

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

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

**Sermon – 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**1<sup>st</sup> September 2024**

**All Saints' Marseille**

*Jane Quarmby, Licensed Lay Minister*

Do you have any traditions in your family? Lots of us do, especially around Christmas – in the Quarmby family, pork pie for breakfast is a favourite. A lot of traditions are based around food in celebration. We have Christmas cake, Christmas pudding, mince pies, then there's pancakes and chocolate at Easter, Harvest suppers in Autumn. Some traditions go back centuries, others are relatively new, like singing Christmas carols and decorating our houses with fir trees.

If we leave our native country we tend to take our traditions with us - although I have yet to get to grips with a Christmas tree and a barbecue lunch on the beach on Christmas Day in New Zealand with the sun blazing and everyone in shorts. In Leicester, the large Indian community have a big celebration for Diwali, the festival of light, when the streets are lit up. In several cities the Caribbean communities hold their exuberant and colourful carnivals. Closer to home here in France, the expat community in the Dordogne now host Open Gardens, just as in England.

Somehow when you are far from home, holding onto your much loved traditions becomes more important. It's a way of keeping your identity, holding on to something well known and comfortable.

It becomes even more important when your country has been invaded and is under foreign rule and foreign laws.

That was the background to today's Gospel. Occupied by Roman troops, governed by people who worshipped foreign gods and idols, it became vital for the Jews to hang on to their way of life, to differentiate themselves from the occupiers of their country who ruled so cruelly. They had a strict set of laws or regulations which should be followed by devout Jews to distinguish themselves from foreigners. Washing your hands in this context comes

to have a double meaning – it’s always a good idea to wash your hands when handling food to stop infection and disease – but the Pharisees were insisting on a ritualistic washing of hands and were thrilled to finally catch out Jesus and his followers for not following the prescribed law.

But Jesus makes the point that manmade laws and tradition can blind you to God’s presence and word. So often people get caught up in tradition, in that whole bunch of thistles called “But we’ve always done it like that”. There are many and varied examples in our churches, ranging from not decorating with red and white flowers which dates back to the First World War when it reminded people all too clearly of blood and bandages, to the ringing of a bell before the service starts. It’s not to give an angel its wings as some would say, but goes back to when churches had no seats for the ordinary folk who, standing around, talked amongst themselves and had no intention of stopping until the bell was heard above the cacophony. Woe betide the newcomer who sits in someone else’s pew or, *quelle horreur*, the new church warden who suggests taking out the pews altogether to make room for social activities or toilet facilities. Or the vicar who suggests changing the time of the morning service.

It's as well to remind ourselves regularly that God probably isn't at all interested in the pews, the flowers, the timing of services, whether or not you have enough mince pies for Christmas or any of the other trivia that we get caught up in.

Tradition and manmade laws are just that – manmade. This is the point that Jesus was making – the laws about washing your hands and what you should and shouldn't eat are human laws. It's not what you put into your body that counts, because your body is supremely well designed to process it and expel it. It's what is in your heart, mind and behaviour that is important. Food isn't evil – but our thoughts and actions can be. To God, what is vital is that humans obey his laws, and Jesus came to re-enforce those laws. Love is the most important of all – love one another. It's not just 2000 years ago in a different world from ours that harm can come from manmade laws and traditions as they seep into the culture of a place. I read an interesting recent take on this from a young American pastor – see if it resonates anywhere with you:

“My 34 years as a white, upper-middle-class, average intelligence heterosexual Christian American male who has followed the rules, stayed out of trouble, and minded my own business, has resulted thus far in a good job, an incredible wife, and healthy children all under the roof of a large home in a safe, white, middle-class neighbourhood. And I earned it. I followed the rules, stayed out of trouble, and minded my own business. I played the game and so I get to enjoy my winnings.”

There's a but: "I hate hearing Jesus say that the whole time I've been so focused on following the rules and pursuing success, he's been doing amazing things for, with, and among people I'd worked hard to ignore or put down: people who were born with a different skin colour or a different gender attraction; people born into a different income bracket or a rougher neighbourhood; people born with bodies more susceptible to diseases of the flesh or the mind....."

On reflection now he says:

"I see the tears of countless youth contemplating suicide because they feel the weight of not fitting in at school.

I see the tears of mothers whose black children were killed either by police officers who were taught to assume they were dangerous, or from other youth who, for a myriad of reasons, knew they would never be accepted by society, so they play the game offered by gangs and drugs.

I see the tears of struggle from immigrant families who came to America by circumventing the legal process because they believed their families' livelihoods were worth the risk; only to find out that the people who had the fortune of being born here see them and treat them as drug dealers and pariahs of society.

