

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

Sermon – 19th Sunday after Trinity

Harvest Thanksgiving

6th October 2024

All Saints' Marseille and Aix-en-Provence

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

“Be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done great things!” The words of the prophet Joel could well serve as a motto for Harvest Festivals - celebrations of crops having been safely gathered from the fields, and of the earth’s bounty.

In 2024, we still sing hymns about ploughing fields and scattering seeds, though the Harvest Festival may not no longer hold the same significance it once did, especially for us in the cities, far removed from the rhythms of the agricultural world. Yet, we find pleasure in decorating the church with fruits, vegetables and autumnal flowers, and delight in their colours and savour the promise of the flavours they bring.

Perhaps part of Harvest Festival’s appeal lies in its ability to transport us to an earlier time, when life was harder, yet people lived more closely attuned to the natural rhythms of the seasons. Yet let’s be honest: in our modern, urban, Western world, with its constant abundance and variety of food, we have largely lost touch with the cycles of the earth and the fruits of each season. What was once an integral part of life—the knowledge of when fruits and vegetables came into season, how to preserve them, and which crops thrived locally—is now a distant memory for many. While our grandparents

instinctively understood these things, how many of our children could answer even the simplest questions about seasonal produce? Moreover, the stakes of the harvest have diminished. In our part of the world, even a complete crop failure is unlikely to lead to empty tables, as supermarkets remain stocked with goods imported from far-flung corners of the globe. One might ask: has Harvest Festival lost its relevance?

Even if we are not directly engaged in the work of the harvest, its fruits fill our homes. Our cupboards and fridges overflow with an abundance of food, and we are never short of quantity or choice. But does this abundance insulate us from Jesus' call: "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat and what you will drink?"

Perhaps the last time we truly worried about our food was during the pandemic, when shelves were suddenly empty of favourite items. Or more recently, on several occasions, when wars and adverse weather have brought sporadic shortages of essentials like flour or cooking oil, rice or orange juice. Yet, for most of us, genuine food insecurity, being at risk of starvation or having to queue for basic necessities are distant fears, and perhaps because of this, we feel little gratitude for the earth's bounty. However, our comfort does not free us from concern. We live in a world of finite resources, yet our desires seem boundless and extravagant. We are ever tempted to take more than we need, to reach beyond what is sustainable. The consequences of this are stark for the delicate interplay of land, sea, and sky and the life they sustain, and are something beyond our capacity to control through human means alone. While we may be able to stave off physical famine in some parts of the world, we run a graver risk, the one of a famine of the spirit, alienated from the natural world and its Creator.

We cannot overlook the reality of injustice and inequality, both at home and abroad. While some enjoy abundance, others are left with empty hands, relying on the charity of others to meet their basic needs. For those grappling with uncertainty over their next meal, the biblical refrain “do not worry” may seem distant, even insensitive. Would they find comfort if invited to learn from the birds of the air and the lilies of the field? We may long to contemplate the humble flowers of the field and, like the British poet William Wordsworth, feel that they “can give thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.”¹ Yet we are not, like the lilies, able to photosynthesise our way through life. Even the birds of the air struggle to find sustenance in a world where winters are harsh and summers are marred by the loss of insects due to our lavish use of chemicals.

Yet Jesus’ call to not worry is far from a dismissal of our genuine concerns: “your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things”. Don’t we have here an invitation to reorient our perspective?

Jesus seeks to transform the way we think, live and respond to the world around us, by reminding us that the source of all we need is the goodness and generosity of God. Creation itself, in its richness, in its diversity, and abundance is a visible reflection of God’s loving care. By shifting the focus from ourselves and our anxieties to the Creator, Jesus does not dismiss our concerns, but invites us to respond with trust in the One who provides for all.

We might have begun with the last verse from today’s Gospel: “Strive first for the kingdom of God, and all the things [you need] will be given to you,” and thus shift our reading of it from concern over our anxieties to a reflection on our priorities. To seek first the kingdom of God is to

¹ William Wordsworth, *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*

seek the world as God envisions it—a world where abundance flows from divine goodness, freely given without expectation of return, and we are called to give in the same manner.

