

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 5th Sunday after Trinity

4th July 2021

All Saints' Marseille

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Our readings today from the Old Testament and the Gospel can be used to form a triptych. For those of you who are unfamiliar with this word, a triptych is a set of three associated artistic, literary, or musical works intended to be appreciated together. Triptychs of three panels, typically hinged together vertically, were often used as an altarpiece. Hieronymus Bosch, Giotto and Rubens all created triptychs. The middle panel of a triptych is often the largest flanked by the two smaller related works. And this is the case with our readings this morning.

Before we start to examine the triptych, I should mention something that several of you, and especially our folk in the Luberon, have heard before. And that is when I do a talk in church it is addressed mostly to myself. Because of this I regard you as eavesdroppers who will pick and choose what appeals to you and reject what doesn't. I say that today because this message is different. It is definitely intended for me and every Christian preacher in the world but it is also a message that every Christian must also take to heart as all of us are called to live and spread the word of God.

Having mentioned only the OT and gospel readings you may be wondering where the third panel of the triptych is. I have done this by dividing our gospel reading into two parts. The theme that this gives us is 'obeying our call to spread the good news of Jesus' and as a subtext, to be aware that we will encounter those who reject the word of God. In our OT reading, God is sending Ezekiel to the people of Israel to tell them the word of God and call them to repent. And God says to Ezekiel there will be some who listen and probably the majority who won't because they are a rebellious people. As far as you are concerned Ezekiel it doesn't matter if they listen or not, it is your job to proclaim the word of God. It is important to note that God did not send Ezekiel on his own but He empowered him with the Holy Spirit. Just as we are empowered today.

The middle panel of the triptych, and rightly the largest of the three, is Jesus Himself giving us a living example of the reality of the experience of telling the good news. Here we have Jesus who, sometime into His ministry, has gone back home for a visit. Jesus is well enough thought of in his home town to be allowed to teach in the synagogue but the gathering who came to hear him got more than they were expecting. We are not told what Jesus said but from his other exchanges with the Jewish leadership recorded elsewhere in the gospels we can imagine that they would not be words of comfort. In fact, we read that they were shocked, astounded, and offended by what Jesus said but interestingly they did not challenge the veracity of what Jesus said but the source of what they were hearing and His authority to say these things. “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?” This latter remark was probably a social slur as it was more usual to say the son of the father perhaps suggesting that Jesus was illegitimate.

The response of Jesus was to say that “prophets are not valued, respected, or honoured, in their hometown, not even by their own relatives and not even in his or her own house. We then learn that Jesus could do no deed of power there. I have heard the cause of this being attributed to the lack of faith of the people. Well, I have to tell you that lack of faith was not the reason because the omnipotent power of Jesus is not limited by whether we have faith or not. This is the One of whom John said: *“Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”* Does this sound like someone who needs the faith of the crowd in order to do miracles? Jesus does not work like a rechargeable battery relying on the faith of people to charge Him up to perform miracles! The reason He could not do miracles there was because of the attitude of the people! They did not believe He had authority to do miracles. They did not believe Him so why would they bring anyone to Him for healing? Also note that Jesus had no difficulty healing the few sick people who did seek Him.

The last detail of this middle panel is the statement that Jesus was amazed at their unbelief. If you think about it Jesus was not amazed about much – how slow his disciples were to catch on, how blind the Jewish leadership was, how cruel the people were who persecuted Him; even that did not amaze the innocent one. But faith was the one thing that did amaze Jesus; either the lack of faith as here or the abundant faith of the centurion who had a sick slave.

So having heard about an OT prophet and seen the rejection of the word of God delivered by Jesus Himself, let us turn to the third panel where the spotlight falls on ourselves, the disciples of Christ. Here Jesus is sending them and us out to spread the word of God and proclaim that all should repent and turn to Him. The gospel of Jesus is that we are separated from God because of our sin but Jesus died to cover our sins so that we can have life to the full starting now and lasting through eternity.

"Repent" means to change one's mind. That means acknowledging that we have sinned, that we have turned our back on God, that we have worshiped other idols in place of God. It means to come humbly before God, understand that our sin makes us unworthy of His blessings, and genuinely hate the sin that separates us from Him. It means to turn away from that sin and put our total trust in His saving grace. This was the message God was giving His disciples then and us now to deliver to family members, friends, neighbours and strangers. It does not mean we will be perfect and never sin again but it does mean that we do our very best to honour Him in everything we do and walk as closely with Him as we can day by day.

If you are concerned about what you should say remember a statement that is attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, "Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words." As far as we know, St Francis did not say these actual words. What he said was more nuanced "It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching" but I am sure you get the message. We have to walk the talk!

Proclaiming the good news to others is an essential part of doing God's will. This brings us to the key feature for me of this third panel. And that is the essential element of **trust** for Jesus says to proclaim my word, to heal the sick, to cast out evil spirits, you don't need anything else but a staff and sandals and I would add parenthetically the Holy Spirit. Jesus says, take no bread, no money, no bag for any possessions and not even a change of clothing. Here Jesus is not prohibiting us taking frivolous items but essential items as well. Jesus says, "trust me, I will provide everything else you need". I don't know about you but these days before I leave the house, I have to check that I have my keys, wallet, phones (2), spectacles (3) cheque book, passport, pen, and man bag and that is only to go to Auchan. I suspect that all of these things that I carry are not only an added burden for me but actually get in the way of answering God's call to proclaim his word.

And the real point here is that it is not the physical items that we should be bothered being equipped with to fulfil God's call to proclaim his word but the spiritual requirements of trust and faith. For sure there will be opportunity a plenty.

I would like to finish on an encouraging note for it is not until another seventeen verses into this chapter that after the apostles had returned to Jesus, they "gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught". That is such a beautiful picture but I wonder how each of us will feel, what we will have to show and what we will have to say when we gather around Jesus and tell Him all we have done and taught.

Amen.