I see the tears of Jesus as he was dying on the cross on the hill overlooking Jerusalem – the place where the rules were made and enforced; the same rules that condemned him and the people he had come to save. I see the tears he cried as he tried to show all of us rule-followers a more noble, beautiful, and just way to live."

Jesus was severely critical of those who bound others in rules of their making – he came to cut through them all and give us a simpler framework to follow. His main rule for us was to love one another, and he gave us only two rituals to follow – those of baptism and of the eucharist, of sharing bread and wine in his name. How hard should that be? Perhaps it's time we followed his laws, not our own. Time to focus on Jesus Christ, and his ways, not ours.

Amen.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

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

**Sermon – 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**5<sup>th</sup> September 2021**

**All Saints' Marseille**

*The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain*

Our reading from Mark's Gospel this morning picks up the story from where we left it last Sunday, immediately after Jesus was being criticised by a group of scribes and Pharisees. They were asking why his disciples were breaking the purity code by not washing their hands before eating. Jesus, in reply, challenged their cold-hearted focus on ritual purity and exclusivism, showing them how it resulted in the failure to uphold the spirit of God's law.

This next scene takes Jesus to the region of Tyre, predominantly Gentile territory. There he encounters the Syrophenician woman. The story is a notoriously difficult one. On the face of it, Jesus appears to reject a mother appealing to him in distress to heal her child. And he does so with apparently humiliating language, referring to her and her people as 'dogs'. What is going on?

Much ink has been expended in trying to explain the content of this story. Luke, writing for a Gentile readership, leaves it out of his Gospel altogether. Matthew includes the story, though with slight differences from Mark's version. In Mark's

account, the word Jesus uses for 'dogs' is the same word for 'puppies'. Is this, then, playful banter, with Jesus always intending to heal the woman's daughter, not needing to be persuaded but just reminding her gently that it was not supposed to be within his terms of reference? Perhaps.

Everything we know about Jesus suggests he would have been moved by the Syrophenician woman's request. But perhaps he is still recovering from the scribes' and Pharisees' criticism that he is being unfaithful to the traditions of his elders. He is deeply aware of his calling as Messiah, the anointed one, sent to save and heal those whom God has chosen. In Matthew's version, Jesus at first ignores the woman's request, almost as if he is struggling within himself how to respond. Then, almost as if speaking his thoughts aloud, Jesus says to the woman: 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' That is when she comes right up to him, kneels in front of him and begs for help.

Once again, Jesus is confronted by a choice, the Pharisees' criticism still ringing in his ears. Simply by talking to this woman, he will again be considered 'unclean' by the religious leaders who criticise him, resulting in further confrontation and - ultimately - danger. Perhaps he is thinking about those critics' voices when he says to her: 'it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs'. But the woman's wit gets the better of him. Suddenly the tension is released and, with it, Jesus's compassion for her, irrespective of her status and the distinctions he was so often challenged for not respecting. We hear his surprise and delight, after the argument with the Pharisees about who was and who was not to be considered acceptable: 'For saying that, you may go - the demon has left your daughter.' Once more, Jesus may have made himself 'unclean' in the eyes of his critics, but his words and actions are of love and of

healing, reflecting God's gracious acceptance of all people, whatever barriers humans put up to exclude individuals and categories.

It is often suggested that this encounter is pivotal for Jesus's understanding of his vocation. In his gradual realisation of what messiahship means, more than once he encounters greater faith in those outside religious orthodoxy than those within. Yet, until now, however much he has criticised the guardians of religious orthodoxy for trying to exclude people from the scope of God's blessing, he has still seen his own calling as being to his own people. But the Syrophenician woman, this outsider, will not let him limit it in this way. She challenges him to see the full implications of what he has been saying: this Gospel is for everyone.

Perhaps we should note, too, the placing of her story, which comes between the two feeding miracles – the feeding of the five thousand and of the four thousand. Some have seen in those two miracles a metaphor for the blessing of Israel and the blessing of the nations. For numbers in the Bible are usually significant. In the first miracle, there were five loaves and five thousand people to feed. Five was the number of the Pentateuch – the five books of the Law, the Torah. When all had been fed, there were twelve baskets left over – the number of the twelve tribes of Israel. In the second miracle, there were seven loaves and four thousand people to feed. The number seven was the symbol of perfection, here encountering the number four – a number which some suggest is associated with the Gentiles, forty being the number of the known nations of the world. In between the two miraculous feedings stands the woman with no name, asking for healing – for salvation.

So we can detect different layers of meaning in this encounter between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman. What does it say to us, twenty centuries later? This story, like Jesus's response to the Pharisees in our Gospel last week, is another reminder that we too are called to love beyond all boundaries, ignoring human distinctions and prejudices – whether they be conscious or unconscious - because no one is beyond the scope of God's love.

As if to reinforce that message, Jesus's next encounter is with a man who is deaf and has an impediment in his speech. Once again, he is brought into contact with someone excluded from access to God's blessing by the religious leaders who saw themselves as the guardians of it. Those who were disabled were not allowed into the inner part of the Temple because, as people who were 'different', it was thought that they were displeasing to God. (Before anyone says 'but that does not happen now', we should ask ourselves how well the Church includes people who are disabled. Better still, we should ask them.) Here, in front of Jesus, was a man literally excluded from being heard, owing to his disability. Jesus's response? '*Ephphatha.*' Be opened. There is nothing that excludes you from God's love and acceptance.

Christ's radical inclusion of all who were treated as outcasts in his time put him on a collision course with those who believed they were the guardians of religious orthodoxy. It was a similar sort of radical inclusion to that described in our Epistle today from the Letter of James. It took Jesus all the way to Calvary. I wonder how far, in our time, we might find ourselves ready to go.

Today some church traditions are celebrating the Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is also the second anniversary of the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Two

significant examples of women who said 'yes' to the most daunting of vocations. And, on this day, we are given the story of the Syrophenician woman who didn't accept the answer no. The courage of all three is something we do well to reflect on, as we give thanks for all we have gained by their example.

Amen.



**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

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

**Sermon – 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**5<sup>th</sup> September 2021**

**All Saints' Marseille**

*The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain*

Jesus is on the move once more, seeking a moment of peace beyond the familiar bounds of Galilee. He ventures into the region of Tyre and Sidon, present-day southern Lebanon, hoping to find solitude in this Gentile territory, away from the scrutiny and demands that have followed him. Recently, his own townspeople had mocked and rejected him, and for days he has tirelessly fed the hungry, healed the afflicted, freed the demon-possessed, and faced the Pharisees' challenges — all while having the well-meaning but often baffled disciples at his side. Surely, Jesus has earned a moment of reprieve.

Yet, respite eludes him. Instead, a persistent Syrophenician woman bursts into the house where he is staying, falls at his feet, and pleads for him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

“Jesus says to the woman, ‘Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.’”<sup>1</sup>

To any ear, this must be startling. In Jesus' time, as in ours, likening people to dogs - even “little dogs” (as the diminutive suggests in the Greek text of Mark's Gospel) - is an offence. How could such words serve as a response to suffering and despair? We recoil from this kind of language when it is spoken in our daily lives, but when it comes from Jesus - the Christ of compassion of mercy – it feels especially unsettling. It jars against the image of perfection of Jesus we were likely taught to embrace as we grew in our Christian faith.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mk 7.27

As a woman and a mother, I cannot help but deeply empathise with this Gentile woman approaching Jesus. Her daughter is hopelessly ill, and any parent would be overwhelmed with anxiety, longing to provide comfort and healing. Anyone with a trace of compassion would feel her distress. Anyone would want to help her in any way they could.

Can we find a way to be reconciled with the awkwardness of Jesus' refusal? Over the centuries, theologians and preachers have wrestled with the discomfort this passage evokes. Some interpret it as a reminder that Jesus, though fully divine, was also fully human. This means not only divine empathy with the joys and sorrows of humanity, but also the possibility that Jesus could have experienced physical and emotional exhaustion, faced temptation and anger, and, at times, even felt irritation.

Some interpreters question what Jesus' understanding of his mission might have been at this particular moment of his story. When approached by the Syrophenician woman, his initial response seems to highlight the 'boundaries' - or rather, the priorities - of his mission, emphasising his call to serve his own people first. This can be challenging to accept, especially when contrasted with contemporary examples, such as some French politicians' commitment to 'préférence nationale', that is, the priority given to native citizens over foreigners in areas like employment, social benefits, and housing, to protect national identity.

A traditional view of this passage holds that Jesus, the sinless God-man, perfect in his divinity, was not subject to the failings of fallen human nature (such as capriciousness). Thus, it is suggested that every action of Jesus should be interpreted in a way that befits Christ's divinity. This perspective implies that Jesus had a deeper purpose in his seemingly harsh response to the woman, perhaps using his challenging words to test her and draw out an affirmation of her faith. Yet, this instance stands in contrast to other moments in Mark's Gospel, such as when Jairus, a synagogue leader, "pleaded earnestly with Jesus, 'My little daughter is dying.' Jesus went with him" and raised the girl, without questioning the father's faith.<sup>2</sup>

One feminist theologian<sup>3</sup> feels that something important happens in this passage, asserting that the Syrophenician woman helps Jesus realise his identity as Christ, the Messiah. While I am reluctant to read the Scriptures

