

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Sermon – 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**4<sup>th</sup> August 2024**

**All Saints' Marseille**

*The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain*

“Sir, give us this bread always.”

What comes to mind when you hear the word ‘bread’? Images of warmth and comfort, the scent of freshly baked loaves, memories of simple pleasures—crusty exteriors with soft, airy insides, slathered with butter or dipped in hearty soups.

Living in France, so much of our life is about bread. It is a symbol of the country, so deeply ingrained in its tradition that visiting a boulangerie and queuing with the locals to buy a baguette is a quintessential cultural experience for many visitors. However, even outside France, bread has been a staple food for tens of thousands of years across various cultures, representing both nourishment and the shared human experience of breaking bread together.

So much of our life is about food. We become what we eat, and eating can be a joyful experience, filled with thanksgiving and celebration. As we partake of the great banquet offered by Earth, we savour the delights of this bounty. When we enjoy a particular food, we often desire more and more of it: “give us this food always”.

So much of the human history, and even in the 21st century, is about scarcity of bread and hunger. Recent news highlight how local and global conflicts, along with climate change, exacerbate food insecurity. Despite technological advancements, the basic human need for sustenance remains precarious for many. Currently, more than 30 million people in 22 countries and territories are suffering from severe food crisis and are on the brink of famine.

Who am I to be condescending when I read today's passages of Scripture? Who am I to sneer when the Israelites complain in the wilderness, burdened by hunger, anxiety, dislocation, and the uncertainty of unfamiliar territory, without a clear plan for the future? Who am I to view with disdain the crowd Jesus fed with two fish and five loaves, desiring more after, perhaps for the first time in their lives, having their fill of bread? I never went to bed hungry and with the prospect of another day with little or no food. I have never been haunted by a primal fear of starving. I always eat my fill, and I can choose my bread from my favourite bakery. Instead of judging others for their ingratitude or dissatisfaction and reminding them that "one does not live by bread alone"<sup>1</sup>, I should look in the mirror these stories hold up to me and ask myself how often I reflect the same dispositions. How often I get 'my fill', yet still remain unsatisfied?

"Encumbered forever by desire and ambition, // There's a hunger still unsatisfied," sang Pink Floyd 30 years ago<sup>2</sup>. What are the hungers we seek to satisfy, that may be momentarily appeased yet never truly fulfilled? Each of us has our own unique list: it could be a hunger for meaning and purpose, a yearning for connection, a desire to be genuinely understood, a longing for joy,

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 8.3; Matthew 4.4

<sup>2</sup> Pink Floyd, *High Hopes*, 1994

or an enduring need for wholeness and healing. And, in times like ours, a deep hunger for lasting hope.

The 17<sup>th</sup>-century French mathematician and physicist Blaise Pascal compared our insatiable desire to an abyss that must be filled: “Human beings try in vain to fill it with everything around them, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words, by God himself.”<sup>3</sup>

Jesus fed the hungry without reservation or pre-conditions. He who was born in Bethlehem, the name of which means ‘the house of bread’, understood that people need to be nourished. There was nothing wrong nor unspiritual about their physical hunger. Yet Jesus went beyond merely addressing these immediate needs. He invited the crowds to explore the deeper, unspoken hungers that drove them to him — hungers that only the “bread of heaven” could truly satisfy.

He promised that he himself would fulfil these deeper needs. Jesus did not wish to be merely a provider of physical bread. By calling himself “the bread of life,” Jesus identified with the essence of sustenance, with the food that would come to symbolise hope and resistance for the poor and the marginalised for centuries to come. To speak of God as bread is to acknowledge God’s most fundamental provision for us.

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<sup>3</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Les Pensées*

Jesus is this bread, and he desires to fill the deep hunger of our hearts, the aching emptiness we try to fill with lesser things. He is the bread to be consumed, to be fed upon.

It is one thing to identify our hungers, but quite another to trust that Jesus will truly satisfy them. We excel at finding substitutes for communion with God: constant busyness, social media, entertainment, the ceaseless news cycle, and even 'good works' we mistakenly believe to be 'the work of God' ... Do we genuinely trust that Jesus is our bread, our essential sustenance? More often than not, the answer is no, we don't. Jesus frequently remains an abstraction for us, a creed, a set of sayings and parables we like to quote but don't internalise. In an age marked by heightened individualism and an emphasis on self-sufficiency, we fail to recognize our daily, hourly reliance on his generosity. We do not expect to be nourished by him.

