costly nard. There are similarities in the different versions of the story. In Matthew and Mark the anointing is shown as an act of devotion; some who are present tell the woman off for wasting money; and Jesus defends her, associating her action with preparing him for his death. In Luke there's a slightly different emphasis. The woman is referred to as a 'sinner', and the scene takes place in the house of Simon the Pharisee. The woman in Luke wets Jesus's feet with her tears, dries them with her hair and anoints them with perfume. The point of this version is the repentance of the anointer: Jesus forgives her sin because of her act of love.

The Fourth Gospel seems to combine the two traditions. As in Matthew and Mark, the setting is Bethany, but here the unnamed woman is identified with Mary of Bethany[1], and the story is located in the home she shares with her sister Martha and their brother Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised in the previous chapter. The reported cost of the perfume is the same as in Mark's Gospel – three hundred denarii, the equivalent of a year's working wage. The anonymous 'some' who protest at the waste of money in Matthew and Mark are in John's account identified instead with Judas. John is deliberately creating a contrast between the thinking of two disciples of Jesus – Mary and Judas.

Mary's act is filled with meaning. First, it's an act of humility, foreshadowing Jesus's washing of the disciples' feet in the following chapter – the word used for 'wiping' the feet is the same in both stories. Secondly, it's an act of gentleness. John draws attention to the comfort it must have brought Jesus – the smell of the perfume, the touch of her hair, the attention given to his feet as they prepare to walk the way of the Cross. Someone is finally accepting and honouring what he is about to do, after all the misunderstanding shown by Jesus's other followers. The storm clouds are gathering. Tomorrow he will enter Jerusalem, in the events we will recall on Palm Sunday.

Another point about Mary's gesture is that it is transgressive. For a woman to touch a man's feet in public, let alone wipe them with her hair, would have been seen as shocking, even more so than now. It was provocative, and it provoked Judas to criticise her, though in terms of the wastefulness of the gesture rather than the inappropriateness of the contact. One can see where Judas was coming

[1] I am indebted to Dr Diana Barsham, in her lecture to our chaplaincy in Aix last October, for opening us to the possibility that Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene were one and the same.

from: to smear the equivalent of €20,000 on someone's feet was a reckless thing to do. But to criticise it on those grounds was missing the point.

The point about it is its very extravagance. It represents an overflowing of love and generosity, like the act of God in creation, like the gift of Christ to us. The Gospel writer is encouraging us to see that there are broadly two ways to live – Judas's way and Mary's way. I wonder which we usually choose. Judas's way is shown as calculating, mean-spirited, about hoarding. Mary's way is shown as generous, beautiful, about outpouring. It is clear which way Jesus endorses. This, he suggests, is a true representation of me. This gesture is an icon of my incarnation and my passion. The self-emptying love of God, giving up everything for love. Judas shows us a loveless heart, sceptical, self-absorbed. Mary shows us openness, letting love guide us to live with eyes open to the divine activity around us, open to the needs of the world.

Paul, in our Epistle today, also writes of self-giving – setting aside his earlier status to serve the gospel of the crucified one. Jesus validates Mary's gesture by referring to his approaching death. That death is so woven into the fabric of Paul's thinking that his life is now dedicated, as he says elsewhere, to filling the world with the fragrance of the gospel.

Mary's gesture, therefore, offers a clue to how we might live our lives in the Kingdom of God - the Kingdom where anxiousness about scarcity gives way to a sense of God's abundance, and where service to one another is what we are called upon to give.

There is another anointing in this Gospel, in Chapter 19. After Jesus's crucifixion, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two secret but well-connected disciples of Jesus, ask Pilate for permission to take away his body. They bring a mixture of myrrh and aloes, 'weighing about a hundred pounds'. Again, an extravagant

quantity. It's almost the only other time we see anyone doing something kind and generous to Jesus in the Passion narrative, caring for his body. What does that say to us? Are we prepared to be extravagant for him? Extravagant in our gratitude for what he has done for us? We know from our emotional lives that they are richer when we give space to gratitude. The same is true for our spiritual lives. Gratitude to God is an act of love, our love for God in response to God's love for us.

Let's come back to the exchange between Jesus and Judas. Jesus's response to Judas's criticism (why wasn't the money given to the poor?) calls for an integration of mind and heart. In following Christ we are not given a choice between devotion to God and committed social action. We can, and should, do both. As the Gospel says, we 'always have the poor with [us]' and we must never forget their needs or cease to be outraged by the injustices of the world. Loving our neighbours as ourselves is what we are called to do, every day of our lives. But we are also called to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. This scene reminds us of the summary of the law which Jesus himself gave us, and that in following it we are liberated from our focus on self, scarcity and suspicion.

So it's a powerful one, this short scene, designed to make us reflect. How often do we say, like Judas, that 'the money could have been better spent'? Yet, in Mary's case, might we not conclude that spending money on a gesture that is still being talked about two thousand years later, a gesture so beautifully reflecting both the action of God in creation and the action of Christ in pouring out his life for us, was actually money very well spent?

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Maundy Thursday – 17th April 2025

All Saints' Marseille

Christine Portman, Reader

Tonight's Old Testament reading recounts an event celebrated for thousands of years in Judaism - the passover of the Lord. God's instructions to Moses and Aaron were designed to protect his people from the promised destruction of the Egyptians and to enable the Israelites' liberation from slavery. They mark the start of their journey to the Promised Land. This is to be remembered as the starting point of their history: *This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you*'. (Exodus 12.2). It is to be held as a '*perpetual ordinance'*.

And so, in the evening of the Thursday before Pessach, Jesus gathers with his fellow Jews for one last meal together. No doubt all the preparations had been made according to their laws. On the table would have been lamb, 'roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs' and, to drink, wine. The words of Psalm 116 would most likely have been recited. But its words would come to take on a very different meaning for the disciples and for all of us who follow Jesus today.

I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call upon the name of the Lord.
I will fulfil my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his people.
Precious in the sight of the Lord
is the death of his faithful servants.
O Lord, I am your servant,
your servant, the child of your handmaid;
you have freed me from my bonds.
I will offer to you a sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call upon the name of the Lord.

When we read these verses in the light of remembering the Last Supper, we think of Jesus taking up the cup and blessing it, declaring that this represents his blood. We see him fulfilling his mission to the Lord as he offers himself as a living sacrifice. We know that as his Father's faithful servant, his death will be precious, and that he is now giving up his life willingly, in thanksgiving. As the Letter to the Hebrews explains: *'By that one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy'.* At the first Passover, the Israelites were freed from the Egyptians and promised a better land. The promise bought by Jesus' death and Resurrection offers so much more: eternal life with the Father.

On Maundy Thursday we commemorate that night in the Upper Room, but the story of the salvation of God's people is moving on. As Saint Paul tells the Corinthians, '*you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes'*. Partaking in Holy Communion tonight goes beyond remembering. It brings the promise of new life brought about by the Resurrection and the promise of Christ's return. The Passover had freed the Israelites from physical slavery, but their behaviour as they followed Moses and Aaron in the wilderness shows that essentially they hadn't changed. They still lived under the slavery of sin.

In coming to live among us, Jesus, the Son of God, brings the promise of a radically new way to live. In the gospel passage he tells the disciples: *'I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you'* and then proceeds to wash their feet. As usual, Peter misunderstands: *'You will never wash my feet!'* His failure to do as Jesus asks reflects the truth for many of us: our inability to humbly accept that God's way is the right way, our frequent insistence that we know best. It seems almost comical that Peter then asks Jesus to wash his head and hands too, but the same issue causes the problem: 'Do it *my* way!'

With great humility, Jesus kneels to wash their grubby feet. Of course, in taking on this servants' task, he was doing so much more: '*if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.* We, like the disciples, have to learn this lesson and be baptized into Christ's way, *'For* '*Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.'* This new way requires *'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.'* In giving up his life for us, Jesus reveals the all-

encompassing love of God, love so powerful that it overcomes sin and death, assuring us that come what may, God will love us to the end.

As Ruth Edwards has noted, in this gospel passage: '*The verbs which John uses to describe Jesus laying aside his garments and resuming them are the same distinctive terms as were used earlier for his laying down his life on the cross and taking them up again in resurrection'*. At the end of this service we'll hear the Post Communion prayer. It acknowledges the key significance of tonight's '*memorial of his passion'.* The events in the Upper Room point way beyond the sharing of the meal and the washing of the feet.

Tonight we don't simply look backwards. The closing prayer reminds us to look to the future. This is a '*wonderful sacrament'*, a moment of holy communion with Christ in which we all join, a time of mystery, revered together. As the prayer will remind us, this is the opportunity to '*know within ourselves and show forth in our lives the fruit of (Christ's) redemption'*. When we receive communion, we do many things. We give thanks for Jesus' all-giving sacrifice. We acknowledge that he died for us, to redeem us and reclaim our lives from a pattern of sin. When we turn away from sin and face towards him, we promise to follow his example, to offer our lives to his glory, lives which will bear good fruit for the kingdom.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Easter Vigil – 19th April 2025

All Saints' Marseille

Jane Quarmby, Licensed Lay Minister

Easter is a roller-coaster ride emotionally for Christians all over the world. Every year we mark the events in the week leading up to Easter Sunday and the bedrock of our faith, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. We hear again about the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, all sunshine with joyful cheering and waving of palms, people putting their cloaks down for his donkey to ride upon, then the rapid about face to darkness, anger, bloodlust, injustice and the tragic and tortured death of a young man. And having descended into the depths of human cruelty and disbelief, Easter Sunday comes with the greatest miracle of them all, when Jesus leaves the tomb, alive once again. It isn't an easy ride.

Many people find the resurrection difficult to belief in. Perhaps we are more like Alice in Lewis Carroll's book "Alice in Wonderland" who says to the Queen "There's no use trying, one can't believe impossible things." Or do we have to practice as advised by the Queen – "I daresay you haven't had much practice. When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast!"

It took a while for even the disciples to believe in the resurrection, despite having heard Jesus tell them it would happen. Like most people, their belief was hindered by what they believed to be possible – as Tom Wright wrote "It wasn't just a lack of faith that had stopped them understanding what Jesus had said in Galilee about his rising again. It was simply that no-one had ever dreamed that one single living person would be killed stone dead and then raised to a new sort of bodily life the other side of the grave, while the rest of the world carried on as before." No-one was expecting it to happen – the women certainly didn't, having grieved all the previous day and then arrived early in the morning to carry

out the ceremonial preparing of the body. They had seen him die and knew well enough that dead people stayed dead.

His disciples weren't expecting it either – they were also grieving, in confusion and fearing about what now would happen to them. Not do they believe the women when they turn up still with the spices and bandages untouched and saying that Jesus wasn't there. They were dismissed as silly. Only Peter went to see for himself. So he was a step further along the way, but even he never put two and two together – that Jesus was telling the absolute truth when he said he would rise again. Nick Fawcett in his book "No Ordinary Man" puts himself in Peter's shoes and writes:

"Our faith was in tatters, life seeming an empty void, for how could God have let it happen, how could he have allowed a man like that to endure such a terrible end? Yet he had, and we just couldn't get that knowledge out of our minds.

It had been different when Jesus was with us – we'd looked forward then, confident, full of hope, no promise too wonderful, no vision beyond fulfilment; for in those few short years of his ministry he'd shown us another way – the way of love, goodness, mercy – and we'd actually believed such things could finally triumph over evil, no matter how impossible it seemed.

Not any more though. It was back to the cold harsh world of reality where hopes are dashed and dreams lie broken, where goodness is trampled underfoot and love tossed back in your face, and this time we were resolved to keep our feet firmly on the ground, the thought of another disappointment, another let-down, too much to bear.

And yet, despite it all, I had to be sure, that flicker of hope their words had kindled either fanned into life or laid to rest once and for all; so I ran to the tomb, scarcely knowing what I did, and found the stone rolled away just as they had said, the grave clothes cast aside, the tomb, empty!

Can it really be, our Lord risen, alive? I want to believe it so much, more than you'll ever know, but dare I take the risk of faith again".

Peter soon found out it was true, as he saw Jesus again and again for the next 40 days.

But we too are called to believe this extraordinary thing, without the benefit of seeing the empty tomb or Jesus himself later on. Over the years as the fledgling Christian church developed and grew, many have tried to throw scorn and doubt

on their belief in Jesus having fulfilled his own prophecy and risen again to new life. But there was no fanfare, no earthshattering events – Jesus came to his disciples after his death and not only talked to them but ate with them. Luke's Gospel describes the women as being first on the scene. Had he been making it all up he would never have mentioned the women as in those days no-one took any notice of women and they were not seen as credible witnesses to anything. But Jesus valued women and children, he valued all people and wasn't afraid to show it. He chose to let the women be first to see for themselves that he was not dead and buried.

So now how do we honour all that Christ and his followers, his family and friends, those who loved him went through?

Other than breaking our fasts, enjoying the chocolate and the celebratory gathering together of friends and family on Easter Day, how can we show what it means to believe in Jesus Christ? What should our church look like to others? Bishop Debbie Sellin spoke on Monday evening at a rural zoom service in Rutland and summed it up in 3 words – welcome, service and worship. Welcoming people to come to Jesus, serving others and worshipping together. Do we do that – do we do it enough? Are we inspirational models of Christians? Something to think about in the months ahead.

Happy Easter!

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

Easter Day – 20th April 2025

Église du Sacré-Coeur, Oppède

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

'Four Gospels, One Jesus?' is the title of a book about the New Testament[2]. It's interesting to note the differences between the four accounts of the first Easter morning. All include an empty tomb and all include one or more appearances of the risen Christ. But the emphasis in each account is different.

In Matthew's version we have an earthquake, an angel rolling away the stone, Roman guards on the ground like dead men [message: Rome, you're finished. God's reign is breaking in].

In Mark we have a brief account, with most of Jesus's disciples expressing disbelief on hearing the news of the resurrection, until Jesus himself appears and says 'How slow can you be to believe?' [message: the same question is asked of those who are listening to this].

In Luke, we have bewilderment, followed by growing awareness and confidence as the risen Christ appears on the road to Emmaus and later in the upper room where his friends are in hiding. He comes eating bread and fish (does that

[2] *Fours Gospels, One Jesus*, Richard Burridge (2013).

remind us of anything?) [message: listen to this story and you will learn all you need to know about how to live well in the world].

John's account of the resurrection is the most intimate. His writing is almost like camera-work, which is why artists have depicted its scenes so often. There's a painting in the Musée d'Orsay of Peter and the other disciple running. And then this world-changing event is captured in close-up, as the camera focuses in on two people, shown in the painting by Fra Angelico which you see at the top of your service sheets.

The resurrection story in John is full of references to creation and recreation. On Easter morning we are shown a man and a woman in the garden, just like the first time. But not like the first time, for sin and death have been conquered and new life is beginning. Easter enables us to see, in the mystery of the creation, glimpses of the unimaginable power of the Creator of all. We see it ourselves each year with the arrival of Spring. As the priest-poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote in his poem entitled Spring:

> 'What is all this juice and all this joy?
> A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning
> In Eden garden.'

The impulse of renewal, of new growth bursting out of old, fresh buds appearing at the end of a long winter, is etched deep within the creation. And it speaks of something fundamental about God. For there is no limit to God's power to create and to redeem, to recreate and to affirm. God is love, and love involves affirming the one who is loved. Not even death can defeat God's purposes. The

resurrection of Jesus assures us that what God creates will not in the end be destroyed. And it includes you and me.

In Christ crucified and risen, God invites us to rethink who we are and what our destiny will be. We stand with one foot in time and one foot in eternity, as we live in God and God lives in us, raising us up to new life, to live as part of the new creation inaugurated on the first Easter Day. That is what we celebrate, today and every day.

Let's come back to Mary, looking into the darkness of the empty tomb. Jesus who had called her, restored her, given her meaning and purpose, taken her seriously, offered her hope, is gone. And with him has apparently gone everything he stood for – forgiveness, justice, freedom, life, glory, truth. And just when it couldn't get worse, now even his body has been taken, the body she had hoped to anoint in a final act of care. Mary is in despair, weeping uncontrollable tears. But it is in looking into the darkness, not shying away from it, that she encounters the risen Christ, calling her name. 'Mary.' Then she does the most crucial and transformative thing: she turns round. And just as she reaches out to embrace the risen Jesus, longing for his touch again, he says: 'Do not hold onto me, but go to my brothers and sisters'.