As we celebrate this Harvest Festival, we must ask ourselves: are our actions aligned with God’s will? In a world where some have plenty while others go hungry, what are our responsibilities? Perhaps it is time to shift our focus from what we desire to what we truly need and live in the present moment with gratitude. It is time to strive for the world which God desires, setting aside our worries and working toward justice, toward feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. Hard work? The words of Jesus and the prophet Joel offer hope: God desires the flourishing of all creation. He can do “great things” for the healing and flourishing of the world and invites us to be instruments of that grace.

On this Harvest Festival, we gather to give thanks for the year’s crops and for those whose labour brings food to our tables – honest work and sometimes exploited toil. As the German mediaeval mystic Meister Eckhart reputedly said, “If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is ‘thank you’, it will be enough.” Yet let our gratitude be more than just words. Let it stir our consciences, shape our wills, guide our actions and influence the choices we make. Let us recognise that we are not the centre of the universe. We bear responsibility towards our planet and those we share it with, especially those who have little or no harvest to celebrate.

To live more simply, more justly, more sustainably and more harmoniously with both Creator and creation is a real challenge. But we must take it to heart, so that one day, in the words of former

Archbishop Rowan Williams, “we shall [all] sit and speak around the table, share one food, one earth.”²

Heavenly Father, for what we have received, make us truly thankful.
Amen.

² Rowan Williams, *Rublev*

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 20th Sunday after Trinity

13th October 2024

Eglise du Sacré-Coeur, Oppède

Canon David Pickering

The well-known opening words of today's Gospel: "Jesus said: 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear.'" (And here are the important words) "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"

Celebration of the year's harvest can take many forms. Anthropologists tell us it is probably one of the earliest religious rituals in the evolution of human history. Some believe there may have been some form of harvest celebration during both Neanderthal and early hominoid development.

An early Christian harvest celebration was Lammas Day, the 1st of August, when a loaf of bread, made from the first cutting of the harvest, was brought to the local church: an offering for a prospective bountiful harvest.

Harvest celebrations as we know them today in Anglican and Protestant traditions only began recently, in the earlier part of the eighteenth century. But these age-old traditions have been, and continue to be, celebrated worldwide. Recently in one of the main British newspapers I came across a travel article entitled 'Ten Great Harvest Festivals in Europe'. Readers could choose between olive picking in Croatia and truffle hunting in Romania, the black lobster harvest in Sweden or grape picking in Portugal. But the one that caught my eye was grape stomping in Provence. This, to quote the article, takes place at "Les Pastras, an organic farm in the picturesque Luberon region, with suggested accommodation Le Mas du Colombier". I think it's situated on the south side of the Luberon, near Cadenet. Maybe some of you know it? Like many vineyards I suppose they're always on the lookout for new ways to bring in customers.

But what are we celebrating this morning? A little story may help. A man was out hunting in the wild woods of Northern Canada. Suddenly he found himself confronted by two large, menacing bears. He picks up his rifle and points it at

them. Undeterred, they draw nearer. There's no alternative, so he pulls the trigger. But it fails to fire! After two or three more failed attempts, he drops the rifle and starts to run. Before long he reaches a cliff edge, and there's nowhere to go. Despite being an avowed atheist he drops to his knees and prays in desperation for a miracle. But nothing happens. Sheepishly he turns round and sees the two bears kneeling down. Then he hears their prayer: 'For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful'.

So today, may the Lord make us truly thankful. Thankfulness is what we give and celebrate at Harvest Festival. Some may refer to today as a Festival, but I'd prefer to leave the festival part to the tourists, be that Olive Picking, Truffle Hunting, Grape Picking, or even Grape Stomping here in the Luberon. We're here this morning to give thanks. By the end of our service we'll have used the words **thanks**, **thank** and **thankful** eighteen times. And, of course the very word Eucharist means **Thanksgiving**. In our relationship with God, and perhaps most importantly in our worship, thanks and thanksgiving are basic and absolutely crucial.