The crux of Jesus' invitation lies in whether we will transcend self-sufficiency and embrace a radical, all-encompassing dependence on a God we can taste but never control.

If we dare to acknowledge our hungers and accept Christ's call to deeper trust in God, where should we go from here? We should journey into openness and deep vulnerability, into a willingness to truly 'consume' Jesus Christ — to incorporate him into our lives daily, through practices that resonate with us: contemplation, prayer, reading, singing ... Jesus Christ desires to be more in than an inspiring example, a teacher or a source of wisdom; he wants to be our sustenance. Are we truly hungry for him? Will we allow his substance to become

a part of us? After all, we become what we eat. The bread of heaven awaits our tasting. "Sir, give us this bread always."

May we share this bread generously. May we desire it above all else. May its nourishment infuse us completely, transforming us into life-giving nourishment for the world, just as Christ is.

Feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.

Amen.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Sermon – 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**11<sup>th</sup> August 2024**

**Eglise du Sacré-Cœur, Oppède**

*The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain*

Our Gospel readings this summer began with the feeding of the five thousand and, in the weeks that have followed, we have been reading St John's extended meditation on Jesus's words 'I am the bread of life'.

The crowd who were following Jesus around the shores of Lake Galilee had experienced a satisfying of their physical hunger and were wanting more. Jesus challenged his hearers to look beyond their immediate needs, to develop an attitude of mind and heart that would help them deal with whatever life brings. 'Do not work for the food that perishes', he said, 'but for the food which endures for eternal life.'

But they challenge him back, and in today's passage they are doing so more stridently, particularly that group whom the Gospel writer refers to as 'the Jews'. (It must, always, be emphasised that this does not mean Jewish people generally, but a particular group of religious leaders in Jesus's time who were questioning his authority.) Still focussed on the question of food, his hearers compare their present experience with that of their ancestors receiving manna from heaven as they wandered in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses – 'What are *you* going to do?', they ask. 'Show us a sign and we will believe you.'

Jesus says to them: 'It was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven'. The past tense becomes present as Jesus's true significance is revealed. Then he says the words: 'I am the bread of life.'

It is the first of seven sayings in the Fourth Gospel that begin with the words 'I am'. 'I AM' in the Old Testament was the name given to God himself. St John is saying: this is it, the end of all our desiring. The mysterious presence of God, which is all we need. Christ the bread of life is the ultimate provision for us in life and in death. God in Christ is the comfort we need to walk faithfully through our earthly lives, and also the gift that promises eternal life with God.

Jesus teaches his hearers that the feeding of five thousand – like the manna - was temporary, but that what he is offering is permanent. 'What are *you* going to do?' they ask. The enormity of the answer comes at the end of our Gospel reading: 'the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.' There are two references in those words, both central to our faith.

One is a reference to the crucifixion, the self-giving, self-sacrificing love that lies at the heart of the mystery of what Christ did. The mystery of a God emptied of power, dying as a criminal on an instrument of torture, a place of shame. Christ's words assure us we are dealing with a God who has known the worst that humanity can suffer and is with us in it, never leaving us alone.

The other reference is to the gift Christ gave us on the night he was betrayed - the institution of the Eucharist, when he took the simple elements of bread and wine, blessed them, broke them and poured them, and shared them with his

friends. He told them they were his body and blood. And he asked them to do this in remembrance of him.

What does Eucharist mean? Literally, it means thanksgiving. But when we gather here each month to share bread and wine in keeping with Christ's request, we also enter into a place, a communal action, where time meets eternity. We are reminded that the Eucharist, while based on the account of the Last Supper, is a forward-looking feast. It proclaims a new future in the present, which Jesus called the Kingdom of heaven. A future we are invited to help build. A future where all will be welcome, everyone will have enough to eat and drink, and justice and mercy will be the values we learn to live by.

'I am the bread of life.' One way to understand those words is to look at the four actions you will shortly see me perform, as bread is taken, blessed, broken and shared. They offer us a pattern for living. For they speak of what it means to love. In order to love we must first learn what it is to *be* loved – to be taken and to be blessed. We must also learn what it means to become vulnerable – to allow ourselves to be broken. It is only then that our lives can be truly shared with others.