The message of John's resurrection account lies in these three words. Turn – from despair to joy. Touch – but know when to let go. And Go – because there's new life to live, news to share, restoration to embody. Turn. Touch. Go. I wonder which of those words we find the hardest. To turn – to realise that despair and despondency aren't the last word, that by being absorbed by them we are missing the gentle presence behind us. To touch – to see our longing to be held, loved, embraced, met, is only part of our deeper calling to share the joy of God with others. To go – to find new life, bring reconciliation and healing and

truth and discovery to those who are beset by grief and regret and bitterness and hurt. Turn. Touch. Go. The three Easter words. And they start with a woman looking deep into the darkness, believing all is lost and meaningless, ruined and rotten. But Jesus is back. Death can't hold him. And he is calling her by name.

Easter, in the end, is not something we understand with our minds but feel with our hearts. Faith is about trust, not certainty. That's the message of Mark. Easter gives us the courage to dream beyond the harshness of the world's suffering today, towards a future of hope and possibility, confident in the power of God to bring life out of death. That's the message of Matthew. Easter is about wanting for everyone the fullness of life Jesus came to bring, challenging injustice, bringing the marginalised to the centre, building the Kingdom, stone by living stone. That's the message of Luke. Turn. Touch. Go. The three Easter words which are the message of John. Together they reflect the words Jesus spoke in that other garden, at Gethsemane, before his final act of redemption: 'Your will be done.'

In his Easter message last week, King Charles noted how human beings are capable of both great cruelty and great kindness, and how both are very present in the Easter story. He commented that three virtues we need particularly at this juncture of our history are faith, hope and love. They are known as the three theological virtues, and you will see them intertwined in the Camargue Cross that we use as our chaplaincy's logo.

Easter assures us, finally, that the words of the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu are true, now and for all time:

> Goodness is stronger than evil.
> Love is stronger than hate.

Light is stronger than darkness.

Life is stronger than death.

Victory is ours through him who loved us.

That is why you and I are here this morning, saying together the words which have echoed down the ages: ‘Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!’

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Easter Day – 20th April 2025

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

The wilderness of Lent is behind us. In the last few days, we have witnessed Christ endure a world's worth of indignity – suffering injustice without cause - in order to span the chasm between our frailty and the holiness of God. Now the tomb stands empty, and a new day breaks with quiet brilliance.

We have a gift of grace this year at Easter: the whole Christian world greets the empty tomb with one voice. Today, Orthodox and Catholic, Reformed and Pentecostal, Anglican and Armenian, communities in forests and in cathedrals, refugees and royalty, new believers and lifelong disciples — all proclaim together: Christ is risen! It is a reminder that despite our differences, there is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one empty tomb, and one hope. It is an opportunity for us to give, together, a testimony of why we are Christians, even if we follow different traditions. We are here this morning, and on any other Sunday of the year, and at any other moment of our life as Christians, because Christ is risen.

We have read in today's epistle how Paul tells us that if Christ had not risen from the dead, our faith would be in vain. If there were no Easter morning, if the resurrection of Jesus Christ had not happened, then Christians would be "of all people most to be pitied."

Yet, Easter begins not with joyful proclamation: "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark …" That is where Easter really begins. It begins in darkness. It begins with fear, bewilderment, pain, and a profound loss of certainty. The creeds and clarifications we cherish nowadays came much later.

The Resurrection remains a mystery known fully only to God. No human telling can encompass it. It surpasses every effort to define or explain. Whatever the Resurrection was and is, its fullness dwells in holy obscurity, hidden from our sight. What we can know is this: God, in the silence and secrecy of death, brought forth life. From the depths of sorrow and loss, God accomplished salvation.

The icon called *Anastasis* (on the front page of the service sheet) is the Easter icon par excellence in the Oriental churches. It symbolises the mystery of Christ's Resurrection happening in a "dimension" beyond our earthly ones. In Greek, *anastasis* means a movement of ascent, yet the icon depicts Christ descending into the realm of darkness, the darkness of death and Hades. Beneath His feet, the gates of Hell are shattered. He breaks the locks and chains, setting free those who were bound. His garment, dazzling like light, is in motion—signifying that the Spirit is at work. Christ descends triumphant in the realm of the dead, not as a passive figure of resurrection but as the active conqueror of death itself. He reaches down to Adam and Eve, lifting them from their tombs, a gesture that speaks of liberation, healing, and the restoration of all humanity. This image is not only about Christ's rising but about ours as well. Today, we see this promise made visible in Anisha's baptism, as she rises from the waters into new life, and in Tiaro's first Communion, as he receives the risen Christ into his heart. Christ is risen—and we rise with him.

Yes, the resurrection happens not only to Jesus Christ, but, mysteriously and deeply, to his disciples as well. They are drawn out of the narrow confines of their former lives and into the wide light of a renewed existence. The Gospel accounts of the Resurrection speak deeply to our human nature, for they show individuals encountering the risen Christ in ways as varied as their own hearts. Peter sees the empty tomb and flees. The " beloved disciple" sees and believes, though he does not yet understand. Mary Magdalene sees and weeps, lingering in longing. Yet each, in their own way, is met by Easter. The Resurrection comes to them as they are – and so it comes to us.

The Risen One who meets us on Easter Day awaits us on many occasions: in scripture and sacrament, in prayer and music, in community and service. The Risen One waits for us in the faces of those who love us, and in the faces of those who need our love. The Risen One waits for us in the texture of our lives: the dreams and failures, the trials and joys. The Risen One waits for us in every corner. Forgiveness, transformation, peace and hope are what he offers.

Easter is the highest of all Christian feasts because, in it, human nature is transfigured. We are set free – free to love without limit, to choose goodness without compromise, to give without measure. On Easter morning, we are invited to receive this truth, not as distant doctrine but as living reality: to begin again, to step into newness of life, released from the weight of fear, and welcomed into the risen life of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Easter, the feast of our encounter with the Risen One, is not reserved for the worthy—it is given to the hungry. It is not the prize for the perfect—but the gift for those who seek. As St. John Chrysostom proclaims in his Easter homily, “First and last alike receive your reward; rich and poor, rejoice together! You that have kept the fast, and you that have not, rejoice today for the table is richly laden. Let no one go away hungry. Partake all of the cup of faith. Enjoy all the riches of God’s goodness!”

The Easter story begins in darkness and in tears - but it does not end there. It ends in proclamation: "I have seen the Lord.". Having encountered the risen Christ, Mary Magdalene runs to tell the others. She does not hesitate to bear witness to what she has seen and heard — even though the world into which she speaks is heavy with anxiety, weariness, trauma, and doubt. Yet the news must be shared, the world still needs to hear it: the tomb is empty, sorrow will not last, and the same Jesus Christ who conquered death is still present, here with us and among us. Anisha and Tiaro will bear witness to this truth in their own lives.

This Easter, may the Christ who rose in the shadows lead us into new life, new light, and new hope. May we come to know him in the places that are difficult and dim. May we have the courage to linger at the tomb until the Risen One calls our names and sends us out to share his good news. And when we are asked why we are Christian, may our answers be honest and humble, a testimony to our hope: Christ is risen - death is no more and life is set free.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Third Sunday of Easter

4th May 2025

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

It is interesting that Pope Francis chose today's Gospel reading for his funeral service last week. It is without doubt one of the most beautiful scenes of forgiveness and reconciliation that has ever been written.

I wonder if you have ever had the sense that you had let down a friend, or even a stranger, so badly that there seemed no possibility you could ever be forgiven. I wonder if you have ever felt forgiven when it didn't seem possible.

Our Gospel reading is from the beginning of the final chapter of John's account, and it contains most of the elements of the previous chapters rolled into one. We are back in Galilee, with Peter and his friends, who have gone back to fishing. Jesus appears on the lake shore, where he feeds them. And he offers them forgiveness, challenge and commission. But now the story is moving into the future, beyond Good Friday and Easter. The fishing, the feeding, the forgiveness and the challenge are imbued with a sense of something accomplished, now to be worked out, opening up into new life and new possibility.

It is a scene of transformation. A fruitless night's fishing becomes a sign of new abundance. The conversation Peter must have been dreading, beside a charcoal fire that must have reminded him of the fire in the courtyard of the High Priest

in which he denied Jesus three times, becomes an opportunity to transform his denials into stumbling affirmations of love and loyalty. Jesus's questions are turned into commissions – feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. Finally, there is the transformation of vocation itself – no longer is Peter to be Jesus's headstrong right-hand man, ready (as he thought) to die for Jesus out of a sense of self-importance. Instead, because Jesus has laid down his life for Peter, Peter will in turn lay down his own life, glorifying God.

The scene ends with the simple, life-changing words with which the Gospel accounts of Jesus began: 'Follow me.' But the atmosphere is different now. In the early stories of the calling of the disciples, there was excitement in the air. They recognised in Jesus something dynamic, and they followed him, confident that he would tell them what to do and look after them. In the past, Peter thought that being a fisher of people would put him in the spotlight, to be admired and loved. Now, however, he has seen Jesus crucified, and he knows that the calling to follow him can be unbelievably costly. At the beginning, Peter left his nets to follow Jesus caught up in a kind of hero worship. Now, he takes up the commission that Jesus gives him without illusion. He knows that he has betrayed Jesus. He now knows what kind of mission Jesus's was. He is prepared for the awesome responsibility of caring for people as Jesus did, all the way to the cross.

And yet the emphasis in this exchange between Jesus and Peter is on love. Love that flows outward, to the sheep of the Good Shepherd. It is an intimate moment. The day has begun in community, with the disciples catching fish and sharing breakfast. But now the two are alone. 'Do you love me?' It's a real question, painful because of its reality. Peter had denied Jesus publicly, shouting

– at the point of Jesus's greatest need – that he did not even know him. Jesus presumes nothing, calling him Simon again rather than the nickname Peter. He invites him, gently, to return to the beginning. It is what we all need when we have got things wrong, as we do all the time. Peter is given the chance to reverse his three denials with three affirmations. 'Do you love me?' 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.'

Being given a second chance is one of the most life-enhancing things that can happen to a human being. It is noteworthy that the Church of God was founded upon it. The parish in London where I worked before I came to Marseille was part of a network in the Church of England called 'Second Chance Churches', where released prisoners could be assured of a welcome and support from the community as they began to rebuild their lives. In an article this week in the Church Times, my former colleague there The Revd Jonathan Aitken (a government minister who, twenty-five years ago, served a prison sentence for perjury and was later ordained as a prison chaplain) wrote about his work in these terms:

> 'The challenges of prison ministry are often overwhelming. Yet I love this field of God's work, precisely because of the resurrection dimension. Prisons are not empty tombs — they are overcrowded, often despairing, occasionally dangerous, black holes of poor mental health and sadness. … So, where does our hope come from? Eastertide is a good time to search for it. Our Lord's resurrection was unique, and yet it can spawn individual human resurrections. At this time of year, my favourite service in the prison chapel is Maundy Thursday's washing of the feet, when the acting out of the liturgy can produce astonishment, tears, cleansing,

repentance, behavioural change, and stirrings of the soul towards new beginnings.'

'Do you love me?' Think about the radical vulnerability of the divine invitation. So much rejection in the world, so much denial. Think of the claims of love that surround us - economic, ecological, societal – claims that would make us behave differently if only we would pay attention to them, and yet we deny them. 'Do you love me?' are the words of the refugee, the migrant, the homeless stranger, the child factory worker making clothes for us to buy too cheaply in the West, the farmer facing devastation from the impact of climate change. 'Do you love me?' are words from the Word made flesh, asking for our compassion.

What does that love mean? 'Feed my lambs.' Love for the other is the outworking of God's love in us. 'Tend my sheep.' It's a concept that runs throughout the Fourth Gospel and the Letters of John: 'those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen'. (1 John 4.2) Making ourselves fully available to Christ, responding to Christ's challenge and commission – 'Feed my sheep' - will lead us in ways that we cannot foresee and sometimes may not wish. It may even lead, as in Peter's case, to martyrdom, for those who make themselves completely available to the call of Christ.

Thus our Gospel reading ends with the call, as simple and life-changing as Jesus's question to Peter. With Peter, we are returned once more to the beginning. All of it – the love, the feeding, the radical availability – is held in this call of a lifetime: 'Follow me.' It is that call which I think the world heard again at Pope Francis's funeral. And it was powerful.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Fourth Sunday of Easter

11th May 2025

Oppède

Jane Quarmby – Licensed Lay Minister

When white smoke rose over St Peter's Square on Thursday evening, the world paused. It signalled a decision that would forever alter one man's life—and the world took notice. Behind the Latin proclamation and solemn pageantry, we witnessed more than the election of a global figure. We saw a man stepping forward in humility, attentive to the voice of the Shepherd, and responding in faithful obedience. However exalted the office may appear, it does not begin in power but in prayer. At its heart, it is a response to a call.

Like I suspect many people are at the moment, I've been making holiday plans, which seems to involve a lot of computerised form filling giving details of who I am, and providing proof that I am who I say I am. Nowadays we have plastic identity cards with all our details on and a cringeworthy photograph, or else a nice formal little booklet called a passport – which also has a photograph clearly taken at the most unfortunate time. Even my dogs now have their own passports and are microchipped so that they can be identified if they get lost or travel with us. So the whole family can prove we are who we say we are.

Not so 2000 years ago, when you had very little in the way of identification. If, in Jesus's time you were born a Roman citizen, things were much easier for you, but even so, the average person had very little to prove their identity.

So how was Jesus to prove he was indeed the long-awaited Messiah? Here we come up against people's preconceptions of what they thought a Messiah should be – many thought it should be a great soldier, a warrior who would fight for them and reclaim their land, kick out the occupying Romans and their stooges. All this talk of love and looking after each other wasn't what they wanted to hear at all. They wanted rabble rousing, arming themselves and fighting. They didn't want to hear about smelly shepherds, looking after their sheep and goats. So even when provided with proof that this was the son of God through his actions of healing, bringing dead people back to life, restoring sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, mobility to the crippled, they refused to accept the truth. It wasn't what they wanted to see and hear so they blanked it out, said he must be possessed by demons.

And yet – there are signs of some people coming to believe the evidence of their own eyes, and so we have others in the crowd coming to Jesus's defence. They've seen the miracles themselves and are sensible enough to realise that God is really at work in this man, this itinerant preacher. Demons don't heal people. For them, as for millions of people yet to be born, this message of peace, of love for one another, of following the good shepherd who will always look after his flock even to the extent of dying for them, is making sense.

War and fighting only leads to death, grief, destruction, poverty and abject misery. As we still see in the world today.

But this isn't well received, and even less well received are the words Jesus then speaks to the crowd "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life. They will never, ever perish, and nobody can snatch them out of my hand." Who else but God can promise this? And so the nonbelievers in the crowd, if you consult your bible and read on, picked up stones to stone him for blasphemy.

History has judged those people for their actions. Jesus too was judged by his actions, faithfully doing the will of God even to the point of an agonising death. Through which he created the foundation of our faith, that through Jesus Christ we will come to eternal life.

It's through our actions too of course – he was very clear about how we should live our lives in the here and now. We should care for others, feed and clothe the poor, welcome the homeless and the migrants, care for Gods' creatures and creation, turn away from evil things and evil actions. And he wasn't just thinking of charities and governments, the rich and powerful, he was laying down a blue print for ordinary people to live by, which in many cases can change lives in unexpected ways.

As we say goodbye to one Pope and welcome the next in the line of St Peter, it's interesting to see how Peter himself has changed out of all recognition. In our reading today, Peter is on the move visiting the

groups of believers who have sprung up. In his previous life he was a humble fisherman, now he's doing extraordinary things. It's unlikely he travelled before encountering Jesus and now here he is covering the country. He's not rich but is put up in ordinary people's homes, and mixes with the ordinary people. And the fisherman is now healing people, performing miracles. But he's performing these miracles not from his own power or skill, but in the name of Jesus. In his belief in Jesus. We hear of the paralyzed man, able to stand after 8 years in bed, and then of Dorcas brought back to life. And Peter, a devout Jew, is staying in the house of a tanner, Simon. Simon's occupation, handling dead animals and processing their hides for leather, made him ritually unclean. No Jew would normally have anything got do with him, much less stay in his house. His house had to be on the margins of any town, by the sea, to deal with the stink emitted by the process. A most unusual place for Peter to stay in – and pointing to the vision he would later have in that house of the gospel not just being for the Jews, but for all people in the world.

These then were ordinary people, who received the most extraordinary blessings from the rough fisherman now fishing for souls. Peter's faith, having seen and experienced all that he had in 3 short years with Jesus, can indeed perform miracles. As Jesus used to do, he too prays first. He doesn't for a moment believe that he is doing this by himself, he's asking God's help and God's power.

Why these people though? There's nothing exceptional them. They were ordinary people, not rich or powerful; one was disabled, one a widow and one unclean. The community in Joppa was largely a group of widows, and so there is naturally a group of them by the body,

weeping for one of their own. Dorcas was known by her good deeds and generosity, already following the guidelines for life set out by Jesus. She made clothes. Not a glamorous trade but very necessary before the days of mass manufacture and online shopping.