I'm sure this morning as we came to church we had many people in our hearts and minds who we wished to remember. But when we think of them, before praying for any of their particular needs, do we give thanks for what they mean to us in our lives? To hold someone in thanksgiving is a good way of praying them.

Our thanksgiving should be broad and all embracing. The 13th century great spiritual teacher Meister Eckhart once wrote, "If the only prayer you use is 'Thank you', then that would be enough." Saying "thanks" recognises the generosity of the giver, our God. It allows us to use his gifts properly and to share what we have been given, to repent of our misuse, and to remember those who have not been as fortunate as we may be.

Jesus says, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" He is calling us to give thanks for all the things we receive in life, not only those things that enrich our material lives - but for the very basics, which we so often take for granted, but which so many do not enjoy. Are we thankful for our health, that unlike those who will receive our gifts from this service, we have enough not to worry about where the next meal is coming from?

Our Harvest Thanksgiving this morning is not simply for our food, or, to use Jesus's words, for our clothing, but it is an expression of our gratitude for and appreciation of the whole of God's loving creation.

For me this is summed up in the Prayer of General Thanksgiving in the Book of Common Prayer. The original version was by the 17th century Bishop of Norwich Edward Reynolds. Written in 1596, it's claimed that it was inspired by a private prayer of Queen Elizabeth 1.

I'll close with its beautiful words in full:

(Quoted the original version from my original Prayer Book and Holy Bible)

(This is the 1979 Version)

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made. We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory throughout all ages.

Amen.



*Chaplaincy of All Saints' Marseille
with Aix-en-Provence
and the Luberon*

*13th October 2024
20th Sunday after Trinity*

Reflection

I wonder if you are sometimes struck by the apparent contradictions in the readings set for a particular day?

Today we read in Amos a series of dreadful warnings to those who trample the poor, afflict the righteous and push aside the needy. The prophet has in his line of fire those who have become comfortably rich by oppressing others. But Psalm 90 ends with a heartfelt plea to the Lord – prosper for us the work of our hands, O prosper the work of our hands! These two readings together show us the paradox that we all have to live with – we want to be both rich and righteous, both materially secure and spiritually healthy.

The conflict between these two is spelled out most sharply in the gospel reading. A rich man has every earthly possession – and we don't know how he obtained them; perhaps he was one of those who oppress the poor, and he has a bit of a conscience about that. But perhaps he just inherited his wealth or worked honestly for it. All we know is he throws himself at Jesus' feet with a profound sense that something in his life is missing. He has kept the law as faithfully as he could and it seems that God has prospered the work of his hands, but he is still unsettled.

What's missing? The Bible often speaks of "one thing".

The speaker in Psalm 27 says "One thing I asked of the Lord, to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord".

When Jesus heals a blind man in John 9 and the man is questioned by the religious authorities, he says, “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

St Paul says in Galatians 2 that the leaders of the Jerusalem church “asked only one thing, that we remember the poor.” And in Philippians 3 he says of himself, “This one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.”

The example that perhaps comes most readily to mind is when Jesus is in the house of Mary and Martha, and he chides the busy sister by saying, “There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”

Jesus speaks to the rich man in Mark 10 in similar terms: “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”

In all of these examples, one thing has been identified as the most important thing for them – beholding God’s beauty, seeing clearly at last, remembering the poor, focusing on the future, sitting at the feet of Jesus, or in the case of the rich man, turning from his possessions to follow Jesus.

And all of them indicate something that was missing or holding them back. It may have been physical or spiritual blindness, or forgetfulness of the needs of others, or dwelling on the past, or too much concern with trivial tasks. In the rich man’s case, he had made an idol of his wealth and he couldn’t bring himself to walk away from it.

This isn’t to let us off the hook about wealth. It’s not just the rich man in the gospel who is challenged about his possessions. For most of us in the developed world, hanging on to the comfortable life we have, or aspiring to more and more material goods, may be a spiritual problem. How much is enough? Are we too concerned with our financial affairs to notice the one thing that is missing?