Taken. Making ourselves available to God, opening ourselves to the movement of the Spirit. What Nicodemus, with his literal mind, felt unable to do.

Blessed. When, in the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus listed the qualities he said would make people blessed, they were not the sort of things you and I might think of. Being poor in spirit, being those who mourn, being those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and being persecuted for it. They



are about being caught up in the reckless, abundant love that God pours out on the world. Discovering that it is where we are poorest in spirit that blessing comes. In our Old Testament reading today, it is when Elijah is at the end of his resources that he encounters the gentle, inviting, restoring presence of God. Not when he feels strong. (Our reading comes after his confrontation with the prophets of Baal, which has provoked the wrath of Queen Jezebel who is intent on having him killed. Elijah is in the wilderness, at the end of his strength, asking for death to escape the hardship of another day.)

Broken. There are many kinds of brokenness, and the wounds we carry inside us are not always visible. However sorted we might seem, as individuals or as a community, we need to know how to be broken-hearted, or the broken-hearted people won't know that they belong here too. The Eucharist is a broken-hearted meal, instituted in the hours before Jesus was betrayed, arrested, tortured and executed. Our own capacities for jealousy, betrayal and violence are exposed in the story of Jesus's last days. We are confronted by them every time we meet him here. But they too are redeemed in the gentle, inviting, restoring presence of God.

Shared. For all the emphasis nowadays on self-fulfilment, we are not made to be self-sufficient. As one writer has put it, 'our vocation is to become fully the person we are, so that we can give ourselves away'.<sup>1</sup> It's about love. Being open-hearted in everything we do.

As Anglicans, we believe in the priesthood of all believers. We are all taken, blessed, broken and shared, not in some abstract religious world but in grown

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<sup>1</sup> *Reading the Bible with your Feet*, Lucy Winkett (2021).

up, grounded human living, shot through with a sense of the divine. What was so magnetic about Jesus of Nazareth, what drew people to him wherever he went, was that they found life - life in all its fullness, in a way they had never experienced before. And it is still true today.

Jesus said: 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.' Thanks be to God.

Amen.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Sermon – 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**11<sup>th</sup> August 2024**

**All Saints' Marseille**

*The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain*

When setting off for a full day hiking or a trekking adventure, it is wise to consider how your body will be sustained. Food on the go should not be taken lightly. There is a science to fuelling long walks, and an entire industry has evolved around it. A glance through the trekking section of a sports store reveals a myriad of options, from energy bars to dehydrated gourmet meals, each designed to keep adventurers well-nourished and confident in their ability to complete the journey. Yet, despite this impressive selection, I find myself returning to the simplest provisions: I always pack enough bread in my backpack, because it is both a quick and an enduring source of energy for the body - science tells us it prevents hypoglycaemia, delays fatigue and reduces the formation of stress hormones. Aren't these wonderful achievements for such a modest food?

However, I am acutely aware of my privilege: I can choose when and where to exert myself, and for me, this is a leisure pursuit. What a stark contrast to those forced to flee under dire circumstances, often with no time to plan their journey and facing extreme scarcity, relying solely on what they can carry or find along the way.

In today's Old Testament reading, the prophet Elijah embarks on a gruelling journey fraught with danger and dread, following a dramatic confrontation with the prophets of Baal, that has provoked the wrath of Queen Jezebel, who is intent on having him killed. We find Elijah in the wilderness, at the end of his strength, asking for death to escape the relentless hardship of another day. Whereas the First Book of Kings previously portrayed Elijah as a bold and victorious prophet, it is striking to see him now frightened, exhausted and dispirited.

One might expect a divine rebuke for Elijah, yet what follows is one of the most tender passages in the Scriptures. Elijah is awakened by the touch of an angel, God's messenger, who brings him freshly baked bread and insists: "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." God doesn't trivialise Elijah's exhaustion and discouragement or offer an easy way out. The journey must be undertaken, and it cannot be avoided. The bread, prepared intentionally for Elijah, enables the prophet to go "in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights". It is not merely bread for the journey, but also bread for hope, bread for the long haul that is life. This bread is pure gift.

