

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 5th Sunday after Trinity

30th June 2024

All Saints' Marseille (via Zoom)

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Have you ever felt bombarded by pleas from charities for giving? They seem to be everywhere – on TV, radio, magazines, e mails, for everything from homeless people to children needing surgery or clean water to neglected animals. It can seem overwhelming at times and difficult to see how my £2 a month can make any difference. Which ones to support? Oh to win the Lotto and give millions to make a real difference. But then I remember that I'm not on my own in this – there are indeed millions of people relatively well off and if everyone gave £2 a month to their selected charities, together we really could make a difference, we could even out the gap between those who have and those who have not. It's a travesty that we complain about the healthcare in our countries when there is none at all in other areas of the world, it's a disgrace that in the West tons of edible food is thrown away whilst people starve. We run clean water in our sinks waiting for the hot water to arrive, whilst others walk miles for dirty water. It's an enormous problem, this divide between the haves and the have nots.

Our Bible readings today might seem disconnected from that, but there's a theme of giving and giving generously in Mark and Paul.

In our Gospel reading, we have two examples of the generosity and self-giving of Jesus, in healing people. Reading about all the times that he healed people from all walks of life, it's easy to assume that it was some kind of magic, that it cost him nothing to do – he only had to look at someone it seems and they would be healed. But I don't think that's so – he felt a drain on his energy when the woman touched his cloak. His healing came with intense prayer from him, from intense effort and concentration. There are it is said, two types of people, those who give out energy to others, and those who drain energy from others. Supporting, counselling, nursing, just listening and empathising all takes energy

– after a day of listening to other people’s problems and hardships, it can seem as though every last ounce of energy has been leeched away. The giver has to recharge their batteries and Jesus did that through time alone in prayer – but not strictly speaking alone. His prayers and time without others around him was spent in communion with God, the source of his energy and power.

Having just invested in an electric car and come up against all sorts of problems with our eccentric Provençal electric wiring system, I now have an even greater appreciation of how important it is for us, like Jesus, to have a direct cable plugged in to God, to recharge our batteries. Thankfully that isn’t as complicated as rewiring your house, but it does take discipline and time to go away on our own and plug into that bottomless well of energy and power. If not, like my lovely shiny car, we’ll come to an abrupt halt somewhere highly inconvenient.

Jesus gave extravagantly and willingly to all who needed him, whether by healing anyone and everyone who asked or even those who were too shy or embarrassed to ask, by teaching, by leading by example, by feeding vast crowds of people, and ultimately giving his life for us to rescue us from death. True self sacrifice, the ultimate generosity. And all done on his part without self advertisement, quietly without any conceit or need for praise.

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, also talks about giving and gives us an object lesson. He’s writing to a church which is in really good shape, blessed with all sorts of gifts, working well on the surface, one that has made great strides in his absence. But it appears to be functioning on its own, happy in its own busy workings and looking after itself. It seems to have forgotten that it is part of a greater church, and Paul is reminding the people there that they began with great enthusiasm, and have an abundance of skills, knowledge and faith, but they need to look outside their own cosy environment to other groups within the overall Christian community who aren’t doing as well. Specifically he is referring to the community in Jerusalem which is poor and in need of financial support. Was there some kind of discrimination I wonder – the Corinthians were a mostly Gentile group, whereas that in Jerusalem was made up of Jews who had decided to follow Christ. Or were they just wrapped up in their own world? Whatever the reason, Paul wasn’t afraid to ask them to make good on their early enthusiasm and help out their fellow less fortunate Christians, to have greater awareness that they weren’t the only Christian group and their responsibilities included supporting other communities. Regardless of ethnicity, they were all Christians. He urges them to give generously and cheerfully, not to the point of

impoverishing themselves, but to share their wealth. He assures them that his envoys who are coming to collect their donations are upright, honest and trustworthy, so they could be confident their money would be going to where it should.

That letter was written nearly 2000 years ago but the sentiments are so of today – so many churches are focused on their own communities, on keeping afloat, of keeping the roof on, that they fail to look outside and recognise those in even greater need. People, often with good cause, are suspicious of charities – they want their money to go where it should, not be siphoned off into employees' pockets or corrupt governments. We perhaps, as I mentioned, are suffering from too many requests for financial help and in the clamour of cries for help get so bewildered that we end up not giving at all to anyone. Others dedicate their lives and all that they have to helping others and they are truly a blessing wherever they are. You may have heard of Marlene Engelhorn, a young Austrian who has inherited 25 million euros from her grandmother and is busy giving it away to good causes via a panel of strangers.

Paul's message is realistic – he isn't asking for the world, he knows people still need to live. But he does ask for cheerful givers – people who realise how well off they are and willingly share what they have with others less fortunate. His message is timeless and applies just as much to us as it did to the Corinthians.

God loves a cheerful giver – and we all need as much of God's love as we can get.

Amen.