I don’t know about you, but I’ve never met a monk or nun who seemed bitter about their lack of possessions. Over 30 years of ministry, I’ve known plenty of people who are poor, at least in a First World sense, but who praise God daily for the things they have – their families, their health, their faith. Conversely, I have met a lot of wealthy people, and some of them have sat lightly to their riches, given them away generously, and found a sense of peace and meaning in their lives that had nothing to do with money. Others have been consumed with anxiety and envy and have lived restlessly and unhappily.

What is the one thing we lack? Or in a positive framing, what is the one thing needful? As the examples from scripture show, it may be different for different people. It’s a deeply personal question. Spiritual directors often ask it: What is your heart’s desire? St Augustine answered it in the famous words in his Confessions, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our

heart is restless until it rests in you.” And he had some regrets about his rich and careless youth, which kept him from baptism until his thirties. He wrote, "Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved You. And see, You were within and I was in the external world and sought You there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely created things which You made. You were with me, and I was not with You.”

Augustine’s Christian life began in what was middle age in his time, but what a fruitful life it turned out to be. For many of us, the questions about meaning and desire only surface in mid-life, when we have tackled many of the tasks of adulthood. The work of our hands may have prospered, we may have found contentment in personal relationships, we may be fortunate enough to have a satisfying career. Or perhaps our personal life has come unstuck or our work has not been fulfilling, and we may have made big changes in those areas. But the question remains: What one thing is lacking? What do I still need? Why does my heart remain restless?

I find it fascinating that so many people in rich societies are turning to this question after years of adult striving. The BBC series called Pilgrimage follows groups of celebrities who put on their walking boots and open themselves up the experience of travelling traditional routes to holy sites. The mediaeval route of the Camino to Santiago de Compostela is today walked or cycled by nearly half a million people every year, and pilgrimages to Rome, Canterbury, Walsingham, Iona, Lindisfarne and many less well-known destinations are growing in popularity all the time.

After the post-service coffee, I’ll be sharing some of my own experiences of walking the Camino nearly 20 years ago, and my more recent connections with St Albans Abbey, where every visitor is treated as a potential pilgrim and the heart of the cathedral is the restored shrine of Britain’s first martyr.

It is possible of course to go on a pilgrimage as a sporting or cultural holiday, or simply to have some sociable exercise with a group of people who may become new friends, but it is hard to escape the questions that every such long-distance walk poses. Why is there a pilgrimage-shaped hole in your life? What is driving you to make this journey? And how are you hoping to be changed by this experience? Are you prepared to be challenged and surprised?

The rich man in Mark’s gospel wasn’t ready yet. He turned and walked away, and Jesus let him go. But we don’t know the end of his story. Perhaps he heard the gospel preached after the resurrection of Jesus, and like St Augustine, his heart was still restless, and he turned away from his comfortable life to seek the one thing needful after all.

Perhaps we are still feeling spiritually restless and wondering if the one thing most needed is missing from our lives. We shouldn’t worry if that is the case. It will always be true in a way for every living person. If we felt we had everything we needed, we would no longer thirst

for the nearer presence of God. We are in a sense all pilgrims until we reach our eternal home and see God face to face.

We have to keep confronting the paradox that the readings for today set before us. We want to prosper and be safe and happy in this world. But our deepest need is to be at home with God, and that may mean leaving many of the securities of this life behind. Let us not be afraid to admit this contradiction and follow where our restless hearts may lead us.

