

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 2nd Sunday after Trinity

9th June 2024

All Saints' Marseille

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Since last Sunday, we have entered the Church's Ordinary Time, which lasts until Advent. What does 'ordinary' mean in this context? Business as usual? Some prefer to call this 6-month period the 'season of living into the mission of the Church'. Indeed, you will find this 'season' punctuated by themes that highlight the mission and work of the Church. It should be for us a time to grow and live the life of Christ.

However, Ordinary Time begins this year with Jesus in conflict. Last Sunday, we heard how the Pharisees began conspiring with the Herodians to destroy Jesus. Today, we hear about conflict with scribes and authorities. In a few alarming lines, we even hear about a possible conflict between Jesus and his own family. And we have only read from the first chapters in Mark's Gospel! It's a troubling and challenging passage. If you expect it to make your life decisions less painful and costly, to affirm your spiritual comfort zones, you will not find what you look for here.

In these times of polarization, fear of the other, of identities questioned and defended, when conflicts of any size and shape have become 'ordinary', we long to know there is still a place where we can always find refuge, a place we could call home. As poet Robert Frost said, 'home [is] the place where when you have to go, there they have to take you in'¹. It is the place where you are known and loved, where your identity has been shaped, and where you are reminded of who you really are.

Jesus is back home, in Nazareth, after inaugurating his ministry. His reputation has preceded him. Much has happened since the son of Joseph the carpenter left home. He has driven out unclean spirits, healed the sick, eaten with sinners,

¹ *The Death of the Hired Man*

chosen twelve disciples, declared himself to be Lord of the Sabbath. The hope and yearning in people's hearts that he has stirred up is so formidable that they can't leave him alone. Yet, many find this as difficult to understand, as we do today. They try to rationalise Jesus, asserting that he is not a divinely empowered healer, but mentally deranged, or even possessed by an evil spirit, "the ruler of the demons."

This situation is more than enough to alarm his family who come to retrieve him and take him home, get him away from the public eye, to shield him. Undoubtedly, Jesus' family are moved by good intentions: they wish to protect him and are concerned that he has overstepped and may be harmed. Perhaps they are more aware of where his ministry may lead than he is.

I find Jesus's behaviour in this passage disconcerting. Does Jesus truly dismiss his familial bounds? He seems stern and austere. Instead of offering reassurance to his mother and siblings, he renounces their claims on his life, and 'replaces' them with a new family of his own choosing: 'Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.'

I believe this is a moment when Jesus faces some questions: 'Who am I? What am I? Who are my people? To whom do I belong? Where should my loyalties lie?' This is the juncture when he redefines his identity. Redefining one's identity is a provocative act, and it almost always comes at a cost. This was likely a moment when Jesus said to himself, in the words of Thomas à Kempis, 'Do not care much who is with you and who is against you; but make it your greatest care that God is with you in everything you do.'²

Jesus pays a price higher than we can even fathom. Can you imagine the scene? Outside the house stand the so-called insiders - the family and also the religious authorities convinced of their understanding of God's will, rigid in their beliefs about how God's Spirit should manifest, and Jesus does not conform to their expectations. Inside the house are the outsiders - the outcasts, the tax collectors, the prostitutes. They are not concerned with dogma; they seek acceptance, forgiveness, and love. They yearn deeply for a sense of belonging. And in their midst is Jesus, declaring, "This is my family."

² *The Imitation of Christ*

I tremble at the thought of Mary standing and waiting outside that house. At the same time, I imagine what it must have felt like to be within that house with Jesus that day, to be acknowledged by him as kin.

If this doesn't touch us, then we are not truly attentive. Jesus isn't advocating for superficial change here. He delves into the depths, challenging what is entrenched, institutionalised and systemic. Outside becomes inside, and inside becomes outside. This undeniably widens the margins and confronts those who complacently assume their connection with God. As we listen to this passage today, it prompts us to peer beyond our boundaries, sectarian divisions, our socio-economic standing, and even our beliefs, so that we recognise our kin. God summons us to expand our familial bonds in a manner as startling as it was to the initial audience of the Gospel of Mark.

Here is the Gospel truth: Jesus is not deranged; Jesus is not possessed by malevolent spirits. Instead, Jesus possesses the wisdom of God; Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit - and extends an invitation to all of us to share in that same wisdom and Spirit within the new family of those who do the will of God. This is still challenging for us as a church today. A church where divisions and discord loom threateningly, endangering the unity of the family. We cannot listen to this passively: being a family demands engagement.

Be prepared: when God speaks and acts in the world, as he did in Jesus, both the message and the messenger defy conventional human standards. God's ways will invariably challenge, disrupt, defy human expectations. To human common sense, God's methods are unconventional, even 'crazy'. If we, either individually or as church family, align ourselves with God's will, we may be perceived as 'crazy' by worldly standards. In one of his most popular sermons, Michael Curry, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, passionately exhorts to such necessary 'craziness', as he calls it: 'We need', he says, 'some Christians who are as crazy as the Lord. Crazy enough to love like Jesus, to give like Jesus, to forgive like Jesus, to do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with God - like Jesus. Crazy enough to follow the radical way of the gospel. Crazy enough to believe that the love of God is greater than all the powers of evil and death. Crazy enough to dare to change the world from the nightmare it often is into something close to the dream that God dreams for it. And for those who would

follow him, those who would be his disciples, [...] it might come as a shock, but they are called to craziness.”³

Dare to be ‘crazy’! Dare to do God’s will!

Amen.

³ *Crazy Christians*