She reminds me of all the people who quietly get on with life despite their own trials and tribulations, their sorrows and hardships, but can be relied upon to turn up and clean the church, do the flowers, polish the floors and seats, wash the altar cloth, turn up for services every week, take a cake to newlyweds in their street, or a casserole to someone just home from hospital, collect the post for someone housebound, check on someone living alone and not seen for a few days, take a turn in a charity shop or soup kitchen, visit the sick, who recycle rather than throw away, give to charities or volunteer for them. All the little things that nowadays is called community, but that ease the lives of others. They may not be wealthy themselves, or in positions of power and influence, live in a big house or are known outside their own families or area, but they are the ones that make this world a better place to live in. All the unsung heroes, too often taken for granted.

The late Pope Francis called them “The Saints next door.” They give us a good example of every day, following Jesus in their own way, making life just that little bit better for those around them. We can’t all be the Pope, influencing millions world-wide, but we can be a pebble in our own little pool, spreading out in ripples to the good of those around us – and the glory of God on the way.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Fourth Sunday of Easter
11th May 2025
All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

When white smoke rose over St Peter's Square on Thursday evening, the world paused. It signalled a decision that would forever alter one man's life—and the world took notice. Behind the Latin proclamation and solemn pageantry, we witnessed more than the election of a global figure. We saw a man stepping forward in humility, attentive to the voice of the Shepherd, and responding in faithful obedience. However exalted the office may appear, it does not begin in power but in prayer. At its heart, it is a response to a call.

The Pope's vocation may be singular, but the pattern is not. Today, on Vocations Sunday, we are each invited to reflect on what it means to be called—not only to ordained ministry or religious life, but to every form of Christian service: lay and ordained, visible and hidden, young and old alike.

It is also Good Shepherd Sunday. Our Gospel reading places us within the Feast of Dedication—Hanukkah—a festival commemorating the rededication of the Temple in 164 BCE, after its desecration by foreign powers. To this day, it remains a celebration of light prevailing over

darkness, of faithfulness enduring through trial, of God forging a way where none seemed possible.

It is no accident that Jesus chooses this moment—when Jerusalem thrums with memory and expectation—to speak of recognition and truth. The people encircle him in the Temple courts and press him: “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” Yet Jesus does not offer a slogan or unveil a manifesto. He offers a relationship: “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.” His answer eludes the categories of both politics and religion. He does not argue. He invites. He does not compel. He calls.

For every true calling begins in listening. And true listening is no small task.

We inhabit a world saturated with noise. Each day, countless voices vie for our attention—voices from the media, from politics, from culture, and even from within the Church. Many claim to speak in God's name. Many promise safety, prosperity, or salvation—if only we will follow. We are often drawn to the voices that offer comfort without change, peace without justice, faith without cost. But the voice of Christ does not avoid hard truths. It leads us into them—with courage, with mercy, and with love.

The call of Christ is not a summons to ambition, but an invitation to attentiveness. It is the slow, steady work of learning to recognize the voice of the One who knows us by name—the One who has already claimed us as his own. The Good Shepherd declares, “You belong to

me. No one can snatch you out of my hand." These are not words of control, but of deep and liberating assurance.

From that place of security, we are set free—to live the life Jesus speaks of earlier in John's Gospel: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

To hear that voice is to be transformed. To follow it is to discover, at last, our true calling.

Tabitha's story is, at its heart, a story of vocation. She is introduced without embellishment: "… a disciple named Tabitha." No title, no accolades—simply "disciple." Remarkably, she is the only woman in the New Testament to be directly named as such. Tabitha was not an apostle, not a preacher, not a public figure. She did not plant churches or pen epistles. Her calling was quieter, more domestic, yet no less sacred: she made clothing for those in need. But let us not confuse quietness with insignificance.

Her ministry was deeply practical and fiercely compassionate, stitched—quite literally—into the fabric of her community's life. In the early Church, amid powerful preaching and extraordinary signs, Tabitha was part of the Church's beating heart. To outsiders, the garments she made may have seemed unremarkable. But to those who knew her, each stitch carried a prayer, each hem a fragment of hope. Her generosity, her skill, her steadfast care—this was her vocation. This was how she answered the Shepherd's voice. Tabitha

did not seek greatness; she simply followed Jesus, needle in hand. And through her quiet faithfulness, lives were changed.

Tabitha's name was inscribed not in monuments, but in the hearts of those she served. She stands among the countless—perhaps unnumbered—women and men across the centuries whose vocations have unfolded in quiet, faithful service. The world may overlook such lives; heaven does not.

Her story is a reminder that vocation is not a matter of status or hierarchy, but of response. Whether one is Pope or parent, teacher or tailor, adolescent or elder—if you are answering the Shepherd's call with love, faith, and generosity, then you are living your vocation.

When we are tempted to believe our calling too small, our labour too ordinary, Tabitha's legacy gently counters: "Not so. The Shepherd sees. The Shepherd knows. And in his eyes, this is holy."

Today, we give thanks for all who have responded to the Shepherd's call to ordained ministry—for priests, deacons, and bishops—because ordained ministry is a sacred and particular gift to the Church. And yet, vocation extends far beyond the boundaries of ordination. The Church endures not only through those who wear collars or bear mitres, but through every Christian who hears and answers the call.

The teacher in an under-resourced classroom, the nurse tending patients in the quiet hours of night, the artist who brings light to

shadowed places, the neighbour who delivers groceries with a smile, the grandparent who prays faithfully each day—each of these, in their own way, is living a vocation. These are not lesser callings. They are expressions of everyday holiness.

For vocation is not defined by what we do for a living, but by what we do with our living. In Christ, God draws the ordinary into the heart of the divine. He calls us to inhabit the everyday with love. And just like that, the hungry are fed. Just like that, neighbours are seen and cherished. Just like that, the heartbeat of God continues—quietly, faithfully, beautifully. And just like that, the Church becomes what it was always meant to be: a community of the called—a communion of vocations, gathered by the One who knows each of us by name.

Rowan Williams once observed that the Church is the community that embodies God's call to the world. We are not only the called—we are also the voice through which others might hear the echo of divine love.

So the question before us is not only, "What is your vocation?" but also, "What is the vocation of our Church?" Where is Christ calling us, together—to serve, to love, to reconcile, to bear witness, to be transformed? For the Shepherd is still speaking. The voice still calls. And when we respond—wherever we are, with whatever gifts we bring—God's dream draws nearer: the dream in which all are one, the dream in which all may have life, and have it in abundance.

May we hear the Shepherd's voice, rising above the din. May we rise, like Tabitha, into the fullness of new life. And may our whole lives—

each moment, each role, each humble act—become our answer to Christ's call: Here I am, Lord.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Fifth Sunday of Easter
18th May 2025
All Saints' Marseille
Christine Portman, Reader

I wonder how you reacted this morning as you listened to the Old Testament reading? From the first time I heard it, as a small child, it's never ceased to horrify me. How could God ever ask such a terrible thing of Abraham? To murder his only son as proof of his love and obedience? It seems unbelievably cruel, an unthinkable demand from a God we know to be loving and merciful.

But as I grew up, the parallels between the stories of Isaac and Jesus became unmissable. Father and son walking together to the place of sacrifice: "*Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering and laid it on his son Isaac*". Then Jesus, burdened by the wood of his own instrument of death. And there's that dreadful moment when the innocent child asks, "*but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering*?

Yet this passage from Genesis begins: "*After these things God* ***tested*** *Abraham".* It marks a turning point in human understanding of what God requires of his people. It becomes clear that God had never intended harm to come to the boy. Kindness and mercy are his hallmarks. He doesn't wish suffering and death upon humankind. Yes,

there's still a sacrifice, but it's a ram, caught in a thicket. *"So Abraham called that place 'The Lord will provide'"*.

In Jesus' times, animal sacrifice would still have been mainstream Jewish practice – just think of John's account of Jesus in the Temple precincts, so infuriated by the profiteers selling their animals that he whipped them out, along with the racketeering money changers. But in coming to live as a full human being, Jesus radically altered human understanding of what God wishes for us. For what he did through Jesus's life, every day we should be praising God with the excited enthusiasm of today's psalm. Jesus, the Son of Man and the only Son of God, shows a new way: he takes up his Cross willingly. The man, Jesus, sweated tears of agony in the garden of Gethsemane, knowing full well what lay in front of him. But Jesus Christ, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, understood that his crucifixion was his Father's will, and he accepted it.

Judas Iscariot leaves the Upper Room, going out to betray his master. Then Jesus explains to the disciples why he has chosen this path: "*Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once".* If the meaning of those words is often hard for us to grasp today, how much more difficult would it have been for his disciples on that night when they held their last supper together? But perhaps, knowing as we do the truth of the Resurrection, we can begin to understand how, through his life and death, Jesus was offering a glimpse into the glory of God. Christ's way of being offers *us* a new way of being and a new pattern for life: God's essence - Love. *"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." As the new Pope Leo had to remind a certain Vice-President very recently, this is not a selective love given only to the people who are close to us. It's an all-encompassing love, like the huge sheet let down from heaven in Peter's life-changing vision.

In these disturbing times, surrounded as we are by so much mistrust and hate, we need to remember the message of that vision: *"What God has made clean, you must not call profane."* It can be all too easy to get drawn into feeling hatred towards people who cause harm. When we see terrible injustices, we may be roused to anger, feeling hurt and powerless to protect those who suffer. But there is such a thing as righteous anger; we need to speak out clearly against oppression, greed and violence. At the same time, we must never allow ourselves to fall into the trap of behaving in the same way as those whom we oppose.

Christ's vision of the glory of God is of a "*new heaven and a new earth"* where "*the home of God is among mortals".* If we hadn't read from the Old Testament this morning, we would have heard that wonderful passage from Revelation which continues:

"He will dwell with them;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.'

And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.' Then he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life".

Let us pray for the grace to follow in Christ's way, always ready to drink from that living water, which is his life in God.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Fifth Sunday of Easter

18th May 2025

Manosque

Jane Quarmby – Licensed Lay Minister

A new commandment, a new order of how to live, coming from Jesus just before he dies - love one another as I have loved you. Sounds simple doesn't it? Love one another. Very broad, not nearly as detailed as the 10 commandments, just love one another. And over the centuries since humans have spectacularly failed to keep this one commandment. It's easy to love someone you like, not so easy to love someone you fear or dislike.

There are all kinds of love – romantic love, love for your children and grandchildren, love of your friends, your pets, your home, your garden, your country, your job, your hobbies, the list goes on and on. The film Love Actually shows some of these – with its 10 different stories showing different aspects of love. There's Bill Nighy's rock star turning his back on the celebrity parties to spend Christmas with his faithful and long suffering manager, the best man at his friend's wedding secretly in love with the bride, the writer crushed by his girlfriend's infidelity who runs away to Portugal to fall in love with his housekeeper despite the language barrier, the husband on the brink of an affair challenged by his wife on Christmas Day and realises he's

been an idiot risking his real love for his wife and family. Who could forget Hugh Grant dancing down the stairs of Number 10 Downing Street in his cameo of the Prime Minister who falls for a new member of staff from a huge family, or the little boy who learns to play the drums so he can be near his first love the singer in the school band (or the love of his recently bereaved step father who suffers those loud practice sessions). Then there's the young woman with a mentally ill brother who puts him first at the expense of her own happiness, and the faithful friend waiting at the airport for his globetrotting flatmate, and the shyness of Martin Freeman and Joanna Page playing professional stand-ins for films who finally find "someone they can talk to" despite filming umpteen nude scenes together. So there are all kinds of love and love does make the world a better place.

But Jesus died for all humanity which he loved – how many of us would do the same? His love was fathoms deep and all too often our love fades away when met with obstacles. Children have their very best friends one day and the next are definitely never, ever speaking to that person again. We find it easy to love but equally easy to hate. Christians have used their faith to justify wars and persecutions – the Crusades in the Middle Ages started by Pope Urban 11 in 1095, the Spanish Inquisition, the burning and drowning of witches, the Wars of Religion here in France which caused the deaths of over 2 million people, up to the present day with the violence in Ireland between Protestants and Catholics. Religion has been used over and over again to justify violence, death and destruction. We read of abuses by clergy and others in the church against the young and vulnerable, and churches excluding LGBT people from worship, women from ministry. Where is the love in that?

So it's a situation as Albus Dumbledore said "fraught with complications", faced with the inherent violence and prejudice in mankind. Peter, in our reading from Acts, faced the reality of how difficult Jesus's command would be to implement. His vision of God telling him that it wasn't for him to reject that which God had made clean, wasn't altogether received with joy by the other disciples and early Christians. As devout Jews, it had been engrained into them that they must follow the rules in keeping away from unclean food and those who were deemed unclean themselves through jobs or disease, and the rest of humanity who weren't Jews and were so very different. Peter himself was devout, had never eaten anything unclean.

The nucleus of the believers in Jesus were based in Jerusalem and there was a hardcore of devout Jews amongst them, who believed that in order to be Christian, it was necessary to be Jewish first and follow the Jewish ways, from what they ate through to the males being circumcised. They took Peter to task by demanding what he was thinking of, mixing with uncircumcised men and even eating with these unclean people. So Peter patiently explained to them about his vision, about the 3 men from Caesarea sent by Cornelius the centurion, asking for Peter to go to his house to explain to him and his household all about Jesus. He also told his questioners that he himself had been guided by the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit had fallen on Cornelius and his household. This convinced his critics, who accepted that God had given his gift of life to everyone. They had the humbleness to accept that what they had been given, had been given to their neighbours despite the differences between them. All the trappings of circumcision, unclean people or food, handwashing before meals and all the rest of the minute details which went with being a Jew, weren't now necessary in order to be saved by the belief

in Jesus as the Messiah, and that they would now be part of a much bigger group – all who believed in Jesus. That must have been hard to accept, but accept it they did.

I'm not so sure they would have accepted it so readily had it not been for the intervention of the Holy Spirit, which came upon the disciples and was now at work in others too. It might be all too easy for us to be critical of those early disciples, not wanting to share their new found assurances from God but we need to bear in mind that they were living as we are in troubled times. They were living under occupation by the Romans, trouble was brewing all around them which finally erupted 20 years later in the bloodiest and most disastrous war in Jewish history and the destruction of their holy city of Jerusalem. So holding dear the things like circumcision and food laws is understandable – it made them different from the foreigners amongst them and was like the yellow and blue being used by Ukrainian supporters today, to remind them they were a nation, they did have their own identity.

So on the surface Jesus's commandment seems innocuous enough, but in reality we find it impossible sometimes to love others, especially if they don't share our background, or our ethnicity, or our values. Whilst we might well be prepared to die for our children or partner, how many would die for people they have never met? Christ came for a short time to teach us a different way of living, one which would require us to put aside our prejudices and fears, and to live together in harmony. What a different world we would live in if in the past 2000 years humanity had done just that? How much death, destruction and horror would have been avoided.

As I look at the world around me, the hedgerows white with blossom, the fields and verges alive with colour, hear the birdsong, I can't help wondering how quickly we could save our planet from the damage we've inflicted on it if every nation took it's budget for armaments and defence and instead spent it on tackling pollution and global warming, the destruction of our plant life and animals. Or used it to tackle hunger, lack of clean water, finding a cure for cancer and dementia for example. The recent 142-billion-dollar deal for weapons between America and Saudi Arabia would be a good start. And how many people would still be alive if we stopped fighting? Love one another – if only we could.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Sixth Sunday of Easter
25th May 2025
All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

"I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers."[1]
So writes Langston Hughes, the 20th century - African American poet. His words are not simply about water, but about a soul shaped by the slow, persistent flow of something ancient—something alive.

Human beings have always been drawn to water. Not only because it sustains—quenching thirst, cleansing the body, nourishing the land—but because it stirs something deeper. We go to the water when we are weary. We bathe to feel renewed. We sense, somehow, that water carries a promise.

Across every culture and every faith, water is never just a backdrop. It is a threshold—a place where the ordinary brushes against the eternal. And throughout Scripture, water flows not only as an element but as a sign—a symbol of creation, of cleansing, of chaos, of life. In the

[1] Hughes, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*

beginning, the Spirit of God hovered over the deep, and from that watery silence came all things. The flood washed the earth and offered a new beginning The Hebrews passed through the Red Sea into freedom, and the Jordan River into promise. Prophets spoke of streams flowing in the desert and of justice rolling down like waters. Jesus begins his ministry in the waters of the Jordan and completed it with water flowing from his pierced side.

Again and again, water marks the boundary between the old and the new, the broken and the whole, the barren and the fruitful. It is at the water's edge that God meets people—in their thirst, their waiting, their praying, their pain. Today we return to the river and the healing pool - what might God be doing at the edge of the water?