The Revd Prebendary Marjorie Brown

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
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Sermon – 21st Sunday after Trinity

20th October 2024

All Saints' Marseille and Aix-en-Provence

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

In our culture, there exists a fascination with success and greatness. We yearn to know who is the "greatest of all time" – whether artist, athlete, musician, or president. "Vanity of vanities," says Kohelet, the wisdom teacher. "What has been is what will be, [...] and there is nothing new under the sun."¹

For centuries, philosophers have wrestled with the concept of glory-seeking, each offering their insights. Plato saw the pursuit of glory as an intrinsic part of the human soul, while Thomas Hobbes viewed it as a tool for social advantage and power.² Jean-Jacques Rousseau identified it as a weapon in the self-made man's arsenal,³ the most glaring modern-day example being the celebrity culture. For Jean-Paul Sartre, the quest for glory offers a response to existential angst, helping us to believe that we matter.⁴ Consider the relentless self-promotion on social media platforms like X, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. We seek the secrets of highly successful people and, if we cannot attain greatness ourselves, we hope at least to bask in the reflected glory of those who have succeeded – hoping, perhaps, that some of their success might rub off on us.

¹ *Ecclesiastes 1.2, 9*

² *Hobbes, The Leviathan*

³ *Rousseau, Discourse on The Origin of Inequality*

⁴ *Being and Nothingness*

This week's Gospel reading recounts what may be the boldest and most presumptuous request in the New Testament. "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you. Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." The request is made by James and John, two brothers who have left their father Zebedee's fishing business to follow Jesus. Their request is made immediately after Jesus has foretold his disciples, for the third time, of his impending betrayal, suffering, and death at the hands of the political powers in Jerusalem. Yet, instead of acknowledging Jesus' forewarning of suffering and death, James and John remain fixated on their vision of the kingdom Jesus announces, very much like the structures of human power and authority they know so well and are submitted to. They imagine a triumphant scene when the Messiah will enter Jerusalem, and they seek to secure their places of power beside him – as his closest advisors, his second-in-command.

Although "glory" may not be a word we frequently use today, we can easily recognise what James and John, in an astonishing act of audacity, are asking for: prestige, fame, honour, renown, and applause. They seek unique access to Jesus' power and glory, not only desiring these things, but believing themselves entitled to them. Their ambition rouses the indignation of the other disciples, who fear that James and John might gain an advantage over them.

It is tempting to laugh at or to dismiss the two brothers as naive, immature and self-serving. But Jesus does not react with scorn, he takes their request seriously, asking "What is it you want me to do for you?" He addresses their desire for power and prestige, then comments on the nature of human power – the very power that will soon crush him in his trial and execution – and on the meaning of his death. Jesus redefines power and greatness, setting his life and death,

as well as the lives and sufferings of his followers, in direct opposition to worldly notions of power.

In doing so, Jesus overturns – again - the common pattern of human behaviour. True greatness, he teaches, is not found in domination, political manoeuvring, or the pursuit of personal glory. Instead, is found in self-sacrificial service to others. To be great is to be a servant. This certainly defies all conventional wisdom and human expectations. While earthly greatness is measured by how much power one wields over others, divine greatness is measured by how much one serves others. Jesus' entire life, his teachings, death, and resurrection stand as a demonstration of the true nature of greatness. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

James, John, and the other disciples struggled to grasp that in the kingdom of God, service is not a means to an end - it is the end itself. To serve is to experience glory. A few weeks later, Jesus would take off his outer garment, tie a towel around his waist, and kneel to wash the disciples' feet. "Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first must be slave of all." Glory, by Jesus' definition, is not an accumulation of privilege but the continual outpouring of oneself in love and service to others.

The call to servanthood is to all of us, not merely to the few. Are we, too, a servant church?

Henri Nouwen, a Dutch-born Catholic priest, professor and spiritual writer, achieved significant success as an academic, teaching at prestigious institutions such as Yale and Harvard Divinity Schools. Yet, he later left academia to live in one of the L' Arche communities,

together with adults with serious developmental disabilities. This experience his understanding of success and leadership, inspiring him to write *In the Name of Jesus*, a small book called which reflects on the paradoxical nature of Christian leadership and greatness. Nouwen observed that “one of the greatest ironies of the history of Christianity is that its leaders constantly gave in to the temptation of power,” whether political, military, economic, or even moral and spiritual - “even though they continued to speak in the name of Jesus, who did not cling to his divine power” but came to serve. Perhaps, Nouwen suggests, this is because “it seems easier to be God than to love God, easier to control people than to love people, easier to own life than to love life.”