This naturally brings to mind other biblical figures, such as Hagar and her son Ishmael, Moses and the Hebrew people, David, Ezekiel, John the Baptist – all who wandered through their own wilderness, whether literal or metaphorical. In these liminal spaces and times of desperation, they encountered God, who provided for them with faithfulness. Through their journeys, they discovered that the wilderness could lead to fulfilment and freedom, and that it is a path that can be traversed. For God does not forsake those who walk in the wilderness; he offers protection, refreshment, and sustenance. He guides and supports the journey towards its destination. This reminds us that God remains close and in

solidarity with humanity, never abandoning us but continually seeking, accompanying, and providing for us.

Today, as well as in previous Sundays, we have heard Jesus offer, generously and graciously, “the bread that came down from heaven”, “the bread of life”. Jesus likens himself to the manna, that sustained the Hebrew people during their arduous journey through the wilderness, much as the bread baked by the angel sustained Elijah in his trials. Jesus provides nourishment for an even longer journey - the journey to eternal life. This new existence unites us with all of God’s people, in the joy of fully knowing and loving God and one another.

At its heart, the Church is a community of people embarking on a long journey: “Live in love,” Paul instructs the Ephesians, or, as the original text of the epistle puts it, “Walk in love.” We are called to journey in love. Paul further exhorts us to be “imitators of God.” Yet, how do we truly embrace such a calling?

Paul has already described the boundless dimensions of God's love for us — its breadth, length, height and depth that surpass human understanding.<sup>1</sup> Now he calls us to love one another with that same love we have received from God himself.

“Blessed is the person who can love all people equally, always thinking good of everyone,” exclaimed Maximus the Confessor, the 7<sup>th</sup> century Church father. This, perhaps, is the essence of imitating God. While Paul and Maximus make it sound simple, almost effortless for me the reality of such a journey feels daunting without proper nourishment and support. I admire the American poet Wendell

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<sup>1</sup> *Ephesians 3.17-19*

Berry for his candid acknowledgement of the limited resources he himself possesses when it comes to embarking on this journey in love:

*I know that I have life  
only insofar as I have love.  
I have no love  
except it come from Thee.  
Help me, please, to carry  
this candle against the wind.<sup>2</sup>*

There is more than a gentle breeze around us that might snuff out the flickering candle of love and hope we try to bear into the world – there are howling gales out there that threaten its fragile flame. How, then, can we sustain and protect this delicate light?

The Church requires nourishment and support to embark on its long journey in love. Yet we must relinquish any illusion that we can summon the necessary drive and resources from within ourselves, or that we can complete this journey through our own means. Instead, we need to carry the bread of life with us, the bread that is pure gift.

This is the bread Jesus Christ offers - the love of the invisible God made tangible and accessible to our human experience. When we embrace that love and partake of this bread, our deepest hunger is satisfied. The God-shaped void, as you might remember Blaise Pascal describes it, is filled, and this love begins to overflow to others – manifested as a recognition of our neighbours' dignity and

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<sup>2</sup> Berry, *I know that I have life*, 2012

rights, as acts of forgiveness, generosity, and hospitality, and as peace both offered and received.

The journey ahead is long and arduous, the rocky path can easily lead us to exhaustion and discouragement, or even to indifference. We cannot manage on our own. Christ wishes to be our bread for the journey, even to the point of placing himself into our hands. This bread is pure gift. Everyone is welcome to feed on this bread, everyone can be nourished, and everyone can be blessed.

Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Sermon – 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**18<sup>th</sup> August 2024**

**All Saints' Marseille**

*The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain*

In our Gospel readings this summer, we have been hearing St John's extended meditation on Jesus's words 'I am the bread of life'. Today our extract is paired with a reading from the Book of Proverbs on the subject of wisdom, in a passage sometimes referred to as 'Wisdom's Feast'.

The Wisdom tradition in the Bible is found in the Books of Proverbs, the Book of Job, the Song of Songs and the apocryphal Books of Ecclesiasticus and Wisdom. The Wisdom literature is sometimes devalued by narrower forms of the Protestant tradition, partly because it does not focus on the more dominant biblical theme of salvation history, and partly because it sometimes sounds like the works of ancient pagan writers. But this stored treasure of human insight has a lot to teach us.

There are, broadly, two aspects to wisdom in the biblical tradition. In the Book of Wisdom itself (otherwise known as the Wisdom of Solomon), written around the time of Jesus's lifetime, wisdom is understood, first, as being a gift from God to the righteous. It's the thing that helps us understand God's will for us, how we should live well in the world. When the young King Solomon succeeded to his father David, inheriting a kingdom full of internal conflict, the thing he asked



of God above all else – be it wealth, health, happiness or long life - was wisdom. And, we are told, his request delighted God.