---

<sup>2</sup> Mk 5.21-43

<sup>3</sup> Hisako Kinukawa – *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese Feminist Perspective*

through an ideological lens, I agree with this author that something significant happens here. The encounter with this mother appears to mark a turning point, revealing a genuine shift in Jesus' understanding and suggesting that he is, indeed, evolving, 'on the move'. This perspective may be challenging to accept if one thinks of Jesus as perfect and immutable from birth, possessing omniscience and omnipotence. I'd like to remind you a few words from Luke's Gospel: when the 12-year old boy Jesus returns with Mary and Joseph from a visit to the Temple, the writer makes it clear that this boy had to mature in every way, just as we all do: "Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour."<sup>4</sup> Just as Jesus learned carpentry from Joseph, his growth in moral and intellectual stature must have been a genuine learning experience. If God chooses to be revealed to us within the limits of our humanity, then the possibility of growth and change must also be embraced.

The power and reach of the Kingdom of God extend far beyond what even Jesus envisioned in this moment within Gentile territory. 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs,' the woman replies with remarkable insight when Jesus declares that the time has not yet come for the Gentiles to be nourished with God's grace.

Jesus can only concede: "Because of this word (τοῦτον τὸν λόγον, in the Greek original), you may go – your daughter has been healed." In her reply, Jesus recognises the "word", a term Mark has already used to signify the Gospel, the good news of the coming of God's Kingdom<sup>5</sup>. Here, in this conversation, the presence of God is unmistakable: he is with the Syrophenician woman, who grasps that the good news has arrived, believing that Jesus can dissolve boundaries and widen the table of grace. God is also with Jesus, guiding him in his listening and response.

It is "because of this word" that comes to him in the encounter and conversation, that Jesus broadens the scope of his mission and ministry - not only to this woman and her daughter, but also to the man healed of deafness in today's Gospel reading. The restoration of humanity to the fullness of life now transcends the children of Israel. The good news of the Kingdom defies geography and purity laws, spreading more swiftly and widely than even Jesus had foreseen.

---

<sup>4</sup> Lk 2.52

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Mk 2.2 ; 4.33

God meets us – indeed, even Jesus himself – in the space of encounters and conversations. Through newcomers, strangers, and those who differ from us in countless ways, God widens our horizons and challenges the limits of our understanding. What would it mean to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, to respond to the urgent call of the Other? To embrace the wisdom that only a vulnerable outsider can offer? To announce the good news to those who do not look, speak, act, or worship as we do? To dissolve the boundaries? To widen the table?

The charge now rests upon us to carry forth the Gospel of Christ to all corners of the earth, even as we stand shoulder to shoulder with the Syrophenician woman, humbly seeking the crumbs of grace. Yet, as we approach the Lord's table, we are assured to receive not mere crumbs, but the Eucharistic feast – the very gift of eternal life.

Amen.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

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

**Sermon – 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**15<sup>th</sup> September 2024**

**Église Protestante Unie, Manosque**

*The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain*

Over the last couple of weeks we have heard many people arguing why they or others should, or should not, be considered for a leadership role. The complicated negotiations that have followed the unexpected calling of legislative elections in France in the summer, the build-up to the American presidential election in November. The formation of a new government in the United Kingdom. Whether or not we are interested in politics, we all subconsciously find ourselves evaluating who we think we would be comfortable with in the role of a public leader, the sort of characteristics and priorities that we would want them to have.

In all of this, the very last thing any of those candidates has expressed – and, in our own evaluation of the desired characteristics, not the first thing we would think of either – is the sort of manifesto Jesus gave his disciples. As Messiah (or, as he preferred to refer to himself, the Son of Man), he must undergo great suffering, be rejected and killed. And, in case they haven't worked it out, that means risk and danger to his disciples too: 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who

want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it.’ It’s not about power, but about its loss. Not about status, but about its lack. The upside-down world of the Kingdom of God. Hardly designed to win recruits, one might think.

Our Gospel reading comes at a pivotal moment in St Mark’s account – the middle chapter, 8 of 16. At this midpoint, Mark has Peter come to the realisation of who Jesus really is. They are at Caesarea Philippi, in the northernmost part of the country, furthest from Jerusalem, before Jesus turns to begin the journey that will lead him there. It is here that he asks them: ‘who are people saying that I am?’ They mention three of the complimentary attributions, tactfully not mentioning some of the less flattering ones that were no doubt also around. Then he challenges them: ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter rushes in with a spectacular answer: ‘You are the Messiah.’ And so the great secret is revealed, the one which Jesus was so anxious that no one should know. He is the anointed one, the one who will restore all things and bring about God’s future. Peter opens his mouth and gets it spectacularly right. But Jesus then goes on to explain what it really means. That he will undergo great suffering, be killed and rise again. Jesus is drawing on the prophetic tradition from Isaiah and other, writing during the exile of Israel in Babylon some five hundred years earlier.