The thirst for power and privilege lies at the heart of our human brokenness. Yet, in God’s kingdom, the path to true success lies in relinquishing our claims to privilege. Our faithfulness to Christ is measured by our willingness to serve. The more we serve, the more we become attuned to God’s presence. Above all, when we serve those who have nothing to offer in return. Though the world may scorn these humble acts of service, it is through such seemingly weak means that God’s work is accomplished.

In a few weeks, we will enter the season of Advent, preparing our hearts to contemplate a God who entered humanity as a helpless baby, a God whose greatest displays of power included riding on a donkey, washing dirty feet, and dying on a cross. This is the God of ‘kenosis’, of emptying himself of all privilege, pouring himself out and surrendering his own life for his loved ones. He is the God who turns to each of us and asks, “What is it you want me to do for you?” May we find the courage to make this question our own and turn to the world asking, “What is it you want me to do for you?”

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 21st Sunday after Trinity

20th October 2024

Eglise du Sacré-Coeur, Oppède

Jane Quarmby, Reader

Today we celebrate the harvest – the gathering in of what has been planted. A big day for those who grow crops, after the uncertainty of the weather, the hard work, and finally the getting in of the crops ready for processing, storing and eating. On many farms it's a big relief and reason for a party.

Nowadays, harvest doesn't just happen in the autumn. Crops are grown year round in poly tunnels, animals raised in barns, food is flown in from all over the world, dried, frozen or fresh. We can buy strawberries for Christmas Day. People living in cities are used to having everything on their doorstep – if you need coriander at 8 in the evening in London, you just nip out and buy it.

But the downside of this is that the vast majority of the world's population live in cities and are remote from the process of growing their food. Many have no idea where it comes from, and what's involved. They don't see the fields of sunflowers, vines and corn that we see here in the countryside of Provence. Friends and family of ours think we are ever so slightly strange in growing our own vegetables and horrified that we eat chickens and sheep that we have raised ourselves.

As fewer farmers grow more crops, and people become more urban, and ever greater in number; the very soil itself has been poisoned by chemicals, ever larger harvesting machines hold up impatient camper vans on the roads, and we ourselves ingest plastics that we have carelessly thrown away – plastic is in our water, in the soil and the food we eat. However, providing we have the money in the affluent West, we can eat and drink whatever we like, when we like.

Have the words we heard today in our readings come true? Joel with his promise of plenty to eat for all; the Psalm with its words of "sow in tears, reap with joy"; Paul saying be content with the food and clothing you have because

the “love of money is a root of all evil”, and Matthew’s words from Jesus telling his hearers not to worry about what they will eat, drink or wear, because God knows they need them and its more important to strive first for the Kingdom of God. Even the Lord’s Prayer contains the words “Give us this day our daily bread”. And here in our part of the world, we have all the choice in world.

We have so much choice that we actually waste a lot of what is available to us. I read recently that there is pub in Cornwall which offers a carvery where you can eat as much as you like, which has now started charging for wasted food. People pile their plates high and leave it uneaten so it has to be thrown away. The manager estimates that they have to cook enough for 200 people to feed only 100 people. And so now they charge. In France 10 million tons of food is thrown away annually – which has a value of 16 billion euros. In my gardening magazine this month readers have written in to say what they do with a glut of fruit and vegetables. They were making great efforts not to waste it, so they make soups, sauces, jams, freeze fruit and vegetables to conserve, swap their excess with neighbours, or give their bumper crop away to neighbours if they can. Only one person wrote to say that he takes all his excess produce to the local food bank, to be given to the needy who rarely get fresh fruit or vegetables.

And all this is in a world where the World Health Organisation estimated that in 2021, 828 million people were affected by hunger.