The second aspect of wisdom in the biblical tradition is that it was understood to have been with God from all eternity. There's an echo of this in the Prologue to St John's Gospel: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.' We see how the Gospel writer uses the language of the Wisdom tradition when referring to Christ, the Word made flesh.

Paul's recipe for wisdom in our Epistle today is fairly challenging. Writing to the church at Ephesus, he urges them to avoid the foolishness of comfortable and fashionable immorality. They are to understand God's will, seeing where it conflicts with easier options.

Solomon's prayer for God's wisdom was a prayer for God's own life to live within him, affecting his thinking and the decisions he took. Our feeding on Jesus, both in the Eucharist and in other ways, is our prayer for God's own life, made flesh in Christ, to live within us, influencing our thinking and our decisions.

The following words in our reading today from the Book of Proverbs might almost have been written by St John himself: 'Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight.' It is the language of poetry, describing an inner, spiritual reality. It's the same sort of language register as that which is used by Jesus in our Gospel reading: 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'

But some of Jesus's hearers are not hearing in that register. They take him literally, and it gives rise to bewilderment: 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' (Incidentally, it must always be emphasised that when St John refers to 'the Jews' he does not mean Jewish people generally, but a particular group of religious leaders in Jesus's time who were questioning his authority.) It's the same bewilderment we saw in Nicodemus, when Jesus spoke to him of being born into the life of the Spirit: 'How can anyone be born after having grown old?'

In referring to his flesh, Jesus seems deliberately to be using language that will shock his literalist hearers. By choosing the word 'flesh' (in Greek, *sarx*) instead of 'body' (*soma*), and a verb better translated as 'gnaw' instead of 'eat', he creates meat-eating images that are hard to domesticate. If he had rested with the feeding of the five thousand, he could have been the new Moses, the bringer of bread. Instead, by choosing this imagery, he claims to be the bread. He then refers to drinking his blood, which was expressly forbidden under the food laws of his tradition -shocking them again. It's as if Jesus is encouraging them to see that what he is describing will not fit into his hearers' previous categories: it is time for them to rethink what they thought they knew about God. Even his own followers balk at this, many of whom abandon him at this point in his ministry.

All this is a reminder that we must beware of biblical literalism in our own day. In St John's Gospel, few things are simply what they seem. Water is not just water, but living water that springs up to eternal life. Bread is not just bread, but the bread of God that gives life to the world. And Jesus promises to those who eat his flesh and drink his blood two things: mutual abiding and eternal life. Life in all its fullness with him, now and always.

In using the language of flesh and blood, Jesus refers to two things which are central to our faith.

One is a reference to the crucifixion, the self-giving, self-sacrificing love that lies at the heart of the mystery of what Christ did. The mystery of a God emptied of power, dying as a criminal on an instrument of torture, a place of shame. Christ's words assure us we are dealing with a God who has known the worst that humanity can suffer and is with us in it, never leaving us alone.

The other reference is to the gift Christ gave us on the night he was betrayed - the institution of the Eucharist, when he took bread and wine, blessed them, broke them and poured them, and shared them with his friends. He told them they were his body and blood. And he asked them – us - to do this in remembrance of him. To fill our hearts, minds and souls with him, so that he becomes part of us, as we become part of him.

At his table, week by week, we renew our relationship with the life of God. Here we find the reality of Jesus, the humanity in which God's life was most fully lived, offered as food for our humanity. And here we find eternal life – life lived now in the dimension of the eternal, and also an anticipation of the life of heaven. Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, puts it like this: 'This is where life begins again and again, God's life, eternal life, the life of reconciliation, of generosity, of selfless identification with those in need'.<sup>1</sup> As we leave his table, it is that life which we carry in us, ready to share with all the world.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Rowan Williams, *Eternal Life*, in *The Bright Field* (2014), p 152.



## ***All Saints' Marseille***

***25<sup>th</sup> August 2024***

***13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity - Bartholomew the Apostle  
Holy Communion***

### **Reflection**

We don't know much about St Bartholomew, whose feast day was yesterday. In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, he is included in the list of the twelve apostles chosen by Jesus. Bartholomew is often identified with Nathanael in the Gospel of John, because in the lists of the apostles in the other three Gospels he is named after Philip, and in John's Gospel it is Philip who goes and tells Nathanael about Jesus. 'Bartholomew' was probably a surname – in Aramaic, 'bar' meaning 'son of' 'talmai' (son of the furrows). So, the thinking goes, his full name may have been Nathanael Bar-talmai.