But Peter has taken his understanding of the Messiah from other parts of Scripture, perhaps the literature of Daniel and the Macabees, where the anointed one was envisaged as a triumphant leader who would overthrow the occupying Romans and restore Israel to its former glory. Peter opens his mouth again and this time gets it spectacularly wrong. Jesus checks him in the strongest terms: ‘Get behind me, Satan.’ Peter is thinking in human terms and not God’s,

and Jesus pulls him up. From the same mouth comes true and false understandings. In the Letter of James, the writer comments on this human tendency. The tongue, though a tiny part of the body, is very powerful. We use it to bless and curse. We worship God but we also demean those who are made in God's image. Peter shows how easy it is to say both the right thing and the wrong thing within a few minutes.

There were many pressures on Jesus to do things differently. All around him were minor insurrections against the occupying forces of the Roman Empire. Yet he chose the path of non-violent, active resistance and the creation of an alternative society within the apparent dominance of Rome. Non-violent resistance where people are oppressed is still the church's vocation – forming an alternative community that is about reconciliation.

Jesus's question is for all his followers, then and now. 'But who do you say that I am?' In church, we say that he is God of God, Light of Light, Lamb of God, Living Word, etc. But what do we say when we are away from church? Do those around us know that Jesus is Lord for us – in the things we do, the decisions we make, the words we speak?

Jesus told his followers that if they wished to follow him they must deny themselves and take up their cross. This meant putting him first, not thinking about what they wanted but what God wanted, for them and their community. It may mean travelling a difficult road, unsure of the future, not being in control, having to come to terms with suffering - but trusting that God can and will bring good out of the most difficult circumstances. Speaking a few days ago of the ending of her recent cancer treatment, the Princess of Wales used a biblical

image when she said: 'Out of darkness can come light.' She may or may not have been aware of it, but that is the whole message of the Gospel.

This week, let us think about the words we say in church and the words and actions we perform each day. Does it all hang together? Would others say that we are people of integrity? We all make mistakes, says the writer of the Letter of James. Peter is a good example of it. But Jesus challenged Peter and reminded him to do the work of God and side with truth. So let us check our words, our actions, think before we speak and listen for the voice of Jesus in our ear: 'But who do you say that I am?'

Amen.



**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

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

**Sermon – 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**15<sup>th</sup> September 2024**

**All Saints' Marseille**

*The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain*

“Take up your cross and follow me!” A startling and very demanding command from their Teacher. Jesus’ disciples were surely not prepared for such a conclusion to the day’s teaching. The day had begun with a sense of ease for them, as they confidently answered his question, ‘Who do people say that I am?’

Considering their age, background, and professions, some among them may have found the idea of being taught rather intimidating. Yet, Jesus’ teaching method was suited to them. Instead of sitting them down and subjecting them to discourses on the programme and theology of the Kingdom of God, he wove his teaching into the fabric of their journeying together, addressing a point here and another here. Despite the spontaneous nature of these ‘lessons’, his teaching was coherent and consistent. Their apprenticeship under Jesus had already been intense, but it was about to deepen further as he prepared to set his course toward Jerusalem. Before taking this step, Jesus paused to ask them, ‘Who do people say that I am?’ It was a question that seemed easy enough. The disciples readily echoed the voices of the crowd: some said John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others, one of the prophets. Indeed, Jesus’ ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing had all the hallmarks of Israel’s greatest prophets.

The teacher then asked a second, more searching question. He sought to move his followers beyond the interpretations of others, he wanted them to express their own understanding. It was no longer enough to lean on the answers of the crowd. Jesus implied that reciting creeds, quoting traditions and theologies would not suffice. ‘But who do *you* say that I am?’

Though the disciples are often depicted as slow to grasp the truth, in this moment Peter seems to see clearly: 'You are the Christ,' he boldly declares. And we, with the benefit of hindsight, breathe a sigh of relief - for Peter has indeed spoken the right words. Yet, he will quickly discover that understanding Jesus' identity is far more than naming a title. The act of naming does not contain the fullness of meaning.

For Peter, as for most of his Jewish contemporaries, the long-expected Messiah was envisioned as a royal figure - one who would topple the oppressors and usher in a kingdom of power and glory akin to King David's reign, establishing the Kingdom of God. But just as Peter believed he had solved the riddle, Jesus shattered his assumptions. He began to speak of a Messiahship not built on conquest but on suffering. It is, after all, the teacher's task to challenge their students' preconceived notions. Like Winston Churchill, who famously offered the British people only 'blood, toil, tears and sweat'<sup>1</sup> in the fight against Hitler's Germany, Jesus unfolded a narrative of redemption that would lead through rejection, abuse, abandonment, and death. What a chasm between the expected role of the Messiah and the reality of Jesus' mission! From the very beginning, Mark announced that his account was 'good news', *euangelion*. But how could this be good news? For the disciples, none of it made sense. They were bewildered and disoriented, unaware of the darkness yet to come, or that Peter himself would soon falter in the face of it, undone by fear and doubt. There is still so much more for them to learn - so many more answers for them to grow into.

As Jesus unveils more of his identity and destiny, he also defines what it means to share in his mission. Teaching, after all, is hollow without action. To know who Jesus is remains an abstract exercise unless it is lived out. Christ calls his followers not merely to understand, but to walk alongside him: 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me'. Self-denial and bearing the cross - is this the cost of discipleship?

Jean Calvin, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century reformer, is known to have said that self-denial is 'the sum of the Christian life.'<sup>2</sup> However, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, such language may seem outmoded. Our Western culture prizes self-esteem, self-empowerment, and self-sufficiency – anything but self-abasement. Yet, what if self-denial is not about devaluing ourselves, but rather, about losing the false self, surrendering

---

<sup>1</sup> Churchill, *Speech to the House of Commons*, 13 May 1940

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, ch.7

the ego, giving up worldly values, and setting ourselves aside for the sake of the Kingdom's ones? What if it means giving ourselves for the sake of others, in a spirit of generosity, humility, and love? What if it means letting God's will direct our own?

And what of Jesus's exhortation to take up the cross? Does he call us to seek out suffering and martyrdom, to endure every hardship, from irritating neighbours to serious illness to discrimination to abuse to natural disasters, without complaint? Certainly not. Jesus' ministry was focused on alleviating suffering, not glorifying it. He healed the sick, restored relationships, liberated captives, and fed the hungry—acts that stand in radical contrast to any notion of suffering as virtuous in itself. The cross of Christ, instead, symbolises God's presence within human pain, and especially God's love for us in the midst of it. Thus, to bear the cross is not to embrace suffering for its own sake, but to accept the consequences of faithfully following Jesus, whatever they may be. It means placing God's purposes above our own comfort, and being willing to lose ourselves in service to others — giving our time, resources, gifts, and energy so that, through us, others might encounter the love of God revealed in Christ.

Christ's question, 'Who do you say that I am?' is for us to answer on this and every day. Yet, within it, lies another question: 'Who, then, will you say that you are?' This is the challenge embedded in his inquiry. It compels us to define our own identity, for faith, at some point, must become very personal and deeply invested. Our answer may emerge through a sudden, life-altering transformation, or it may unfold slowly, drawing us into the realisation that we must embrace this answer, shaping a new life and a new way of being. Are we prepared to align what we profess with how we live? The way we understand Jesus Christ will determine how far we are willing to follow him - the weight of the cross we are willing to bear in his name, the courage with which we will proclaim him to a world in need of his love and healing, and the humility with which we will serve as his hands to those in need.

The life of a disciple is a journey, walking with Christ in the way of the cross. We cannot know where this path will lead, but we are certain of our companion in Christ and the hope to which we are called. Take up your cross and follow him.

Amen.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**  
**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**  
**Sermon – 17th Sunday after Trinity**  
**22nd September 2024**  
**All Saints' Marseille**

*The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain*

“They did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.”

Nearly everyone has, at some point, hesitated to ask a question, held back by the fear of appearing bothersome, being judged, or exposing ignorance about what they believe they should already know. This reluctance often traces back to childhood or adolescence, when a seemingly simple inquiry may have led to embarrassment or dismissal. Over time, this hesitancy takes root, stifling curiosity and personal growth. What begins as self-doubt can evolve into a deeper fear, despite the undeniable truth that asking questions is essential to our understanding and learning.

In today's passage from the Gospel of Mark, Jesus speaks for the second time of his impending fate: “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” True to his succinct style, Mark leaves out any description of the disciples' reactions—the gasps of shock, the widened eyes, the silence that must have followed. Instead, he offers only a brief statement: “They did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.”

When Jesus speaks of the suffering that awaits him, he opens a path for his disciples to draw closer to him, inviting them into a deeper understanding of his mission. Yet, they shy away— either because they don't have the courage to admit their ignorance, or because they are unable to bear the truths that might cause them pain. The notion of a suffering, dying Messiah must have confounded them. Perhaps, like so many of us, they believed that evading discomfort would somehow spare them. Or perhaps they recalled the rebuke Peter received at Caesarea Philippi and want to avoid a similar humiliation. Whatever their reasons, their reluctance to ask difficult questions—of themselves, of one another, and of Christ—stifles their growth and limits their communion with God. In their confusion, they turn to quarreling, disputing trivial matters of rank and status. While Jesus foretold his death to reveal a kingdom built on self-sacrifice, the disciples betray their preoccupation with self-aggrandisement.

To help them understand that, in the kingdom of God, the world's understanding of 'greatness' is reversed, Jesus offers his disciples a teaching: "If anyone desires to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all." To further explain this truth, he stages a living parable. Taking a child into his arms, he places the child before them and declares, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the One who sent me."

Jesus uses the example of a child not to invite us into innocence or naïveté, but rather to call us to abandon our desires for power and dominance. The child—powerless, vulnerable, without status—is the very one Jesus commands his disciples to welcome. In welcoming those without power, whose voices are ignored in the world, the forgotten, we engage in something far removed from the disciples' arguments about greatness. Indeed, Jesus dismantles human

hierarchies as he takes this small child in his arms – this is a radical new order.

By placing the child at the center, Jesus makes visible a kingdom unlike any other—a kingdom where greatness is redefined, not by self-centered ambition, but by an embrace of those at the margins. If we aspire to true greatness, we must cultivate hospitality towards the vulnerable, those silenced by the world. It is within this embrace, in extending community to the marginalized, that we encounter the very presence of God. To place only ourselves, our closest circle of family and friends, and those like us at the center, is to distance ourselves from the presence of Christ and the One who sent him. In the divine order, power and prestige are not amassed by asserting dominance or chasing recognition. Instead, they are granted to those who embrace humbleness and vulnerability.

Yet, there is even more for us to learn about God in welcoming children. Their presence among us can open us to deeper, more authentic communion—with each other, with Christ, and with God.

Children teach us to honour our imaginations as paths toward God. Their capacity for wonder and creativity is nothing short of extraordinary. In the words of poet William Blake, they can

“See a world in a grain of sand,  
And the Heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold infinity in the palm of [their] hand,  
And eternity in an hour.”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus calls his disciples to this same imaginative leap: to envision a world where death is not the end, where suffering gives way to joy, where resurrection is not just a hope but a promise. But the disciples,

---

<sup>1</sup> Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*

confined by their rigid expectations of the Messiah, struggle to grasp this vision. They cannot imagine the world Jesus presents to them. "Welcome the child," Jesus urges. Open your hearts to wonder once again, to the childlike capacity for awe, and see the world anew.

Children teach us the courage to ask questions as we journey toward God. Their natural curiosity knows no fear, no shame in posing awkward, challenging, or seemingly impossible questions. When something puzzles them, they ask—boldly and without hesitation, persisting in asking until they find understanding.

We, like the disciples, often pretend to have no difficult questions. Yet, life's mysteries persistently elude us. Why do the righteous suffer? Why do humans inflict such cruelty upon one another? Why does evil appear to prevail? If even God's Son was betrayed and killed, what security can anyone claim? Why did God fashion a world so fraught with peril?

Children also reveal to us the essence of divine power. A child, in their helplessness and dependency, embodies powerlessness and need. In many societies, children are socially invisible; in others, they are legally unprotected. Everywhere, children exist at the mercy of those who are older and stronger. And it is this image of vulnerability that Jesus offers as a reflection of God. Do we truly wish to see the face of God? Then let us look to the child abandoned, to the child exploited, hungry, or fleeing from war. Look to the weak, the small, the simple, the vulnerable, and the powerless. Look to the least of these, and behold the face of God.

One of the most extraordinary and humbling truths of Christianity is that God became a helpless human child. In this week's Gospel story, Jesus deepens that mystery by revealing another truth: all children everywhere represent God's heart, God's likeness, God's power. To

welcome a child is to welcome the divine. In God's kingdom, true greatness is found in choosing vulnerability, and in consenting to be little, we discover what it means to be truly great.

If you want to learn how to live with this mystery, welcome the child.



**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

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

**Sermon – 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**Michael and All Angels**

**29<sup>th</sup> September 2024**

**All Saints' Marseille and Aix-en-Provence**

*Jane Quarmby, Licensed Lay Minister*

Today we celebrate Michael the Archangel and all angels – but do we actually think about what we are celebrating? Do we, nowadays, really believe in angels at all? Michaelmas is now a season in the agricultural year, a term in the scholastic year, even a flower which blooms in September – the Michaelmas Daisy.