Every year it's estimated that of the 100 billion garments produced each year, 92 million end up in landfill. There’s a movement now to recycle old clothes, to treat garments with respect and mend them rather than throw them away. But most of cheap fashion ends up in landfill.

Perhaps we need to look at what our harvest is? What do we have to show for our labour? If we don’t grow our own food, what do we contribute to the world? In our last very rural parish, we only saw the farmers in church at Harvest Festival, when they lugged in old ploughs and a big sheaf of corn. But our little community also had residents who didn’t work on the land, who brought in laptops, model lorries and other signs of their work. In a church on Coventry, a Rolls Royce engine took pride of place in church because that was where most of the worshippers worked. So just because we don’t all drive a combine harvester, we do still have a harvest – through our work, whether paid or voluntary, through our interaction with other people, through what we do for other people and how we live.

We can make responsible choices about what and how much food we buy, look at where it comes from – think about the transport costs and try and buy local, think about the amount of clothes we buy and how long we keep them for - try and recycle them when they no longer warrant space in our wardrobe, pay a fair price for goods and services, and share our bounty with others. Play our part in reducing plastic, make a fuss about it being buried or dumped at sea where it pollutes the entire food chain and kills God’s creatures. We are collecting today for Les Restos du Coeur – why do we only do it on one day of the year?

God gives with both hands to us, and an important part of all our readings today is about giving thanks to him and being content with what we have been given. I know how peeved I am when children in our family don’t say thank you for a Christmas or birthday present – how much more annoyed would I be if I gave someone life itself and they never said thank you? This service is all about giving thanks to God for the many things he has given us which we do in word and song. But Jesus gives us a cautionary note – don’t worry about food, drink, and clothing – worry about entering the Kingdom of God. Because once we do put God first, and live our lives accordingly, everything else will follow. That needs faith, to trust to that extent, and perhaps that involves some soul-searching and effort. But Jesus tells us that God knows what we need and if he can create beautiful flowers, and feed even tiny birds then what more will he do for us. So next time we say the Lord’s Prayer, let’s think about just asking for enough for today. As Paul warns: be content with the food and clothing you have because the “love of money is a root of all evil”.

And thank God every day for what he has given us – as the old prayer before meals goes – “For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful.” Or should we say “For what we have received, may the Lord make us truly thankful.”?

Amen.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Last Sunday after Trinity

27th October 2024

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Jamie Johnston, Chaplain

Before she was ordained, the Bishop of London, Dame Sarah Mullally, was the Chief Nursing Officer for England. I recall her preaching a sermon about the questions Jesus sometimes asks when people come to him for healing. In the Fourth Gospel, there's a man who has been ill for thirty-eight years, to whom Jesus asks: 'Do you want to be made well?' The answer may seem obvious, but Bishop Sarah said it reminded her of working on the accident and emergency wards of a London hospital, when people suffering from addiction would come in late at night seeking medical help. She often wondered what it was that had triggered that moment, the moment when they suddenly said: 'This needs to change.' It was, said Bishop Sarah, one of the most moving things about being a nurse, witnessing that moment in someone's life, watching a doctor set them on the road to recovery, with love and encouragement. 'Do you want to be made well?'

In our Gospel reading today, the question Jesus asks Bartimaeus is: 'What do you want me to do for you?' Again, the answer may sound obvious, but Jesus invites Bartimaeus to name his vulnerability – 'let me see again'. There are other

dimensions to the question too. For in this miracle story, like the others, there are many layers.

What do we know of Bartimaeus? We know that he wasn't born blind, as he asks Jesus to help him see 'again'. But his acquired condition has left him destitute, outcast, begging by the roadside. He has hit rock bottom (the place from which a person battling addiction often begins their journey towards recovery).

The man who had been ill for thirty-eight years replies to Jesus's question 'Do you want to be made well?' by saying that he can't access healing because he can't get quickly enough into the pool of Bethesda - the pool that was thought to have healing properties for the first person to get in after the water was stirred up. That story touches on a tendency in all of us, when facing a choice that might help us change, to say 'well of course I would, but...'. Not feeling able to let go of the props we feel we must hold onto.

