

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 **Ω Ω Ν**, "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 Sadducees 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, imagine 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 as 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.