The word angel crops up all over the Bible in both the Old Testament and the New. We heard this morning about Jacob seeing angels going up and down a ladder to heaven, (which is also now a flower – Jacob's Ladder), in the psalm we spoke of the angels of the Lord, the mighty ones who do his bidding, our New Testament reading from Revelation describes how Michael and his angels won the fight against Satan and his angels, and threw them out of heaven and onto earth. Not good news for us, living on earth, to have Satan and his angels here with us and in a very bad temper. And in our Gospel Jesus tells Nathanael he will see "the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man".

The hymns that we sing are sprinkled liberally with angels too. On a quick poll in my hymn book about 10% have a reference to angels. At Christmas we sing "Hark the Herald Angels Sing"; "The Angel Gabriel from heaven came" to tell Mary the news of her holy child to come, and another old favourite is "While Shepherds watched their flocks by night" when the angel tells them of the Christ child. Look around most churches and you'll see depictions of angels in stained glass windows, in flight in the stonework, in paintings. You'll find any amount of them in art galleries too – especially paintings of Gabriel and Mary, and sculptures like the powerful one of Sir Jacob Epstein's "Jacob and the Angel", exhibited in the Tate Gallery. Angels are also in a number of modern songs – Robbie Williams had a hit with his song "Angels", the Eurythmics had a number 1 hit with "There must be an angel" and you'll no doubt think of lots of others.

They pop up nowadays in TV series and films – who doesn't cheer for Clarence the guardian angel who gets his wings in "A Wonderful Life"? If you haven't seen the film, it will be on TV again this Christmas. And they are even now in sport – there's a baseball team in LA called the Los Angeles Angels. We have an angel on top of our Christmas tree, and you can buy little angel brooches and charms in jewelers' shops.

So angels have been with us since time began and are still highly visible in some form now. But what about real angels? In the First World War, a number of servicemen told of seeing a troop of angels between them and the German forces, others of a single angel, or 4 or 5 angels protecting them from overwhelming odds. The men who told these stories were often not believed, they were exhausted, in pain, frightened – but these weren't raw recruits, they were tough experienced soldiers at the Battle of Mons, heavily outnumbered and up against impossible odds. But they survived, and many were convinced it was due to the intervention of Michael and his angels.

Angels appear in many religions and cultures, but in today's world what do we think? Do we all have a guardian angel who looks over us? Is God not alone in heaven but has any number of divine beings who not only worship him but are active in our world too? Without angels in the Bible, there would be an awful lot of gaps – and, without angels doing God's will, there would be an awful lot of gaps in our world too. Does the church believe in angels? Well, in 2020, at a time of misery caused by the pandemic, angels began appearing all over England, made by local churches. Everything from full sized illuminated versions in Somerset, to teenagers delivering small angels with a card to people in care homes. They brought hope, and comfort, and a smile to people's faces.

At the heart of today's festival of St Michael is the recognition of the reality and presence of angels, and their participation in the war against evil and darkness. It's a source of comfort to believe that angels are on our side, they protect us, mostly without our knowing. God created angels as well as us. They are his messengers, like Gabriel, protectors, like Michael, healers, like Raphael. Augustine considered that "the good angels seek at all times to direct us towards the true source of happiness, God; that they encourage us in worship of God". The catechism of the Catholic church states "The whole life of the church benefits from the mysterious and powerful help of the angels.... From its beginning until death, human life is surrounded by their watchful care and

intercession... Christ is the centre of the angelic world. They are his angels... They belong to him because they were created through and for him.”

So yes, we need angels, and yes, we need to let them into our lives, to bring us hope, protection, reassurance and comfort, to guide us in living our lives as nearly as possible to how Jesus directed us to live them. Not in fear, not in the pursuit of our wants and desires at the expense of others, not in isolation from God, but in the light. And if Satan and his dark angels are roaming about in high bad humour, doing their best to lead us astray, to cause havoc, pain, misery and darkness, then I for one welcome as many of God’s angels into my life as can cram themselves in.

I’m going to finish with the words from Robbie Williams’ song – not the usual prophet for a Sunday but I really like these lyrics:

“I sit and wait  
Does an angel contemplate my fate?  
And do they know the places where we go  
When we’re grey and old?  
‘Cause I have been told  
That salvation lets their wings unfold.

So when I’m lying in my bed  
Thoughts running through my head  
And I feel that love is dead  
I’m loving angels instead.

And through it all she offers me protection  
A lot of love and affection, whether I’m right or wrong  
And down the waterfall, wherever it may take me  
I know that life won’t break me  
When I come to call, she won’t forsake me  
I’m loving angels instead.

When I’m feeling weak  
And my pain walks down a one way street  
I look above  
And I know I’ll always be blessed with love.”

It just goes to show - angels are often in the most unexpected places.  
Amen.