Some commentators have seen Bartimaeus's cloak as such a prop. The cloak was his only protection, possibly his only possession. It would have been wrapped around him against the cold of a Jericho winter. It would have been spread out on the ground to receive alms, his only livelihood. He might have held onto it tightly. Yet when he hears that Jesus is calling him he springs up, 'throwing off his cloak'. How different from the rich young man earlier in this chapter of Mark's Gospel, who couldn't let go of his possessions. Bartimaeus comes to Jesus with empty hands, ready to receive.

‘What do you want me to do for you?’ If we think back to last week’s Gospel, we have heard those words of Jesus before, when James and John came asking for prime places in the Kingdom – status, glory, fame. Bartimaeus answers with just four words: ‘let me see again’. He longs for renewed vision, and all that would come with it – wholeness, acceptance, inclusion, a future.

Mark’s story highlights Bartimaeus’s insistence, his own agency in his healing. The divine will somehow needs our human will to cooperate. There is call and response, almost in circular motion. Jesus is there to heal. He also responds to the call of human pain. Bartimaeus has been calling Jesus. Jesus now calls Bartimaeus, and Bartimaeus responds in turn.

‘Go’, says Jesus, ‘your faith has made you well.’ But Bartimaeus doesn’t ‘go’ – instead, he follows Jesus ‘on the way’. In its earliest years, the ‘Way’ was the word used to refer to the Christian faith. The way of the cross, but also the way to life, resurrection and new creation. Being made whole. Being made well. That’s what salvation meant to the earliest hearers – in Greek, the word for wellness and salvation is the same.

The healing of Bartimaeus is the last miracle story in Mark’s Gospel, just before Jesus arrives at Jerusalem and the passion narrative begins. It’s the climax to a theme important to Mark, that of spiritual blindness and sight. Jesus’s teaching about the nature of his messiahship is complete, but the disciples are still only half seeing, as their quarrelling about supremacy in the last scene showed. By contrast, Bartimaeus immediately recognizes Jesus as the Messiah: ‘Son of David, have mercy on me’. Until now, Jesus has told anyone who thinks he is the Messiah not to speak of it. But he allows Bartimaeus to shout it.

The healing of Bartimaeus is a story of transformation. At the end of this service, we will sing the hymn 'Amazing Grace', written by the former slave trader John Newton. In it, Newton writes of the power of grace that turned his blindness into sight. Transformation through following Christ is liberating, a change from being self-centered to becoming centered on God and others. The giving way of blind eyes and a closed heart to compassion and hope.

One more layer. Bartimaeus is the only person healed in Mark's Gospel who is named. Some say there is significance in this. His name is 'son of Timaeus'. The surrounding culture in which these events are taking place is Greek. The Greek philosopher Plato had written a dialogue called Timaeus, which would have well known to some of Mark's hearers. In it, Plato wrote that sight was the source of the greatest benefit, because when we contemplated the heavens it led us to philosophy, which for him was the greatest good 'ever given to mortals'. So perhaps at one level Mark is saying: this good news is beyond Plato, this good news is better than philosophy - following in the Way.

The Gospels were written looking back at the crucifixion and asking: 'was this good news?' Mark's unequivocal answer is yes. He contrasts Jesus's liberating, radical message of love with the spiritual and moral blindness of the religious authorities with whom he was so often in dispute. The blind man begging beside the road 'gets' it. The authorities don't. The disciples do some of the time, but then they get weighed down by the props of status and position. But this man has none of that. That's why he is remembered. Blind Bartimaeus understands and trusts the upside-down kingdom of God.

When we come to the Eucharist, like Bartimaeus we come with empty hands, ready to receive. And what we receive is everything. Through Scripture, sacrament, in fellowship within the body of Christ, what we receive is God's own self to nourish us. Not because we deserve it, but because that is what God is like. A God who in Christ meets us where we are and says, 'What do you want me to do for you?' Overflowing with love, now and forever. And that *is* good news.

Amen.