Paul's encounter with Lydia begins at a quiet riverbank—a secluded place of prayer. It is there, beyond the expected paths, that the Spirit has led him. Macedonia had not been on Paul's itinerary. Yet in Philippi, the Gospel finds its first listener in Europe: a woman from Thyatira, in Asia. The mission of God rarely follows straight lines. The Spirit redraws the map of grace as it goes.

Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, is a woman of wealth and standing. Already a worshipper of God, she is seeking, attentive, ready. On that Sabbath day, gathered with other women by the water, she hears Paul speak—and something within her stirs. "The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly."[2] It is a moment of holy convergence—divine initiative meets human readiness. Lydia listens, but even the act of listening is

[2] *Acts 16.13*

grace. As one writer observes, “Lydia found the God who was finding her.”

That riverside encounter becomes a threshold—into a new identity, a new community. Once again, water marks the place where new life begins. And with the opening of her heart comes the opening of her home. “Come and stay at my house,” she urges Paul and his companions. She prevails upon them, just as the disciples on the Emmaus road once pressed the risen Christ to stay. This is more than hospitality. It is resurrection hospitality. The fellowship of the risen Lord is extended at Lydia’s table. The Gospel arrives not with fanfare, but through prayer, through listening, through welcome. Lydia’s household becomes the seedbed of the Philippian church—a community born by the water.

And so we must ask ourselves: where are we making space for such openness, such encounter? Are we not called not only to receive the Gospel but to extend it—through open hearts, open homes, open lives?

From the river—a place of prayer and openness—let us now follow Jesus to a place of waiting and woundedness. During his visit to Jerusalem, Jesus does not enter the Temple. He does not seek out scholars or ascend to the halls of power. Instead, he walks into the heart of human need—a crowded colonnade by the pool of Beth-zatha. Its name means “house of mercy,” yet for one man, paralysed for thirty-eight years, it has been less a place of healing than of silent suffering. He lies there, watching life move past him, waiting for the waters to stir, hoping that someone—anyone—might help him in.

But it is not the water that moves. It is Jesus who comes. He steps into the man's world—without ritual, without spectacle—and asks a piercing question: "Do you want to be made well?" The man does not answer directly. He explains. He protests. He names the barrier: "I have no one…" No one to lift him. No one to help. His body is paralysed, yes—but so, it seems, is his hope. The Greek word used to describe him means "withered," dried out by years of waiting, of hoping deferred.

Yet Jesus does not wait for perfect faith. He asks for no confession, no eloquence, no demonstration of worthiness. The man does not even ask to be healed. Still, Jesus speaks mercy: "Stand up, take your mat, and walk." It is a resurrection moment. The healing does not come from stirred waters, but from the Living Word who enters his waiting and calls him into movement.

This is Easter in action: stagnation undone by grace, resignation overcome by mercy. Jesus meets us, too, at the edge of the water—in our paralysis, our fatigue, our quiet despair—and he asks the same question: "Do you want to be made well?" It is not a test of worth, but an invitation to willingness. Are we willing to stand? To walk? To desire again? Healing begins not in our strength, but in his compassion—in his voice that summons us from stillness into life.

In both stories, water becomes a threshold—a meeting place between the human and the divine, between what has been and what might yet be. Lydia prays by a river in Philippi. A man waits by the pool in

Jerusalem. One comes in openness, the other in desperation. But both encounter God by the water. Both are transformed.

And in both, it is God who acts. The waters do not transform on their own. God intervenes. Mercy moves. And life begins again.

The Book of Revelation speaks of the water to which all rivers flow: "the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb."[3] It is the river that gathers Lydia's prayer, the longing of the Beth-zatha pool, the waters of our own baptism. All these streams converge in that ever-living river, springing from the very heart of God.

By these waters, no one waits in vain. No one is too broken to be seen. No one is asked to earn their healing. Here grow the trees whose leaves are "for the healing of the nations"—where every injustice is addressed, every wound tended, every longing fulfilled.

Can we be people of that river? People of mercy and healing, of hospitality and new creation? Can we, like Jesus, cross the lines that divide—religious, cultural, social—to lift up those the world overlooks, whose hopes have withered in the waiting? May it be so.

Let us then come as Lydia came—hands open, heart listening—ready to say yes to whatever new road the Spirit reveals. Amen.

[3] *Revelation 22.1*

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Seventh Sunday of Easter
1st June 2025
All Saints', Marseille
Jane Quarmby – Licensed Lay Minister

A friend of ours last weekend showed us her new 8-week-old Siamese kitten – a tiny scrap of life with light blue eyes, a dark face and pale grey fur. She is gorgeous, vulnerable and much loved, even by her enormous half-brother who has adopted her wholeheartedly, protecting her, grooming her and sleeping curled around her.

This kitten has left her mother and joined a new family, where everything is strange and new, to be explored as she grows and develops, with lots of new things to learn and experience. This is similar to the theme of our readings today, with the creation of a new religion which is at first tiny, vulnerable and learning as it grows. Jesus prays for his apostles and the church which they will create after he leaves them, when they have to set out on their own into uncharted waters. He's praying just before he is arrested and sentenced to death, so it takes on an urgency, a depth of feeling. He wants his followers to be united and to be true to his message of loving one another.

But he's not just talking about the people he is close to, he's also talking about us in the here and now. He's praying that we should all be one, united.

If I look around the world now, I see all too many examples of Christians not being united, of disputes between different factions, of disagreements, different titles and ways of doing things – so we have Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Pentecostalists, Orthodox, Methodists, Quakers, and so on and on. We say in the Nicene Creed that "We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church" - where using the word catholic doesn't mean the Roman Catholic but a general overarching church - but I'm not sure that our actions bear that out. Lots of energy and time is being put into ecumenical initiatives but we're a long way from being one united church.

But does that matter? If we all believe in Christ and strive to follow him through our actions and interactions with others and the world we live in, then the niff naff and trivia of when we celebrate Christmas and Easter, of our manmade traditions, fades away. As in a large garden, there are often areas with different themes. In ours we have a vegetable patch, herbaceous borders of flowers, an area of shrubs, a rose garden, a dry garden, a Japanese garden, a grass and iris garden, wild areas, fruit trees, an olive grove and a truffle grove. It's all one garden, but within it different areas grow different things but hopefully in a harmonious whole, with a different view from wherever you happen to be. It adds richness and beauty, interest and variety.

Actions speak louder than words. What really matters is how we act, how we put into practice Jesus's final instruction to love one another, to be one with him and God.

On Wednesday evening our Diocese held a zoom service marking the 20th anniversary of the International Day against LGBTQIA+ Discrimination. Our Bishops, Robert and Andrew, led the service and participants from across the Diocese contributed including Jamie, our

chaplain. During the service we heard how discrimination is still rife with a particularly horrific example from Madrid only four years ago a mob beat a gay man to death outside a night club. Two undocumented immigrants who had a lot to lose but knew that they had to do the right thing tried to help him whilst onlookers filmed the attack on their phones. Shocking. It was only 20 years ago that the World Health Organisation took homosexuality off its list of recognised diseases. It is still a crime in some parts of the world, and even in our supposedly liberal country there is widespread homophobia. Women are still excluded from ministry in the Catholic Church. Disabled people are refused access to cafes because the way they look might upset other customers.

As Jeffrey John, at St George's Church in Paris, who gave the address, summed up, we need to "include the excluded". And that extends to all of us – regardless of the colour of our skin, the country we were born in, whether we are male or female, our sexuality, our social class, our education.

Christ came to unite us, not divide us. He came to show us a better way of living and treating others. Not an easier way by any stretch of the imagination, as demonstrated by Paul's adventures described in Acts. He runs into trouble wherever he goes. Philippi was a Roman colony on a trade route and there Paul and Silas fell foul of a combination of money, religion and politics. The slave girl following them is worth a lot of money to her owners who don't take kindly to Paul ridding her of the spirit of prophesy, and they accuse Paul and Silas of being Jews trying to convert Romans – which was illegal, and of being anti-Roman. They're flogged and thrown into jail. In an object lesson of loving one another and unity, when the earthquake happens and the prisoners are released, they don't escape. Had they done so, the jailer would

have been tortured and killed, his family made destitute. By Paul and Silas staying, he is saved. He is also saved in more ways than one, as he and his household are converted to becoming Christian, and from pain and suffering, the scene quickly changes to joy and feasting.

It's still difficult 2000 years later to take to heart the desire of Jesus that we should all be as one – we are human and have different backgrounds, personalities, experiences, come from different cultures, and we find it hard to accept people who are different from us. Being Christian takes effort, it takes soul-searching and being honest with ourselves. I found a heartfelt plea though in the words of the first hymn we heard on Wednesday evening's service:

Let us build a house where love is found
In water, wine and wheat
A banquet hall on holy ground
Where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God through Jesus
Is revealed in time and space
As we share in Christ the feast that frees us,
All are welcome, all are welcome,
All are welcome in this place.

I pray that we can live up to those words, to that hope, and we can make all people truly welcome in our churches, our homes and our communities.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Pentecost
8th June 2025
All Saints' Marseille
The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

The launching of the church into the world – that is what we celebrate at Pentecost.

It is, by any measure, a remarkable beginning. A rush of violent wind. Tongues of flame resting on bewildered brows. A crowd, stunned and sceptical, accusing the apostles of drunkenness. Then, Peter, rising above the tumult, gives voice to ancient prophecy: "In the last days … I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.". It is dramatic, uncontainable, overflowing. But amid all the clamour, one detail arrests the heart.

Fifty days after Christ's resurrection, God gives his followers a clear and startling image of what the Body of Christ is meant to be: "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability… and each one heard them speaking in the native language of each."

For our own church—a multilingual community—this moment resonates with particular force. Those who speak more than one language understand that a language is never merely a tool. It is a world. It carries memory, rhythm, identity. To speak another's language is to step into their story. It is to take the posture of a guest, a learner, a servant.

This morning, we heard two Scripture passages in which language play a central role. Christians often speak of Pentecost as the reversal of Babel, where God scattered humanity by multiplying their languages. But is diversity the consequence of divine punishment? Is that truly the moral of the story from the Genesis?

Such a reading makes diversity something to be corrected, overcome, even undone. And that logic persists—in policies that reverse diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts; in public rhetoric that brands such initiatives as "radical and wasteful," "illegal and immoral". But this is not the vision of humanity we find in Scripture.

Uniformity, sameness, siloed living—this is the instinct of empire. The impulse to flatten identity, to erase nuance, to draw borders where none belongs. But this is not how God desires humanity to inhabit the world God imagines.

Empires would gladly impose a dominant language, a unified agenda and a singular narrative—one that serves their own ends. In the former Soviet Union, with its vast diversity of ethno-linguistic communities, the state imposed Russian as the singular tongue—an act of cultural erasure. France, too, suppressed its regional dialects in pursuit of national unity. But monologue, monolingualism, monophony—these are not the dreams of God.

At Babel, the drive for a single language and a single project—a tower, ascending toward heaven—was not punished out of wrath but interrupted out of mercy. As the Scottish Torah scholar Avivah Zornberg observes, the sin of Babel is not arrogance alone, but a failure of imagination. What the builders could not envision, Zornberg writes, is "a multiplicity of selves, of worlds, existing together, even

interacting with one another."[1] The tower was not merely tall; it was narrow. Built on conformity. Resistant to difference.

God's response at Babel—the scattering of people and the confusion of tongues—is not a curse. It is a correction. A divine re-alignment. At Babel, God does not simply allow diversity—God creates it, blesses it, and sends it out.

So at Pentecost, the Spirit does not undo Babel but completes it. The disciples are not restored to a common tongue. Rather, all tongues are made holy. The language of God no longer clings to one nation or one voice; it bursts forth in every dialect under heaven. The Church is born—not in sameness, but in plurality. Diversity and inclusiveness were woven into the very fabric of the Church.

The miracle of Pentecost is not uniform speech, but the possibility of mutual understanding. Each person hears the wonders of God in the language that shaped their childhood, their questions, their cries, their hopes. The gospel does not arrive in translation—it arrives incarnate, clothed in the fabric of each culture.

What was scattered is not erased. Difference remains yet no longer divides. The many tongues become the means through which the Spirit is heard. The Church is not called to unison, but to harmony—diverse voices lifted in shared astonishment at the God who speaks through all.

In the closing pages of the Bible, we are given a glimpse of the community first born at Pentecost, now brought to completion: "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe,

[1] Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis*

people, and language”[2]. In that vision, language does not fracture humanity—it completes its unity.

What is the Spirit saying to God’s people today? Perhaps that we live in a world where words have become toxic, where the languages of our cherished ideologies divide and wound. Perhaps that the Spirit is calling forth a bold and creative Church, ready to speak across barriers that once felt immovable. Perhaps that, if we fail to learn each other’s languages—of culture, of grief, of joy—we risk burning ourselves down to cinders.

As the world grows more tribal—nations, cities, even faith communities turning inward—perhaps God, as on that first Pentecost, is urging us outward: into unfamiliar languages, uncomfortable conversations, and deeper compassion. Perhaps the Spirit is calling us to speak tongues we have never spoken, to imagine futures we have not yet dared to dream.

How then do we grow confident in the language of the Spirit? By speaking it. By practicing it. By allowing it to form our thoughts, our words, our prayers. When we do, barriers crumble. Prejudices are confronted. Anxieties lose their grip. Unity becomes more than a hope—it becomes a way of life. Reconciliation is no longer theory—it is practice.

So on this Pentecost, let us listen again for the wind. Let us watch for the flame. And most of all, let us open our hearts to the wild, multilingual, boundary-breaking Spirit of God—who is still speaking, still surprising, still sending us into the world, not despite our differences, but through them.

[2] *Revelation 7.9*

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Trinity Sunday

15th June 2025

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

One of the things I have most appreciated about the last six years in Marseille is the warmth of the ecumenical relationships in this city. The friendship of the different Christian communities is real, nourished through regular meetings and services together. It challenges an objection which one sometimes hears to the Christian faith, in which people assume it wants everyone to be the same.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Throughout Jesus's ministry he encouraged everyone he encountered to be fully themselves: 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly', we read in the Gospel of St John[1]. There is nothing uniform about the twelve apostles, nothing uniform about the women who accompanied Jesus, nothing uniform about the earliest Christian communities. In his ministry Jesus championed human diversity, particularly those who were different from what was considered acceptable in the society of his day. We find him constantly bringing people in from the margins to the centre, often including in his community of followers those who had been excluded by the narrow religiosity of the scribes and Pharisees.

[1] John 10.10.

Yet, alongside this diversity, there is an important sense in which we are all one, for we are united through our Baptism. Unity in diversity – that's a good thing to reflect on as we share the Eucharist on this Trinity Sunday.

The doctrine of the Trinity is the best way that the early church could find to express the mystery of the nature of God. The notion of God being three persons in one was articulated fully for the first time in the fourth century, though some of the language of the Trinity is already there in the New Testament. Paul ends his second Letter to the Corinthians with the words: 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you'[2]. But it took another four centuries for this to be distilled into a doctrine of the church.

Three persons in one. The word '*persona*' in Latin referred to the mask worn by actors in the theatre. Actors wore masks in order to play different roles. The root of the word '*persona*' means to 'speak through' – which was literally true in the case of an actor's mask. For Christians, the one God is experienced in three different ways. First, we experience God as transcendent and mystical, the ground of all that is. We may encounter this aspect of God in a beautiful sunset, a perfectly formed flower or a heart-stopping piece of music. A mystery sometimes referred to as 'the beyond in the midst'. God as Creator.

Secondly, we experience God in relationship – most obviously, perhaps, when we fall in love, but also in the everyday familiarity of family and friends. Supremely we encounter this aspect of God in the person of Jesus Christ, the 'incarnate God' – reconciling, forgiving, freeing, whose wisdom and teaching

[2] 2 Cor.13.13.

have inspired unnumbered women and men through the centuries to live life to the full. God as Redeemer.

Thirdly, God as Spirit, whom we celebrated particularly last Sunday on the Feast of Pentecost. A divine presence that can brush our cheek with gentleness or sweep us off our feet with its energy. God as Sustainer, Encourager, received by the early Church at Pentecost, enabling it to go out and share the message of love that lies at the heart of all things.

For the Trinity also expresses an internal dynamic within the Godhead, a ceaseless movement of love in the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit. Being as communion. The lover, the beloved and the love that passes between them. A love which overflows into the creation, into us, to which we are invited to respond in love. (Where else do we humans derive our ability to love? Perhaps that's part of what it means when it is said that we are made in the image of God.)