If Bartholomew and Nathanael are one and the same, then we do have a small glimpse of his personality, for in John's Gospel Nathanael is given one of the most memorable put-downs in history. When his friend Philip tells him that they have found the one of whom Moses and the prophets had written, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth, Nathanael replies: 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Nathanael was from Cana, the scene of the wedding at which Jesus turned water into wine. Cana was smarter than Nazareth, albeit only six kilometres away.

'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' is an example of how prejudice works within us. We are quick to judge others on the first facts we learn about them. Some primal instinct in us is trying to work out if they are friend or foe. Philip replies to Nathanael: 'Come and see'. And so Nathanael encounters Jesus, and is astonished. For the thing which was both most disturbing and most healing for those who encountered Jesus was that he saw into their heart. Not only who they were but who

they might become. Jesus says to Nathanael: 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' (I wonder if the tone of that comment was in fact: 'Here's one who calls a spade a spade!' - as though Jesus had overheard Nathanael's conversation with Philip about Nazareth.) 'Where did you come to know me?', asks the surprised Nathanael. 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you', replies Jesus. Like many figures in John's Gospel, this new disciple seems to have been hovering on the edge of events, but is then brought into the centre by Jesus, at which point the initially sceptical Nathanael affirms who he has understood him to be: 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God!'

This affirmation by Nathanael reminds us of Thomas, at the end of John's Gospel, saying 'Unless I see the mark of the nails ... I will not believe'. And then, when he does see them, exclaiming in wonder: 'My Lord and my God!' Nathanael and Thomas are, in their affirmations, a bit like bookends to the Fourth Gospel.

Bartholomew would have been at the Last Supper, with the other eleven apostles. Our Gospel reading today is from Luke's account of the that event. Jesus, having already predicted his suffering and death, institutes the Eucharist and then tells them that one of them will betray him. The response of the disciples is to start arguing among themselves about who was to be regarded as the greatest. Jesus stops them, insisting that the greatest should become as the least important. As they eat supper together, Jesus asks them: 'For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table?' The obvious answer is 'yes'. Yet, Jesus points out, 'But I am among you as one who serves'. He turns their expectations upside down, then and now.

John, who never mentions Bartholomew by name, also doesn't describe Jesus giving them bread and wine at the Last Supper. But he does describe an equally humbling scene: Jesus, the master, performs the most menial of a slave's duties, washing the feet of his disciples.

Before they leave the supper, Jesus will say to them, 'For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me: "And he was counted among the lawless"; and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled.' Jesus quotes words from Isaiah chapter 53 that speak about the suffering Servant and he applies them to himself. He identifies himself as the one who is going to be 'pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities', the one who will serve us by suffering and dying for us.

And, in doing so, he provides the model for his followers' lives. He provided it for Bartholomew and the apostles, and they lived it out. After Pentecost they dedicated

their lives to serving others by sharing the Gospel, feeding the early Church with Christ's Word and caring for those within it.

In Bartholomew's case, tradition has it that he went to India to preach the Gospel, and later to Armenia with his fellow apostle Thaddeus. There he is said to have converted the local king, Polymius, to Christianity and, as a result, been flayed (or skinned) alive on the orders of the king's brother, who was fearful of a Roman backlash. In painting and sculpture, St Bartholomew is often represented as holding a knife, sometimes with his own skin carried on his arm. In death, and through art, this unknown apostle becomes shockingly visible, Bartholomew the martyr asking for our attention. Bartholomew has also always been associated with healing, so a number of hospitals are called after him.

Sometimes we feel pared back, stripped of all that makes us human. Today countless people are living with that experience, in this city and across the world. Yet this was the very moment at which Bartholomew found the courage to bear witness, stand up and say that, despite everything, he was a Christian.

To be a martyr is to be a witness. It is, literally, what the word means. And to be a martyr is to be a witness to the future. That was the effect of the death of Bartholomew, whoever he may have been. And that is the witness of our faith, our hope and our love, which can stand in the face of evil and suffering and say they do not, and will not, have the last word. For we preach a Gospel that ends not in crucifixion, but in resurrection. And that is good news for all.

Amen.

*The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain*