

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**  
**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**  
**Sermon – Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity – Bible Sunday**  
**26<sup>th</sup> October 2025**  
**All Saints' Marseille**  
*The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain*

Last Thursday, an ecumenical service of prayer was held in the Sistine Chapel, on the occasion of the state visit of King Charles to the Vatican. While watching, I found myself smiling at how much Scripture was there. The Psalms were sung; the British Foreign Secretary read from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans; and the Choirs of the Chapel Royal and St George's Chapel, Windsor, sang Tallis's *If ye love me* — words from John's Gospel set to music of luminous simplicity.

Readings, prayers, music – and Michelangelo's frescoes arching over them all – Scripture everywhere. The Word proclaimed, sung, painted, prayed.

For each of those gathered there – the Pope and the Monarch, diplomats and clergy, Swiss Guards and choristers – the Bible must have meant something personal, beyond their role or office: a source of truth, or comfort, or mystery; a word that has met them somewhere along the road of life.

Perhaps this is a question for each of us today, on Bible Sunday: what does the Bible mean to me?

For some, the Bible is the beloved book which has accompanied them through the seasons of life; for others, the book of the knowledge of

God — the repository of eternal and saving truth, a life-changing book in its spiritual power. In its pages we find the record of the many ways in which God has revealed himself to humankind as the God of love. Many will remember familiar verses that have brought relief in dark times.

Each reader develops a personal relationship with this collection of texts — filled with intensity and excitement, with drama and poetry — whose words that challenge, provoke, and inspire us every day of our lives.

We open the Bible because of our search for truth, our need of love, our quest for meaning. And in opening it we find that it is not only we who are searching — but God who seeks us and speaks to us through these living words.

What does the Bible mean to the world today, especially in our increasingly secularised West?

For some, perhaps not very much — a few familiar words at Christmas, a solemn reading at Remembrance Sunday; a book that gathers dust on the shelf. For others, it remains a source of comfort or curiosity, a text that has shaped so much of our civilisation. Many cannot forget that it has been used to bring peace and to justify war, to proclaim freedom and to defend oppression.

Some will see the Bible as subversive. The Word of God has always unsettled those who seek to control hearts and minds. It speaks too freely, too directly. It makes no distinction between rich and poor, learned and unlearned. It judges the proud and consoles the humble. In that sense, it is a dangerous book — one that, in every age, breaks

through complacency and challenges assumptions. It reveals a God whose Word cannot be confined: no chains, no censorship, no ideology can silence the voice of the living God.

Even for those who no longer claim faith, the Bible continues to speak through art and culture: through Leonardo's *Last Supper*, through Handel's *Messiah* and Bach's *Passions*, through Chagall's dreamlike visions and the poetry of Victor Hugo or Paul Claudel.

If engaging with Scripture is essential for us – in our worship, our thinking, our praying — how can we make a case for its relevance in a world that moves so swiftly, and speaks so many different languages of meaning? How can our generation awaken in children and young people a desire to engage with the Bible, to discover that these ancient words still breathe?

*“The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword...”*<sup>1</sup> It pierces through pretence and illusion; it lays bare the truth of who we are. The readings set before us this Bible Sunday show that living word at work — exposing pride, sustaining faith, revealing God's justice and mercy.

In the book of *Ecclesiasticus*, we hear of a God who shows no partiality, who listens to the prayer of the humble and gives ear to the cry of the poor. Here Scripture becomes the voice of the voiceless, the defender of the oppressed. It reminds us that the Word of God always takes the side of justice, and that true worship is inseparable from compassion.

In Paul's second Letter to Timothy, we glimpse the apostle near the end of his race — a life sustained by the Word that has guided and guarded

---

<sup>1</sup> *Hebrews 4.12*

him, a companion and witness, a source of courage in trial and of hope in the face of death.

And in the Gospel, the Word of God becomes a mirror to the human heart in a parable of deceptive simplicity. Our Pharisee divides the world between the righteous and the unrighteous, and wants to detach himself from the sinful mass of humankind. “God, I thank you that I am not like other people.” Perhaps many of us pray like him, in subtler ways, more often than we realise — the prayer that proclaims our own righteousness.

The tax collector, by contrast, knows he has no righteousness to claim. He can only recognise his own need, and stake his hope entirely on the mercy of God. “O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” Those few words have inspired one of the most ancient prayers of the Church — the Jesus Prayer, or the Prayer of the Heart: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”

To pray it is to recognise one’s own brokenness, to accept that God is our only hope and only help. It is to discover that, even amid the turmoil and chaos of our lives, God is at work — bringing order out of disorder, life out of death.

In these readings, Scripture lives — not as a relic of the past, but as a voice that still speaks, a light that still searches, a word that still transforms.

Across the centuries, people have laboured to bring that same Word into every human tongue. Each new translation is an act of faith and humility — the Word stooping down into human speech, just as Christ stooped down into our humanity.

I recently encountered familiar words from Luke's Gospel in the *First Nations Version*, a translation for the Native peoples of North America. It was love at first sight. Jesus' words encouraging his disciples to pray — *"Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you"* — are rendered like this: *"Every step is a prayer. Keep dancing your prayers and the Way will open before you."*

Every step is a prayer. The Bible continues to speak with fresh voices, through the rhythms of every culture and the cadence of every people. So, engage with the Bible. Read it. Meditate with it. Debate about it. Enjoy it. It is a unique gift — a book that has endured for millennia because its author is still speaking.

May we not only read the Scriptures, but let the Scriptures read us — until we, too, are shaped into the likeness of the Word made flesh.