Being as communion is an ancient idea. Deep inside classic Jewish monotheism – with its command 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one'[3] – there is also a sense of mutual relationship within the being of the one God: a to and fro, a give and take, a sense of love poured out and love received. God's Spirit broods over the waters, God's Word goes forth to produce new life, God's Law guides the people, God's Presence dwells with them in cloud, tabernacle and temple. The language of the Old Testament enabled people to speak at the same time of God's supreme majesty and God's intimate presence. The most vivid of such language is used to describe God's Wisdom – his handmaid in

[3] Deuteronomy 6.4.

creation, his delight, his *maitre d'oeuvre*. In the Book of Proverbs (from which we heard our Old Testament reading this morning), to embrace Wisdom is to discover what it means to be truly human, to reflect God's image. And, from early on in the church, Christians read the figure of Wisdom in Proverbs as a reference to Jesus. We hear echoes of it in the Prologue to the Gospel of John which is read at Christmas: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God'.

As one commentator has written[4], John's image of the Trinity, evoked in our Gospel passage today, is like a circle in which each of the three figures is only illuminated by the light that the other two are holding. What each light reveals is both how much they love one another and how alike they are, showing a deep family resemblance. And the circle of light invites us, the audience, forward into the light, so that we may begin to reflect the image of the players themselves – the *persona*.

It's mystical stuff. But in the end, as we contemplate the nature of God, we find that language falls short, for the nature of God is beyond our human comprehension. And so we must be willing to live with the mystery. Each of us, at our baptism, became part of that mystery. And each of us, in our Eucharist today, can share in the mystery which is nothing less than an outpouring of the love of God. A God for whom unity matters and in whom diversity is also celebrated.

So let us allow ourselves – each one of us, in all our diversity - to be welcomed into the dynamic of the divine love, as we give thanks to the God who is at once

[4] Jane Williams, Reflection for Trinity Sunday (2002).

beyond us, beside us and within us - 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 – First Sunday after Trinity
22nd June 2026
All Saints' Marseille
The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

Nearly five hundred years ago, Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order, taught his companions to engage with the Gospels not only through words, but with the imagination. He invited them to enter the scene: to hear the wind, to smell the sea, to feel the earth underfoot. Not to observe from afar, but to stand within the story—among the disciples or the bystanders—to notice the people, listen to them, watch what they do. This practice of 'Gospel contemplation' became a cornerstone of the Ignatian tradition. At its heart is the hope that, by drawing near to the story, we might draw nearer to Christ.

If we were to pray today's Gospel in this way, what would we see? Some Scripture passages offer little by way of sensory detail, but not this one. Luke opens the scene wide before us. And what we see is not gentle. If we truly step into this story, we may not be sure where to stand. It is strange, disturbing, even jarring to our twenty-first-century Western sensibility.

A man among the tombs—naked, tormented, exiled to the margins of society. A confrontation with unseen forces. A heard of pigs rushing to their death. The stunned townspeople, watching their livelihood vanish over a cliff. Resistance to grace. And yet: a man, healed, restored, sitting quietly at the feet of Jesus. Can this story of

deliverance and rejection, of fear and recognition truly help us grow closer to Christ? Can we see this, strange as it is, as our story?

Not many people, reading this passage, would admit that the man living among the tombs is not so far from us, after all. And yet…

The story begins with the question by which we all must begin: "What is your name?" Jesus asks it when he first encounters the man by the lake. "Legion," is the reply.

Isn't it devastating? The man has no name left—only what possess him. Only what torments, binds, isolates. He has become identified with what afflicts him: what steals his peace, robs him of joy, and cuts him off from life in its fullness.

And what about us? How many, in our own time, are deprived of their names, their dignity, their identity? Not only under autocratic regimes—but in more ordinary, insidious ways. How often do we reduce others to categories, often disdainful: the migrants, the beggars, the Gypsies, the foreigners…

Sometimes, amid those categories, a gesture of remembrance breaks through. This past week was Refugee Week, and in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral, name boards have been displayed—memorials to those who have died in Calais or at sea. People whose stories too easily become statistics. But here, their names are remembered.

"What is your name?" A caring, searching question. It invites not only self-disclosure, but a confrontation—with what has overtaken the self. Jesus begins where we must begin: with an honest reckoning. Who are you, truly? Beneath the labels and the diagnoses, the pretence and the

piety, the fear and the shame? So many of us define ourselves by our deficiencies, our disappointments, our failures. Enough, sometimes, to rob us of the life God longs for us to know and share.

When John Cassian—ascetic, theologian, monastic founder—brought the desert monastic tradition from the Middle East to the West, in the fifth century, he discovered that even the spiritually devoted are not immune to interior fragmentation. He named eight 'logismoi'—thoughts, impulses, desires—that draw us away from God, gluttony, avarice, anger, vainglory, pride among others. Yet he had to concede that the members of the monasteries faced a raging battle within—a 'legion' of inner voices that disoriented the heart.

And so do we. The truth is: what ails us is 'legion'. We are all shaped by a tangle of influences—nature, nurture, trauma, memory, fear… We are all vulnerable to forces that diminish us, that try to take our name away. Forces that separate us—from ourselves, from one another, from God. And some of us know exactly what Paul meant when he wrote, "What I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." (Romans 7.15)

This is our story—because it tells us exactly where salvation is found. When the afflicted man sees Jesus, he falls down before him. When the townspeople arrive to witness the aftermath, they find him "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind." Salvation, in other words, lies at the feet of Jesus.

That detail is not incidental. It is the Gospel in miniature: the one who was naked is now clothed. The one who was shattered is now whole. But above all, he is no longer alone. He is with Jesus Christ. Near him. Listening, learning, belonging. This is the posture of a disciple. It is the

place of those who have been called, healed, restored. And it is offered to us as well.

Christ is still coming—into the strange world of our guilt-ridden lives, into the tangled places where our sense of self has been worn thin. He comes to cast out our 'demons'—those voices that tell us we are nothing more than the sum of our failures, our wounds, our disappointments. He comes to speak a deeper truth: that we are God's children, blessed not with a closed verdict, but with an open future.

And in that open future, Paul's bold vision begins to take shape: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female." How seriously does the church take this vision?

The categories that divided people in Paul's day may differ from those of our own, but the divisions remain. Still, we sort and rank and separate—by race, by class, by gender, by sexuality, by legal status, by ability. Still, there are those pushed to the margins, whose names are reduced to labels, whose humanity is diminished by indifference or fear.

But Paul is clear. Whatever categories may describe us, they do not define us. Whatever demons divide us, they do not determine us. For we are *one* in Christ Jesus.

To be clothed in Christ is to receive a new identity—one that transcends the fragile names we make for ourselves or impose on others. It is to know that our truest belonging is in God, and that this belonging draws us not into isolation but into communion. Not division, but reconciliation. Not rivalry, but kinship.

The healed man—clothed now not only in fabric but in Christ's mercy—becomes, in a way, the first missionary to the Gentiles. He longs to follow Jesus but instead receives this commission: "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you."

Christ is always showing up in the broken and forsaken places of the world. He comes into our places of death and dying, and he transforms them. He brings new life. New hope. New beginnings. He sets us free from the forces that bind us—from the names that are not ours, from the tombs that claim us—so that we might live as signs of resurrection. So that our lives might proclaim the Good News of a God who, in the face of death, whispers new life.

When you taste that joy—when you too are healed, or forgiven, or simply remembered—return to your home, return to your neighbours, return to your daily life and tell. Tell how much God has done for you. Tell it in faithfulness. Tell it in your presence. Be a witness—right where you are.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – St Peter and St Paul - Baptism

29th June 2025

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

It is a great pleasure and a privilege to be here today, as we gather here for Tabitha's Baptism. We will be doing something which from earliest times the church has done: welcoming a new member of the family by the use of ritual and symbol, using a liturgy that is both ancient and ever new. In this service we are celebrating the two sacraments which Jesus instructed his followers to celebrate. Matthew's Gospel ends with Jesus's words: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' This is what we do in Baptism. And on the night before he died, while sharing the Passover meal with his friends, Jesus asked them to continue breaking bread and sharing wine, actions which formed part of that meal, but thinking of them in a new way as his own body and blood: 'Do this in remembrance of me.' This is what we do in the Eucharist.

Sacraments are physical, tangible things – they have been called 'the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace'. The purpose of sacraments is both to symbolise and to confer that grace, that gift of God's presence and the assurance of God's love for us. Today we are doing both – baptising and breaking bread.

Tabitha is joining a long line of witnesses, here at All Saints' and beyond. The Letter to the Hebrews says: 'since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us' (Heb. 12.1). The first of the symbols we use in baptism is oil. Olive oil, which was always a precious commodity, has a richly symbolic value in the Scriptures. Kings were anointed with it to show that they were chosen by God. It was also used to sanctify priests in the temple. In the ancient world it was used to anoint athletes before they began a race, to make them more supple. As in a relay race, the Christian faith is handed on. Today Tabitha's parents and godparents will promise to introduce her to its riches, and we pray that in time she will discover the beauty of it for herself. It will be her response to God's love, for God will be with her as she grows up.

God will be with her. It has been said that the word 'with' is the most significant word in the whole of the Scriptures. At Christmas we celebrate the coming of Christ as Emmanuel, God with us. We believe in a God who is not remote from us, but our faith is incarnational, authentic to human experience. Christ knew our human experience and there is nothing of what we feel that he has not felt.

This takes us to the second of the symbols we use in baptism: water. The symbolic immersion in water used by the early church in baptism was not only a symbolic purifying, a cleansing from sin, but also a symbolic partaking in Jesus's death and resurrection – the new member of the church was being born into a new life with God. Nowadays we just use a sprinkling of water – if all goes well I will not be dunking Tabitha in the font.

At the end of the service, we will give Tabitha the final symbol of her baptism - a lighted candle, to take with her so that she may shine as a light in the world. Showing the world what love means.

When Bishoy and Louise asked if we could hold the service today, I hadn't realised the significance of the date. For it's a very appropriate day on which to be baptised – the day the worldwide church celebrates the Feast of St Peter and St Paul. The Book of the Acts of the Apostles tells of how Peter and Paul spread the Gospel message across the known world, Peter based in Jerusalem and Paul travelling throughout the Gentile lands. The Church celebrates them both on this Sunday, a time at which ordinations traditionally take place. So it is appropriate that Tabitha should be joining the church formally today, the day of her baptism.

Our Gospel reading today describes the moment at which Simon Peter realises the full significance of the man he and his friends have been following through Galilee as he preached and taught, healed and fed the crowds. Jesus asks: 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' The disciples begin by reciting the different things people have been saying about him, but he insists: 'But who do you say that I am?' It is Peter who voices the truth that has gradually dawned on them: 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' It's a moment of profound recognition, to which Jesus responds with a naming: 'Simon son of Jonah, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church'. In baptism the candidate is also named - in a few minutes I will say 'Tabitha, I baptise you…'

In our Epistle this morning, we heard how Peter, imprisoned for his preaching of the Gospel, escapes from his chains with the help of an angel. It's a story we can hear on different levels, including the symbolic. The loosing of chains is a powerful symbol of what the Christian faith does for us. Freeing us from our sins, from all that drags us down. So often we feel imprisoned by things that

prevent us from living life to the full, things that keep us from God. In baptism we are released from them – washed symbolically, once and for all.

Today Tabitha begins a journey of faith. Jesus said: 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.' The Bench of Bishops of the Church in Wales recently put it like this: 'We each have an innermost identity known only to God, which it is our purpose to discover in its deepest reality.' That's a beautiful vision for Tabitha as she sets out on her journey. In it, she will be nurtured and sustained by her parents and godparents. May God bless them all, and may we each reaffirm in our hearts our own baptismal promises, as we commit to supporting Tabitha in our life as a community of followers of Christ.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon

3rd Sunday after Trinity – 6th 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 – 4th Sunday after Trinity

13th 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 7th 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

13th 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,"[1] 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."[2] And in the Wisdom of Ben

[1] Leviticus 19.18
[2] 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.”[3]

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.

[3] 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[4] 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.

[4] 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 – 5th Sunday after Trinity

20th 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'[5]. 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

[5] 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'[6]. 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.

[6] 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 – 6th Sunday after Trinity

27th 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.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Pentecost
3rd 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 of 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
10th 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."[1] 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."[2]

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

[1] *New King James Bible*
[2] 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."[3] 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.

[3] 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
17th 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 that 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
24th 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 know 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 lead 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 you 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
31st 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[4].

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.

[4] 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." [5] 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."[6] 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

[5] Transcript of the interrogation of Paolo Veronese, 18th July 1573
[6] 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".*

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, devasted 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.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity – Harvest Thanksgiving
12th October 2025
Église du Sacré-Coeur, Oppède

Jane Quarmby

Every autumn, we celebrate the harvest, bringing flowers, fruit and vegetables to decorate our churches, and sing traditional songs about bringing the harvest home. The roots of this tradition stretch back through time, as we heard in our reading from Deuteronomy, where the instruction is given to harvest the first fruits of the land and take them to the priest, to give thanks for the land which grew them. It perhaps means more nowadays to those of us in rural areas than it does to city dwellers, those of us who daily see the wheat being cut, the grapes picked, and the hay cut ready for the animals in the winter. It's a bittersweet time, the autumn. The colours are spectacular, misty mornings giving way to cooler days, thoughts turning to getting out the jumpers and perhaps lighting a fire in the evenings.

But not everything is harvested in October – harvest is not confined to one season - thinking of strawberries in the summer, olives in the winter for example. And for many who are not involved in gardening, agriculture or horticulture, it can all seem a little remote. Certainly, there doesn't appear to be any seasonality in the supermarkets where we can buy anything from anywhere in the world. Unless we grow our own food, many don't look forward to the first fruits of the land, to the wonderful moment of eating our first strawberry, or spears of fresh new asparagus. But it's so important to acknowledge where our food comes from, to appreciate the effort that goes into raising what we eat.

Farming and fishing are tough industries, hard work for little return, but without it we'd starve. So, it's good to say thank you to all those involved in getting food from field to plate – or ocean to plate.

It's also essential to say thank-you to God, for giving us the land and seas, for creating the various life forms, the fertile earth, the rain, the magic of planting a tiny seed in the dark earth and seeing it put up tiny shoots, and growing into a strong plant which in its own cycle of life will seed and continue the story. Scientists may be able to clone and alter animals and fruit and vegetables, but not one can create life from nothing. Nor can they create the sheer beauty of our planet. As a species we are extremely effective at destroying life, but we have no ability to create it.

So today we say thank-you, to God.

But nourishment doesn't come to us merely for our bodies. We also need spiritual nourishment. Paul emphasises in his letter to the Philippians how important it is for us keep communicating with God, through praise and prayer, asking for what we need, in order to receive God's peace. Jesus emphasises this too when he tells the crowd that it wasn't Moses who fed their ancestors with manna from heaven – it was God. God, who answered Moses's pleas for help. If we believe in Jesus then we, as he says, "will never be hungry …….or thirsty." So many people are searching to peace in their lives, for comfort, for something to anchor them, especially in the face of what can sometimes be unrelenting misery and horror. We only have to check the news every day to be appalled at man's inhumanity to man. We need God in our lives now as much as ever.

So, our harvest isn't only of food. Few of us now are even involved in producing food. So, what do I mean about our own harvest?

We all come into contact with others. We all, whether knowingly or not, plant seeds in other people's minds and lives. We are assured that if we give so much a month to charity, it will improve the lives of people thousands of miles away. We will probably never meet them or even know their name, but 10 euros a month can bring clean water to a village, feed a child, give some-one medication, train someone to earn their own living or care for the animals central to their livelihood.

That's just one example of how we affect others. How we sow seeds. I read recently of an example of another form of sowing seeds, which was completely unexpected. See what you think.

In 2011, a young man training to be a paramedic, was attacked out of the blue by a 19-year-old man. One punch led to him being taken to hospital where 9 days later, medical science could not save him, and his parents had to take the hardest decision of their lives – to take him off his life support system. James was his name. He had his whole life ahead of him.

The person who killed him got a short sentence, just 14 months for manslaughter, which James' parents found unacceptable. They knew nothing about the attacker and wanted answers. Overwhelmed by grief they were contacted by someone working for a charity called Remedi, to ask if they would be interested in participating in something called restorative justice. The idea of restorative justice is to give those harmed by a criminal the chance to explain the effect their actions have had on the family and friends of the victim. It makes the criminal face up to the reality of what they have done. James's parents agreed to

take part. The man who had attacked James wasn't initially keen, but when the request came to him to meet James's parents, it made him stop and think. In his own words "They became real people. Before that I'd thought about them. But……they become like imaginary people in your mind…. Almost like fictional characters". But suddenly they were there, real, wanting answers. He went on to say "It was almost like God himself was questioning me. I knew the truth… I had to be fully accountable, fully truthful to the best of my ability, to make sure I could help them."

He had to face those parents and their hurt. In their turn they discovered that he, Jacob, had grown up around gang culture on a council estate, whose idea of a fun night out was getting wasted on drugs and alcohol and proving his toughness to his friends. It was hard for both sides, but they went through with the meeting. The parents suspect had they not met him, they would still be floundering in the depths of bitterness and anger, and he would be in and out of prison and harming more people. In fact, he went back to school and got a degree in criminology, helped by the support and care he found from James's parents. With knowledge on both sides came compassion, empathy – and forgiveness. Small seeds sown in unpromising ground, which bore more fruit that any of them could imagine. The three of them remain in contact and pushing for restorative justice to be available more widely.

We hopefully will never be in such a situation, but we too can sow our tiny seeds in other's lives – a kind word, a friendly face, a helping hand, keeping in touch with a lonely person, giving to a food bank, opening the gates to God's peace. And in those tiny seeds, we are truly God's gardeners. We too will reap a harvest.
Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity
19th October 2025
All Saints' Marseille
The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

How familiar are you with Jacob's story — his long journey, his complicated family, and especially that strange night by the river when he wrestled until daybreak? It is one of the most extraordinary stories in Scripture.

Jacob's night struggle has found its way into song and story — from Suzanne Vega's quiet lyricism to Madonna's *Isaac*, from U2's searching *Until the End of the World* to the poetry of Emily Dickinson and Rainer Maria Rilke. Each, in their own way, has sensed in Jacob's story something of the human condition — our wrestling with the Eternal, with others, with ourselves It is the outward sign of an inner struggle, the visible shape of a night of the soul.

Painters and sculptors, too, have tried to give form to that mystery. Marc Chagall shows the angel lifting Jacob almost into flight — a dance between heaven and earth. Jacob Epstein carved the figures in massive alabaster, locked in an almost brutal embrace. The two could not be more different, yet both recognise the same truth: that Jacob's struggle is everyone's struggle — the night when faith and fear, weakness and hope, meet face to face.

Jacob's very name tells his story. Jacob — the supplanter, the usurper, the heel-grabber, the trickster. He has lived up to his name. He came

into the world clutching his twin brother Esau's heel, as if already striving for first place. He traded Esau's birthright for a bowl of soup. He deceived his blind father Isaac and stole the blessing that belonged to his brother. He schemed and manipulated, yet he also dreamed of ladders to heaven. He wrestled blessings out of others, but never quite found peace.

And now, at last, his old patterns have brought him to the edge of reckoning. He is about to meet his brother after twenty years apart. The night before that meeting, alone by the river, Jacob finds himself caught in a struggle he cannot escape or control. Before dawn, the man who has always grasped and fled will find himself grasped — and held — by a power greater than his own.

This is one of the most mysterious scenes in all of Scripture. Our eyes see as dimly in the night as Jacob's. Even when the dawn breaks and Jacob limps away, the questions remain: Who was his opponent? What did this nocturnal struggle accomplish? Why does Jacob bear both wound and blessing?

Jewish sages have long seen in Jacob's struggle a mirror of our own. Some say he wrestled with his conscience, others read the story as the eternal struggle between ego and spirit — the struggle of every soul to yield its will to God's.

Dutch spiritual writer Henri Nouwen called Jacob, after that night, a "wounded healer": one who has wrestled with God and emerged scarred, yet able to bless. American theologian Frederick Buechner named the encounter "the magnificent defeat of the human soul at the hands of God." It is defeat that becomes victory, weakness that becomes strength.

Jacob's limp is not punishment but sign — the mark of one who has met God and lived. The wound and the blessing are inseparable; the struggle itself becomes grace.

This story challenges every attempt to domesticate God, to make the divine tame or predictable. As C. S. Lewis reminds us in the *Chronicles of Narnia*, through the voice of Mr. Beaver, speaking of the lion Aslan, who's a representation of God: "Safe? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good." So it is with the God of Jacob — not safe, but good; not distant, but fiercely near.

Jacob leaves the Jabbok as the sun rises, limping toward his future. He has seen God face to face and lived. He has been wounded and blessed, broken and made whole. His struggle is ours: the night through which faith is born, the dawn that follows after surrender.

All our readings this Sunday speak of persistence. Jacob refusing to release his mysterious opponent until the blessing is given. A widow, small and powerless, who keeps returning to the door of an unjust judge until justice is done. Paul, writing to Timothy, urging him to persist "whether the time is favourable or unfavourable." And the psalmist, who takes courage from God's own persistence: "He who watches over you will not sleep."

Our persistence, it seems, rests upon God's. We can hold on because God holds on. We can stay awake through the night because God never sleeps.

Both Jacob and the widow persist in the face of apparent divine resistance. They refuse to let go. In both stories, God's hiddenness —

even God's seeming reluctance — becomes the very context in which true faith is revealed. Faith is not the absence of struggle, but the courage to engage it. Faith is not quiet resignation, but tenacious trust. It is wrestling that does not end until blessing comes.

To wrestle with God is not to reject him — it is to stay close, to keep our arms wrapped around the One who alone can bless us. Wrestling is the opposite of apathy, the opposite of resignation, even the opposite of loneliness. As long as we wrestle, we have not walked away.

Jacob's cry — "I will not let you go, unless you bless me" — and the widow's cry for justice are born of the same spirit. Both voices rise from the night. Both refuse to give up on God. And both, in the end, find that the struggle itself is the place of blessing.

This is a strange truth of faith: in wrestling with God, we find not victory but surrender — and in surrender, blessing. Jacob lost his strength and found a limp, but also a new name. The widow lost her fear and found justice. Each discovered that the struggle itself was the place where grace met them.

"When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" asks Jesus. Faith that persists. Faith that contends. Faith that wrestles. Not a tidy, untroubled faith, but one that dares to cling through the night — one that will not let go until the light comes.

Perhaps that is what it means to be blessed: not to escape the struggle, but to be found still holding on when dawn breaks.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity – Bible Sunday
26th October 2025
All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

Last Thursday, an ecumenical service of prayer was held in the Sistine Chapel, on the occasion of the state visit of King Charles to the Vatican. While watching, I found myself smiling at how much Scripture was there. The Psalms were sung; the British Foreign Secretary read from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans; and the Choirs of the Chapel Royal and St George's Chapel, Windsor, sang Tallis's *If ye love me* — words from John's Gospel set to music of luminous simplicity.

Readings, prayers, music – and Michelangelo's frescoes arching over them all – Scripture everywhere. The Word proclaimed, sung, painted, prayed.

For each of those gathered there – the Pope and the Monarch, diplomats and clergy, Swiss Guards and choristers – the Bible must have meant something personal, beyond their role or office: a source of truth, or comfort, or mystery; a word that has met them somewhere along the road of life.

Perhaps this is a question for each of us today, on Bible Sunday: what does the Bible mean to me?

For some, the Bible is the beloved book which has accompanied them through the seasons of life; for others, the book of the knowledge of

God — the repository of eternal and saving truth, a life-changing book in its spiritual power. In its pages we find the record of the many ways in which God has revealed himself to humankind as the God of love. Many will remember familiar verses that have brought relief in dark times.

Each reader develops a personal relationship with this collection of texts — filled with intensity and excitement, with drama and poetry — whose words that challenge, provoke, and inspire us every day of our lives.

We open the Bible because of our search for truth, our need of love, our quest for meaning. And in opening it we find that it is not only we who are searching — but God who seeks us and speaks to us through these living words.

What does the Bible mean to the world today, especially in our increasingly secularised West?

For some, perhaps not very much — a few familiar words at Christmas, a solemn reading at Remembrance Sunday; a book that gathers dust on the shelf. For others, it remains a source of comfort or curiosity, a text that has shaped so much of our civilisation. Many cannot forget that it is has been used to bring peace and to justify war, to proclaim freedom and to defend oppression.

Some will see the Bible as subversive. The Word of God has always unsettled those who seek to control hearts and minds. It speaks too freely, too directly. It makes no distinction between rich and poor, learned and unlearned. It judges the proud and consoles the humble. In that sense, it is a dangerous book — one that, in every age, breaks

through complacency and challenges assumptions. It reveals a God whose Word cannot be confined: no chains, no censorship, no ideology can silence the voice of the living God.

Even for those who no longer claim faith, the Bible continues to speak through art and culture: through Leonardo's *Last Supper*, through Handel's *Messiah* and Bach's *Passions*, through Chagall's dreamlike visions and the poetry of Victor Hugo or Paul Claudel.

If engaging with Scripture is essential for us – in our worship, our thinking, our praying — how can we make a case for its relevance in a world that moves so swiftly, and speaks so many different languages of meaning? How can our generation awaken in children and young people a desire to engage with the Bible, to discover that these ancient words still breathe?

"The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword…"[1] It pierces through pretence and illusion; it lays bare the truth of who we are. The readings set before us this Bible Sunday show that living word at work — exposing pride, sustaining faith, revealing God's justice and mercy.

In the book of *Ecclesiasticus*, we hear of a God who shows no partiality, who listens to the prayer of the humble and gives ear to the cry of the poor. Here Scripture becomes the voice of the voiceless, the defender of the oppressed. It reminds us that the Word of God always takes the side of justice, and that true worship is inseparable from compassion.

In Paul's second Letter to Timothy, we glimpse the apostle near the end of his race — a life sustained by the Word that has guided and guarded

[1] *Hebrews 4.12*

him, a companion and witness, a source of courage in trial and of hope in the face of death.

And in the Gospel, the Word of God becomes a mirror to the human heart in a parable of deceptive simplicity. Our Pharisee divides the world between the righteous and the unrighteous, and wants to detach himself from the sinful mass of humankind. “God, I thank you that I am not like other people.” Perhaps many of us pray like him, in subtler ways, more often than we realise — the prayer that proclaims our own righteousness.

The tax collector, by contrast, knows he has no righteousness to claim. He can only recognise his own need, and stake his hope entirely on the mercy of God. “O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” Those few words have inspired one of the most ancient prayers of the Church — the Jesus Prayer, or the Prayer of the Heart: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”

To pray it is to recognise one’s own brokenness, to accept that God is our only hope and only help. It is to discover that, even amid the turmoil and chaos of our lives, God is at work — bringing order out of disorder, life out of death.

In these readings, Scripture lives — not as a relic of the past, but as a voice that still speaks, a light that still searches, a word that still transforms.

Across the centuries, people have laboured to bring that same Word into every human tongue. Each new translation is an act of faith and humility — the Word stooping down into human speech, just as Christ stooped down into our humanity.

I recently encountered familiar words from Luke's Gospel in the *First Nations Version*, a translation for the Native peoples of North America. It was love at first sight. Jesus' words encouraging his disciples to pray — *"Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you"* — are rendered like this: *"Every step is a prayer. Keep dancing your prayers and the Way will open before you."*

Every step is a prayer. The Bible continues to speak with fresh voices, through the rhythms of every culture and the cadence of every people. So, engage with the Bible. Read it. Meditate with it. Debate about it. Enjoy it. It is a unique gift — a book that has endured for millennia because its author is still speaking.

May we not only read the Scriptures, but let the Scriptures read us — until we, too, are shaped into the likeness of the Word made flesh.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Third Sunday before Advent
Remembrance Sunday
9th November 2025
All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

As we stand in remembrance today, we hold together grief and gratitude. We remember lives given, promises broken by war, and the cost of peace. We remember names once spoken with love, and we feel again the weight of loss that every generation knows.

Our readings this morning do not speak of war or the great silences people keep today, yet they take us straight to the heart of what remembrance invites us to face. In Luke's Gospel, the Sadducees come to Jesus with a question about resurrection. They do not come to learn. They come to trap him. Still, their question lingers in every honest human heart. What becomes of those who have died? What is left when the music stops, the battle ends, the body is laid in the earth?

Jesus answers with a single, steady truth: "He is not God of the dead but of the living, for to him all of them are alive." The covenant love of God, the "I am" of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, does not falter at the threshold of death. To God, the dead are alive, for his love holds them beyond our sight.

That same faith steadied the Thessalonians when they were shaken by rumours and fear. Paul writes to them of "eternal comfort and good

hope." A comfort rooted not in sunny reassurances but in Christ risen. A hope that looks beyond every grave.

And yet hope does not come easily these days.

For our remembrance is not only a bringing-to-mind. It is a binding-together of what has been torn apart. To re-member is to put together again what has been dis-membered through the evil and sorrow of war. After the First World War, many believed that once humanity had seen what its own ingenuity could unleash, such horror would never be repeated. Recent history, and the daily news that reaches our homes, tells a different story. Conflicts intensify. Hatreds rekindle. Peacemakers grow weary.

Are we caught in endless cycles of unrest and violence? How could those who stand for what is good and just not feel exhausted at times?

Yet today, as we remember the fallen and all who have died in war, we do not stand as people without hope. We remember in the light of Christ's resurrection, trusting that life, not death, speaks the final word.

And in these tumultuous and angry times, remembrance asks something of us. It calls us not only to look back, but to live differently now. To live humble, considerate lives. Lives that are impartial and sincere. Lives shaped by mercy and good fruit. To expect such qualities not only of ourselves but of our leaders, and all who speak in our name. In our families, our workplaces, our community, we are called to choose generosity over suspicion, kindness over fear, welcome over exclusion.

This is part of how we honour the sacrifice of those who died at war to protect our freedoms and our future: to work for peace, to refuse the slow habits of hatred, to become in our own time signs of that living hope that death can never destroy.

At the beginning of the Second World War, King George VI ended his Christmas message with words from a poem by Minnie Haskins. He offered them to a nation staring into the unknown. “I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year, ‘Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.’ And he replied, ‘Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light, and safer than a known way.’”

That is the hand we take today. The hand that holds all who have fallen. The hand that leads us toward peace. The hand that reminds us that to God, all of them are alive.

May that hope steady us, guide us, and teach us how to live. Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Third Sunday before Advent – Remembrance Sunday
9th November 2025
Église du Sacré-Coeur, Oppède
Christine Portman, Reader

Today's gospel is the set reading for the 3rd Sunday before Advent. At first it may seem hardly relevant to a remembrance service. But this chapter from Luke is interesting: a series of Jesus' responses to trick questions set by a group of priests and elders. They're trying to catch him out regarding Jewish law. But Jesus outwits them – instead directing their attention to God's very different perspective: *"the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob… is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive"*.

Today we remember and honour the victims of war, souls who in God's eternal mind are very much alive. Although world wars were meant to end all wars, conflict continues worldwide. We pray *Thy kingdom come*, but we may begin to wonder when our prayers will be answered. Faced by such gloom, some say it's pointless to honour this special day. Others dislike it because when they see parades they misinterpret it as the celebrating militarism. This must be hard to take for those who lost friends: I keenly remember what this day meant to my father.

Then there are others who believe it's time to forget the horrors of war – but how can we? Each day we hear of the latest atrocities, be it from Gaza, the Sudan or Ukraine – hundreds of others grind on, forgotten by news outlets as apparently this isn't sufficiently interesting to audiences.

But I'm sure you're here today for the right reasons. You recognise that Remembrance Day is a sombre time for reflection on human sinfulness, and calling to mind all who have died and continue to die from war. But we didn't simply make an Act of Remembrance. We followed with an Act of Commitment.

A month ago, The Right Reverend Sarah Mullaly was chosen to be our new Archbishop. She addressed a Christian community, saying: *The Christian faith is unwavering in its teaching that we are all made in the image of God. Each one of us deserves to be treated with dignity, compassion and respect. Christ commands us to love God, and to love our neighbours as ourselves. In living in the service of others, we must also confront the dynamics of power. Hatred and racism of any kind cannot be allowed to tear us apart. In every church you will encounter Jesus Christ, and his teaching to love one another: our source and our standard. This is both gift and responsibility.*

Civilian deaths from current conflicts should shock us all, but perhaps the incessant exposure to such bad news allows us in some ways to distance ourselves from these far-off events. So maybe it's a good thing to draw back the focus, take time to reflect on what's happening much closer to home, consider the ways in which some in our own communities fail to accept other people who they consider different.

My sister has a seaside house in North Wales. Driving home this summer, she was shocked to see how their village near Lichfield had changed. All the way up their hill the lane was lined with Union Jacks and St George's crosses. The roundabouts were painted over with Union flags. Both of them are proud to be English, but they knew what those flags were meant to signify. To quote her, "*I loathe being made*

to feel that loving my country and its flags is meant to ally me in some way with people who preach the politics of hate".

My father lied about his age and went off, in his own words, *to fight fascism* at the age of 17. I often wonder what he would think of the current political situation. To quote a recent article by Alexander Hurst, "*the Italian philosopher Umberto Eco listed the core criteria that mark out fascism: the call to tradition and the rejection of reason, the fear of difference, the hostility towards disagreement, the ressentiment, the machismo, the degradation of language into newspeak and the cult of a "strong" leader.* In an essay identifying the eternal nature of fascism, he wrote: *"Life is not that simple. Ur-Fascism can come back under the most innocent of disguises."* … the historian Robert Paxton, in explaining why he'd changed his mind about employing the word, remarked: *"It's bubbling up from below in very worrisome ways, and that's very much like the original fascisms. It's the real thing. It really is"*.

You may have seen footage of recent anti-immigrant rallies in the UK – "*Get out the scum!",* screamed one woman. Online, another urged her followers, "*Burn down the hotel!"* Asylum seekers were spat at and hot drinks thrown over them from passing cars. It's worth a moment's pause to remember that among their number are those fleeing torture and death threats, fearing for their lives if they're sent home. I've heard churchgoers saying *"We don't mind* ***real*** *asylum seekers*, *It's just economic migrants we want out".* Those of you who've come face-to-face with real poverty may be reflecting on the validity of that distinction in a world where we see such imbalances of wealth and power.

So as we remember, we might reflect on how most ordinary people in Germany reacted during the rise of fascism. We know how Hilter's ideas took hold – a humiliated Germany after WW1, massive inflation, unemployment, poverty. When people feel threatened they find scapegoats – Jews, Roma, homosexuals – destroy them and our country will be fine! And the sad fact is, that the majority of Christians in both the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran churches went along with it. True, there was resistance. The Confessing Church suffered for it. Dietrich Bonhoeffer and many others died. Faithful people resisted, people who, like my father and his friends, were willing to lay down their lives for what they believed in.

We should be worried when we see that it's becoming acceptable to promulgate the same hate-filled polemic, making it not only commonplace, but increasingly acceptable in the public sphere. Worse still, some would have us believe that spreading this ideology is in the defence of our Christian faith. We've seen people marching, not only with the flag of St George, but also, even more shamefully, brandishing the Cross of our Lord, his instrument of torture and death.

What was Jesus' Way? To become the military leader so many craved? To rise up and crush the enemies of the Jewish people? No, it was to show us that God's way is self-giving, that we too need to take up our crosses if we're to follow him. Our task is to show to the world that using discrimination, hate speak and violence to destroy others is not God's way.

And so I'll continue the words from our new Archbishop's address: *In every church you will encounter Jesus Christ, and his teaching to love one another: our source and our standard. This is both gift and responsibility. Jesus Christ is the life-changing hope that brings us*

*together as church, even in our own brokenness and messiness – and sends us out into the world to witness to that Love. In an age that craves certainty and tribalism, Anglicanism offers something quieter but stronger: shared history, held in tension, shaped by prayer, and lit from within by the glory of Christ. That is what gives me hope. In our fractured and hurting world, that partnership in the Gospel could not be more vital. Hope is made of the infinite love of God, who breathed life into creation and said it was good. Across our nation today, we are wrestling with complex moral and political questions….*including .. *Our response to people fleeing war and persecution to seek safety and refuge. The pressures on communities who have been overlooked and undervalued. The deep-rooted question of who we are as a nation, in a world that is so often on the brink.*

Today, as we remember the millions of war dead, her words help us to reaffirm our faith in *our source and our standard*. We don't wave a flag, we truly follow the Cross.

Amen

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Last Sunday before Advent
Christ the King
23rd November 2025
All Saints' Marseille

Fr Laurent Notareschi
vicar of the churches of Sainte Anne and Saint François-Xavier,
representative of the Diocese of Marseille for ecumenical relationships

Dear brothers and sisters,

First of all, I would like to thank you for your welcome into your community. Having welcomed Roxana last Saturday at St Anne's Church, and myself being welcomed among you today, we show—on our own modest scale—that what unites us is more important than what divides us. And you know how precious such a witness is in these troubled times.

Christ, King of the Universe! As every year, this beautiful feast brings a liturgical year to a close before beginning a new one with the beautiful season of Advent, which invites us to cultivate hope and the expectation of the coming of our Lord.

It is clear that what we celebrate today invites us to embrace the universality of Salvation as Jesus Christ came to inaugurate it during his passage through our humanity.

Some were tempted to make Jesus a temporary king; as a descendant of David, they already imagined him ascending the throne of his ancestor to restore the kingship in Israel, reunite the twelve tribes, and potentially drive out the Roman occupier. A political kingdom, then. Even the disciples and some of the apostles had this vision. How disappointed they must have been at the crucifixion of their favourite candidate for kingship over Israel!

Jesus himself always refused what people expected of him and had warned everyone: *"My kingdom is not of this world!"*

Indeed, Jesus is called to become King of the Universe—that is, of everyone, not just Israel; he is king for every living being, for he came to fulfil the prophecy: *"And all flesh shall see the salvation of God."*

Along the way, this remains a strong call to move beyond our sometimes narrow particularisms, beyond our too-limited vision of religion… to pass from the particular to the universal, from our historically labelled churches to the Church of Jesus Christ and to the catholicity of this Church which surpasses all our institutions in which we may have settled too comfortably… Do you know the limits of the Universe? Neither do I. And it is with great humility that we are called to place ourselves before the greatness of this mystery.

If the salvation brought by Christ is truly universal and concerns every living being, let us not be too quick to set conditions or limits. Let us leave it to God alone to judge.

The king whom we celebrate today is not comfortably installed in a glittering palace on a magnificent marble throne. In the Gospel we

have just heard, he is set upon the cross, and the only crown he wears is a crown of thorns.

This shows clearly that the Lord does not place himself on the side of the powerful of this world, the violent, the tyrants, the executioners.

He places himself on the side of the victims, of suffering, of fragility, of moral and social fracture. He takes the place of all those he came to meet: the excluded, sinners, the sick, foreigners, the rightless, the forgotten.

And again, nailed to the cross, he receives the request of the criminal crucified beside him, who says: *"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."* He, the outlaw, the thief, perceives well that Jesus' kingdom is still to come and asks him to make a little room for him. And Jesus grants him this: *"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."*

Such is the greatness of God's mercy: a forgiveness given to whoever asks for it, accompanied by the promise of having a place in Paradise.

By contemplating Christ on the cross today, we can more easily understand that the kingdom of God is neither temporary nor political. It is a kingdom of love, and every time we allow love to inspire us, to lead us, to guide our steps and our actions, we take part in establishing the reign of God within us and around us.
The *"today"* in Luke's Gospel does not evoke a hypothetical future but a here and now. Salvation still comes through this love, constantly renewed in our liturgical celebrations. Christ tirelessly comes to join us there, to show us his mercy, and to make each of us a temple of his presence, fragile and imperfect as we are.

Paul, in the letter to the Colossians, sums this up admirably: *For God was pleased to have all fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile all things to himself, making peace through the blood of his cross, peace for all beings on earth and in heaven.*

May it be granted to us today, as we celebrate the feast of Christ the King of the Universe, to receive from him all the reconciliations the Lord desires for us, and may the peace of the Lord come to dwell deeply within us as an undeniable sign that, reconciled through Christ with God, his reign of love is indeed given to us, here and now.

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Advent Sunday
30th November 2025
All Saints' Marseille
Christine Portman, Reader

Earlier this week I spoke with someone who feels increasingly depressed about current events. And she's right to be concerned. Across the world we see terrible wars and suffering. My friend asked me why I was '*such an optimist*' given what's going on. Being aware of so much that's wrong in our world, I've never thought of myself as an optimist. That's often understood as a person who tends to be blindly confident about future success, or someone who believes that this world is the best of all possible worlds. So I decided to look up several definitions and found one philosophical meaning*: an optimist is a person who believes that good must ultimately prevail over evil*. Ah! So maybe my friend was correct after all! Proverbs 3, verse 5 came to mind: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and be not wise in your own sight.* Today the first candle of Advent signifies Hope, and as Christians we put our trust and hope in God.

The candle of Hope brings light into our churches. We look forward to Isaiah's prophecy read by X this morning where God's peace reigns, and *'they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.* How we all hope for that time.

Less well-known perhaps are the earlier verses: *'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths'.* Surely this is the key to the coming of God's kingdom. We have the great fortune not to live in a war-torn country, but we still live in a far from perfect land. Countless lives are torn apart by pervasive crime, poverty and injustice. Our society desperately needs to learn His ways and walk in His paths. Perhaps some of you saw the in-depth report on France 2 on Thursday night. It was an investigation into the widespread prostitution and drug dealing going on in children's care homes in France – apparently openly under the noses of those carers supposed to protect them. Marseille is no exception. The most shocking part of the report was an interview with the Prefect of one region where the problem is particularly bad. When challenged that he was the person ultimately responsible for children in care in his region, he simply put up his hands and said, "What do you expect me to do? These homes aren't prisons".

This year's Reith Lectures on BBC Radio 4 are given by a Dutch philosopher, Rutger Bregman. They're entitled "Moral Revolution". To quote the publicity, they "*explore the moral decay and unseriousness of today's elites"* and advocate for a new *"realistic utopia".* As Bregman pointed out in his first lecture, there would be no narco-traffic unless there was an ever-growing market for the products. We're not only talking about wayward young people indulging themselves. There is an epidemic of cocaine use among the professional classes in France. It's cool in many circles to be seen using it. And it's so easy! Just shop for it online and it'll be delivered to your door in minutes. Pity those delivering the goods and living constant fear and danger. What hypocrisy: to deplore the social consequences whilst being responsible for their causes. *Moral decay and unseriousness.*

In the season of Advent, we focus on hope, peace and light, wakefulness and readiness in anticipation of Christ's coming. It's a season of expectation and preparation. We prepare to celebrate the coming of Christ in his incarnation, but we also look ahead to his final advent as judge at the end of time. The readings and liturgy not only look forward to Christmas, they also challenge modern reluctance to confront the theme of divine judgement. Today's Collect prays that we prepare seriously for that day: *'that on the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal*'.

In this morning's gospel, the disciples ask Jesus: *'tell us when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'.* He tells them plainly: '*about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father'.* But in case they miss the point he goes on to say: *'Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming'.* In Luke chapter 17, when asked the same question, he replies*: 'The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is! For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you'.*

In both Matthew and Luke, after healing sick people, Jesus declares: *'The kingdom of God has come to you'.* How many times did Jesus tell his followers that his kingdom is *at hand*? In other words, it is already present with us, offered as a gift from God. We don't need to look for him in special places or in particular events. Through his resurrection, Jesus has opened up for us a way to be with him in the here and now of this life. His presence is there for us to seek and find. When we meet him in faith, he opens our eyes and guides us in action.

Today the Church also celebrates the Feast of Saint Andrew – the first of missionaries. St Andrew's Eve yesterday is traditionally the Day of Intercession and Thanksgiving for the Missionary Work of the Church. We are, each and every one of us, missionaries for Christ, at home and with our families and friends, at work and in our communities. Jesus said '*No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven*' (Matthew 5:15-16). We may not think we have much power to change things, but we can never know the power of our individual witness to Christ in word and deed. In today's Collect we prayed that: *'now in the time of this mortal* life', God will *'give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and to put on the armour of light'.* Let us pray that we put on and keep wearing that armour. Our world needs us.

Amen

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Third Sunday of Advent
14th December 2025
All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

In a reflection on Advent published in the *Washington Post* in 2019, Michael Gerson described the choice that confronts us in this season: "On the evidence of our senses, despair is perfectly rational. Entropy (that is, disorder, randomness) is built into nature. Decay is knit into our flesh. By all appearances, the universe is cold, empty, and indifferent… This leaves every human being with a choice between despair and longing."

There is no mention of joy here. And, if we are honest, joy does not seem an obvious or even plausible word—especially from where we stand now. Six years on, we carry the memory of a pandemic, the ongoing violence in Ukraine and Gaza and in so many other places, and a climate crisis that has moved beyond pessimistic anticipation into lived anxiety.

And yet—twice each year—the Church dares to interrupt its own penitential seasons. On the third Sunday of Advent, and again in the middle of Lent, we are told quite simply: *Rejoice.*

The third Sunday of Advent is an especially paradoxical one. To be sure, some of the readings do lift our eyes. "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad," promises the prophet Isaiah, "the desert shall rejoice and blossom." And the psalmist declares: "Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God."

We begin to feel ourselves rising—only for Matthew to bring John the Baptist centre stage.

For if there is one thing difficult to associate with John the Baptist, it is joy. We never hear him say, "Rejoice, for the kingdom of heaven is near." Only ever: *"Repent."* John is a figure of urgency, severity, truth-telling without ornament.

Just last week, Matthew led us into the wilderness of Judea to meet him: clothed in camel's hair, surviving on locusts and wild honey, proclaiming repentance, and preparing hearts to receive the Messiah. He was utterly convinced of who was coming—and of what that coming would mean.

Today, Matthew takes us somewhere else entirely: into a prison cell. We meet a John who is confined, silenced, and broken—imprisoned because he dared to confront Herod over his unlawful marriage. From that cell, John looks at the world as it is, and at Jesus of Nazareth as he appears to be, and nothing seems to add up.

The Messiah John had announced was meant to make the world new—to bring justice, to set things right, to reorder human life. But as far as John can tell, nothing has changed. The powerful still rule. The unjust still prosper. And he himself remains behind bars.

All he has left now is a question, sent to Jesus through his disciples: "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

John expected the Messiah to come with the fire of judgment. That certainty has now given way to doubt. Confidence turns into uncertainty. Anticipation into disappointment. Hope into desperation.

This movement is not unfamiliar to us. We set out with plans and convictions, full of energy and optimism, only to be brought to a halt—by illness, by the loss of work, by the death of someone we love, by the collapse of a relationship, or by any one of a thousand disruptions that suddenly narrow our horizon and shake our faith.

It is good to hear John's question today. It introduces a necessary realism into our journey towards Bethlehem. Even as we await the

birth of the Christ-child, even as we give thanks for that gift and trust in the promise of his death and resurrection, life in the meantime can be hard, confusing, and unresolved.

“Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” —that is also our question. We ask it from our own prisons: the places where fear, grief, or disappointment confine us to a limited imagination about God.

Like John, we are invited to recognise that God does not always come in the way we expect. Advent, perhaps more than any other season, is a time for the conversion of our ideas of God—for learning to discern new, quieter, and often unsettling ways in which Christ comes into our lives.

Jesus turns out to be the Messiah who comes with mercy rather than force, with forgiveness rather than fire, and with a willingness to suffer for the sake of God’s kingdom. It is not the Messiah John imagined—but it is the Messiah God intended.

Jesus comes not as a victorious conqueror, but as Emmanuel—God with us. Not the one who removes all trouble, but the one who accompanies us through it; who holds us when the world feels as though it is falling apart; who enters into suffering and promises to bring us through all things—even through death—into new life.

Here and there, God allows us to glimpse what he is doing. Light breaks through, often just when the darkness seems most complete.

So Jesus invites us to look and to notice. Do we see God at work— in those who pray and labour for peace, in the care offered to the vulnerable, in forgiveness given and reconciliation begun? As Christians, we are called to watch and to wait, to attend carefully to the places where healing, restoration, and love are taking root—and to recognise that we, too, are invited to play our part in the coming of God’s kingdom.

Choosing joy doesn't mean to deny what is wrong but to notice what is right—what is of God, what bears the quiet marks of grace. To tell what we hear and see, as Jesus asked John's disciples to do. And to pray that we ourselves might become signs of the kingdom to those who are watching and waiting.

Joy, finally, is not optimism. It is the deep conviction that God reigns—that sin and evil do not have the final word, and that the goodness with which God endowed creation cannot be erased. Joy trusts that grace endures, and that one day it will be all in all. Patient waiting is not in vain, because the trajectory of history is tilted upward by a powerful hand.

When a reporter once asked Mahatma Gandhi what the secret of his happiness was, he replied with just three words: *"Renounce and enjoy."* Renounce the illusion of control we cling to so tightly and receive instead the grace that is given. Perhaps that is one of Advent's quiet lessons: only when we loosen our grip on how we think God ought to come, can we begin to recognise—and enjoy—the ways God is already at work.

To rejoice in a time like ours is not to deny the darkness. It is to insist, stubbornly and faithfully, that God is present, active, and trustworthy, even when circumstances suggest otherwise. Joy is not a mood that descends upon us; it is a practice to be honoured, a discipline to be cultivated, a muscle that grows stronger as we learn to trust a God who promises deliverance.

So this week, when you light the Advent candle, name the ache that is still here, and let it sit beside your joy. Do not rush to certainty. Pray instead for the courage to keep walking the road between ruin and bloom, trusting that God is already at work—turning wilderness into promise, and waiting into hope.

And may we awaken on Christmas morning to the joy of life transformed in Christ: unexpected, abundant, and more than we had dared even to ask for.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Fourth Sunday of Advent
21st December 2025
All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

Joseph's day begins as any other: work, routine, the quiet dignity of a craftsman's life. And then the news that shatters everything—Mary is with child. Matthew tells it with restraint, but the human drama is immense: confusion, shame, grief. Scripture refuses to soften the blow.

Joseph knows the Law. He also knows the consequences for Mary if she is accused. And so, even in his pain and ignorance of God's plan, compassion already stirs within him. He resolves to dismiss her quietly, to avoid public disgrace. Before any angel appears, Joseph is already a man of mercy. As evening falls, he enters the night—exhausted, troubled, seeking silence. It is there, in that fragile space between anguish and surrender, that God speaks to him in a dream.

Advent, too, unfolds in such half-light. It is the season in which God comes quietly, asking not for heroics, but for trust—asking ordinary lives to make room for an extraordinary promise.

And it is precisely such an ordinary life that Matthew now places before us. He turns our attention away from the angel and toward the man who must decide what to do next.

Every third year, the lectionary shifts the focus away from Mary and invites us to see the story from Joseph's side. And what we are told about him is strikingly little. Matthew records no words of his at all. Joseph's righteousness is not eloquent; it is enacted.

He is described simply as a "righteous man"—not merely a rule-keeper, but someone who seeks to live rightly before God and neighbour. Joseph is faithful to the Law. He is honest, hardworking, devoted to justice. Like most of us, he wants an orderly, uncomplicated life. Is that too much to ask?

And yet the Law he honours would, if strictly applied, expose Mary to disgrace and possibly death. Joseph finds himself caught in a painful tension: fidelity to God on the one hand, mercy toward another human being on the other.

His initial decision—to dismiss Mary quietly—is already an act of compassion. Even before the angel speaks, Joseph refuses cruelty. Righteousness, here, looks less like certainty and more like restraint; less like self-justification and more like care for another's vulnerability. We make a mistake if we sentimentalise this moment. Joseph's consent does not come easily. God's favour does not lead him into safety or clarity, but into doubt, shame, and scandal. To be righteous, in this story, is not to preserve one's reputation, but to allow one's understanding of justice and holiness to be re-ordered by God.

Joseph stands on the edge of a holiness that is already beginning to look disturbingly like grace. What happens to him here is not an exception, but a pattern—one that runs through this Gospel, and through the whole history of salvation.

The incarnation does not happen *over* human beings, but *through* them. Mary's *yes* is indispensable—but so is Joseph's. This year, the Gospel invites us to contemplate not the courage of bearing God into the world, but the quieter courage of standing beside that mystery.

Joseph's calling lacks glamour. He does not carry the child, but he must trust the woman who does—and he must do so on the strength of God's word alone. His obedience is second-hand, mediated, and costly. It requires him to believe both God and Mary, without proof.

Just before today's Gospel passage, Matthew gives us Jesus' genealogy. It is anything but pristine: some of the names are associated with stories of irregularity, scandal, and sin. God, who could have chosen any lineage for his Son, chooses one marked by brokenness—not because God delights in disorder, but because God works precisely there, through fragile consent and compromised histories.

Joseph stands in that same line. He is not chosen for perfection, but for availability. Without his acceptance, his protection, his willingness to name the child, the story does not move forward. The promises to David stall at the threshold.

God's saving work, it seems, advances not by bypassing human freedom, but by entrusting itself to it. Joseph accepts the invitation to participate in God's plan of salvation—not by understanding it fully, but by making room for it. And in doing so, he shows us that holiness often begins not with clarity, but with trust.

And yet, at the decisive moment, Joseph is not left alone with the burden. God speaks.

I wonder which of the angel's words Joseph remembered in the morning—those that mattered most to him.

Perhaps: *"Do not be afraid."*

Joseph's fear is real and reasonable—fear of disgrace, fear of complicity, fear of losing control of the life he had carefully ordered. God does not scold that fear; God speaks directly into it.

"Do not be afraid," when God's work in your life looks nothing like you expected.
"Do not be afraid," when righteousness turns out to be riskier than obedience to rules.
"Do not be afraid," when God asks you to stand beside the shamed, the suspected, the vulnerable.

Joseph is not told that things will be easy. He is told that fear need not have the final word.

And then the child's name, announced by the prophet: *Emmanuel—God with us*.

Not God above us, or God beyond us, but God present in the midst of confusion, scandal, and fragility. Matthew's Gospel begins with this promise and ends with it: *"I am with you always, to the end of the age,"* says the risen Jesus. Everything in between unfolds its meaning.

Joseph's obedience is not blind. It is anchored in promise. He entrusts his future to a God who chooses proximity over distance, presence over safety, love over control. The disorder Joseph fears is not a sign of God's absence. It is, astonishingly, the place where God chooses to be present. And once that truth has been spoken, nothing more needs to be said. What matters now is how Joseph receives it.

Joseph never speaks, but he listens. He never sermonises, but he acts. He does not understand everything—but he does enough.
Joseph stands, almost unnoticed, at the edge of the picture. And yet without him, nothing moves forward. That, perhaps, is a Christian posture: to allow the most ordinary human actions to become sacred—to consent, to protect, to make room.

In Advent, we pray, *"Stir up your power, O Lord, and come."* We should pause and ask what it would mean if that prayer were truly answered. What happens when God intrudes into our carefully laid plans? When discipleship leads us where we had not intended to go?

That is what Christmas finally is: not a spectacle, but an unlikely, unexplainable appearance of love in the midst of the world's harsh realities—an invitation to trust as Joseph trusted, to give our hearts away to a promise we do not fully grasp, and to discover that God is already there, with us.

May we, like Joseph, have the quiet courage to say yes.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Christmas Day
25th December 2025
All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

Some of you will go home today and find a crib waiting for you — carefully arranged, lovingly lit.

For some, it is a Provençal crèche, crowded with santons: the baker with his bread, the fisherman with his nets, the mayor looking important, villagers caught mid-gesture. A whole world, gathered around a child. Perhaps you add a new figure each year. Perhaps setting it up is one of the quiet rituals by which Christmas becomes real.

A crib is not an ornament. It is not something to be taken lightly. For some, it is the first place where the story of the Nativity truly takes shape. For others, it becomes a place of prayer — a way of sensing God's nearness without many words. And for some, faith is strengthened simply by returning, year after year, to that small, familiar scene.

Every crib tells the Christmas story in its humane simplicity, as Saint Luke does. In the darkest days of the year, it leads us to honour the obedience, trust, and courage of Mary and Joseph, to rejoice with the shepherds, to sing with the angels — and to recognise the astonishing claim at the heart of this feast: that God has come to live among us.

Over the years, I have found myself drawn to smaller and smaller cribs. Some are no larger than the palm of my hand, scattered through my

home. At times I forget where they are. And I am reminded of Martin Luther's remark: *"Nobody notices or understands what God performs in the stable."* The first Christmas passed almost unnoticed — and yet it has been told and retold for two thousand years.

This desire to make the mystery visible lies at the very beginning of the crib.

Francis of Assisi had travelled to Bethlehem, to the land where Christ was born. He had walked the places, seen the caves, touched the stone. And when he returned to his small mountain village of Greccio, he knew that most people would never make such a journey. But he also knew that the mystery of Christmas was not meant to remain far away.

So he did not preach a new doctrine. He did not offer an explanation of the Incarnation. He decided instead to let people *see*.

On Christmas Eve in the year 1223, Francis gathered the villagers for the midnight Mass. There was no attempt at splendour. A manger was prepared with hay. An ox and a donkey were brought in from the fields. A simple figure stood in for the child. Mary and Joseph were played by ordinary people. Darkness, cold, animals, poverty — nothing was softened, nothing was embellished.

At Greccio, Francis did not explain the Incarnation; he placed it before their eyes. The aim was not realism for its own sake, but nearness. God was no longer spoken about from a safe distance. God was allowed to be close.

And this is why Christmas Day is not, at heart, about new ideas. It is about God's refusal to remain abstract. *The Word became flesh* means this: God has entered the scene — and has chosen not to leave it.

The Provençal crèche takes this instinct further.

The child is no longer alone with Mary and Joseph. The whole village gathers — and yet not everyone is looking at him.

The baker still tends his bread.
The fisherman mends his nets.
The mayor stands self-assured.
The miser bends over his coins.

Life goes on.

Some figures are already turning toward the light. Others hardly notice it at all.

Here, the Incarnation is no longer set apart in a sacred corner. It unfolds in the middle of ordinary life. God arrives where people are busy, distracted, preoccupied — much as we are.

Christmas does not suspend the world; it interrupts it. God does not wait for life to become calm, ordered, or attentive. The question is not whether God comes, but whether we notice. And if we notice, whether we allow ourselves to be drawn in.

Among the everyday affairs of ordinary people, God becomes human. Eternity enters time. The infinite mercy of the Almighty descends to us in the vulnerability of a child. Placed at the centre of history, the

Creator of all things meets us not in splendour, but in helplessness and trust.

And then there is *le Ravi*.

In the Provençal crèche, he is the one who stands apart from all the others. His name means *the delighted one*. Arms raised, face open, he arrives empty-handed, as if caught mid-exclamation. He has no task, no trade, no offering to present. His only role is joy.

In a crèche full of purposeful figures, the Ravi is almost useless — and yet he is indispensable.
He brings no bread, no lamb, no carefully prepared gift. He represents no profession, no social role, no achievement. His empty hands matter. They are raised not to grasp, but to receive.

The Ravi does not understand the mystery; he rejoices in it. He does not take hold of the child; he allows himself to be taken by wonder. In a sense, he is the freest figure in the crèche.

Like the shepherds, he has nothing to offer but himself. Like the children whom Jesus later blesses, he responds before he understands. His joy is not the reward of insight; it is the beginning of faith.

The Ravi reminds us that wonder is not childishness, but trust. In a world trained to be cautious, ironic, and self-protective, he dares to be undone by joy. He allows himself to be surprised by grace.
Perhaps this is why he unsettles us — and why we need him. Many of us come to Christmas carrying questions, responsibilities, and carefully measured expectations. The Ravi invites us, if only for a moment, to

lay these down. To stand before the manger with nothing in our hands and nothing to prove.

Christmas does not first ask us to be useful, knowledgeable, or impressive. It asks us to be astonished.

So the crib has been our guide this morning.

Francis of Assisi shows us that God comes close — close enough to be seen, touched, and loved. He refuses to let the mystery of Christmas remain distant or abstract.

The Provençal crèche shows us that God comes into our world as it is — into the midst of work and worry, distraction and routine, where some notice, some hesitate, and some pass by unaware.

And the Ravi shows us how to receive him — not with control or anxiety, not with calculation or achievement, but with wonder.

By his Incarnation, Christ has gathered heaven and earth into one. The promise of Christmas is that there is no such thing as ordinary time, ordinary place, or ordinary people. Wherever God is welcomed, the ground becomes holy.

On this Christmas Day, perhaps the most faithful response is not to rush ahead, but simply to pause. To raise our eyes — and our hearts — and say:
How extraordinary! God is here.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – First Sunday of Christmas
28th December 2025
All Saints' Marseille
The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

The Gospel passage appointed for this first Sunday of Christmas unsettles the familiar afterglow of the season. It comes, perhaps, too soon. We have only just sung of peace on earth and goodwill to all; we have spoken words of hope, light, and joy. Christmas, it seems, has barely begun—and already it feels abruptly shortened.

And yet the Gospel will not allow us to linger too long in sentiment. Sentimentality, after all, is one of the greatest enemies of understanding the Gospel—not because joy is false, but because it can become shallow when it refuses to look at the world as it truly is.

The reading set before us today strikes a new and sobering note. It reminds us that the story of Christmas does not unfold in safety or serenity, but in a world where hope is threatened, where fear shapes decisions, and where God's purposes must find their way through darkness.

The story of Christmas itself is not a gentle one. From the beginning, it unfolds under pressure and constraint. Mary and Joseph are compelled to take part in a census imposed by an occupying power. They travel under duress. Bethlehem is crowded, inhospitable; there is no place of comfort for a woman about to give birth. And not long afterwards, a local ruler responds to fear with violence, ordering the massacre of children in a brutal act of terror.

Joseph and Mary escape—but they do so carrying more than their child. They carry the knowledge of what has happened behind them, and the unanswerable weight of survival.

The arbitrariness of Herod's violence would not have surprised those who first heard this Gospel. For people living under the long shadow of Roman rule, power was something to be feared rather than trusted. Authority did not exist to protect the vulnerable; it existed to preserve itself. What seems unthinkable to us—the use of terror to secure power—was a familiar feature of their world.

And yet, in recent years, we have become painfully aware that such forces have not disappeared. We see again the underside of power: systems that do not cherish life, structures that sacrifice the weak, a persistent contempt for human dignity that surfaces when fear takes hold. Sin is not only personal; it is systemic, subterranean, and at times devastatingly visible.

This is what makes today's Gospel so unsettling—and so timely. The story rings with a terrible familiarity. In this respect, it may correspond more closely to the world we know than the softened, sentimental versions of Christmas we sometimes prefer.

Whether or not the massacre of the innocents can be verified historically, its theological truth remains. It rescues the Nativity from becoming a fairy tale. Jesus is born not into an imagined world of peace, but into a real one—like ours—where children are poor, malnourished, enslaved, and endangered. To lift the Christmas story out of such contexts in order to make it pretty is, in the end, to empty the Incarnation of its meaning.

Matthew does not spare us the cost of fear and power run amok. This passage reminds us that the Incarnation is not protected, not cushioned, not romantic. God enters history on the move, under threat, dependent on warning dreams and hurried obedience.

Before Jesus speaks a word, before he teaches or heals, he becomes a refugee. He knows exile before he knows home. He crosses borders before he learns scripture. His life begins dependent on hospitality, vulnerability, and risk.

Whether or not this story unfolded in every detail exactly as Matthew tells it, its truth is unmistakable. The names and faces may change, but the story itself is endlessly repeated. We have seen the images. We have read the headlines. We have heard—perhaps even taken part in—the arguments about what should be done. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were not the first to flee violence and fear, and they have not been the last.

One of the most striking things about Giotto's painting of the Flight into Egypt is something easily missed at first glance: the Holy Family are not alone on the road. Other figures move alongside them. They are part of a larger human flow—people on the move, displaced, uncertain, seeking safety. The flight of the Holy Family is not an isolated event; it is embedded in a shared human experience.

There are echoes here, too, in more recent history. Think of the Kindertransport: children sent away for safety, not knowing if they would ever return, saved from immediate danger yet marked for life by separation and loss. Sometimes salvation comes at a cost. Sometimes deliverance leaves wounds behind. Salvation can heal—and yet still scar.

And what about Egypt as a place of refuge? The political and theological ironies are striking. The infant Son of God is carried into exile in a land that had once enslaved his people, a land remembered as Israel's great enemy. The place where Pharaoh ordered the killing of Hebrew children becomes the place where a threatened child is sheltered.

Here Matthew invites us to acknowledge that God is not bound to "safe" places. God works even through compromised, foreign, and ambiguous spaces. Sometimes God saves not by removing danger altogether, but by relocating his people within it—by going with them into places they would never have chosen.

In the face of a passage like this, the question inevitably arises: *Where was God?* Why did God allow such fear and violence then—and why does God allow it still? These are not idle questions. They are the

questions people ask when innocence is shattered and power goes unchecked.

Matthew does not attempt to answer them with explanation or justification. Instead, he answers them with presence. The child at the centre of this story is Emmanuel—*God with us*. And the God we meet in Jesus is not spared the tension, fear, and brutality of a wounded world. God does not stand above the story; God enters it.

This is Matthew's claim: God does not save from a distance. God's response to suffering is not detachment, but solidarity.

There is an echo of this in today's reading from the letter to the Hebrews, which speaks of Christ sharing fully in our flesh and blood, our trials and temptations. Even as a child, Jesus knew rejection and rescue. He was, in a profound sense, a saved Saviour—a delivered Deliverer.

This is why the world, for all its brokenness, is never described in Scripture as disposable, only as fallen and beloved. God's love does not abandon it. God's love redeems. God's love lifts up. God's love carries us, as Isaiah says, *all the days of old*.

The promise held before us this morning is not that fear will never return, nor that suffering will be neatly explained, but that God will be present in the in-between times: when wonder gives way to reality, when simplicity gives way to complexity, when joy is threatened by forces that seek to steal it away. From a manger, to exile in a foreign land, to a quiet town in Galilee—there God is. And there God will be.

The Word made flesh begins life not enthroned, but carried—into the unknown.

Carried through fear and flight. Carried through darkness and uncertainty. And in being carried, God chooses to be with us on the roads we would never choose for ourselves—until even those roads are gathered into God's saving love.

Picture: Giotto (1266-1337) – Flight into Egypt, The Scrovegni Chapel, Padua