

## A Reflection from Revd Jane for Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2021 ~ Trinity 2

Over the last fifteen months there is a word that has come up many times – a 6 letter word that we have heard many times. CHANGE. Change – a word we don't like very much...change **something** that we don't like very much. We have seen huge changes in our lives - not just us but the whole world and I don't know about you, but it seems to me the changes haven't finished yet.

There was of course the change Brexit brought about - and which we are still seeing being played out. There are the changes that Covid has brought - things that we would never have expected to see. And there are other things we see that bring change too. We have seen massive changes in technology, massive changes in shopping and the High Street. Places that we have known and loved, shopped in for many years, suddenly they are no more. We have seen people walk on the moon, seen technology and things like social media just take off. How much longer will we need cash? All kinds of things, affecting all walks of life

Perhaps that is the crux of the matter - the fear of the unknown, the fear of something that we have no control over. Change can be unnerving, unsettling, leaving us feeling shaken by what has happened and what is coming. We are often resistant to change because we like things as they are, it's comfortable, we feel secure and safe...why does change have to come? Perhaps some of you don't like it when we speak about the church needing to change...new wineskins for new wine.

Throughout the Bible we see change, but as it says in Daniel 2, it is the Lord who is the Lord of the times and the seasons – he knows the changes that are coming, and amidst all the change, he is faithful and unchanging. Hebrews 13 says 'Jesus, the same yesterday, today and forever'. Before time, in time, and after time – throughout all ages, God never changes. He is faithful and steadfast. He is the rock on which we stand, his word the rock on which we build our lives. When everything is being shaken **he** is not... and when we stand on him we aren't either. We put our hand in his and let him lead us on.

In our Bible readings we see the enormous changes that were facing people. As we look at the book of Acts, we see the good news of Jesus spreading and starting to be made known to the Gentiles. Philip was guided by the Spirit to speak to the Ethiopian Eunuch and now, in chapter 10 we have the story of Peter going to the house of Cornelius. Cornelius was not just a gentile - he was part of the Roman military - part of the occupying force in Israel. Peter must have been aghast - God couldn't possibly want anything to do with Cornelius!!

This whole story from Acts is fascinating as we watch both Peter and Cornelius being guided by the Lord - Cornelius is told by God to send for Peter and tells Cornelius where to find Peter. Peter has visions that prepare him to go with the men that Cornelius sends. As Peter starts to proclaim the good news of Jesus to the household of Cornelius - as he speaks about the life, mission, death and resurrection of Jesus, a door is opened that allows the Presence of Jesus to come in - to come into the hearts and lives of those listening.

As Peter declared that **everyone** who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins, so the Holy Spirit fills those gathered there and they begin speaking in tongues. A replica of what happened to the Jews who had gathered in the upper room at Pentecost.

But, not only had the Holy Spirit come to Gentiles, but they had also not been baptized...Everything about this was completely different to anything that had happened before and demanded a complete mind shift. And so began a major shift, a major change, in the Church's ministry. The unavoidable evidence that the invitation to the Kingdom was open to all made them have to change. We have to understand what a huge mind shift this was for the disciples - this was absolutely massive for them. Jews had always been God's chosen people - they were kept separate, apart, but through Jesus the

way had been opened up for all to come to the Lord. Jesus had already turned the disciples' world upside down - now he was doing it again.

And as we look at this story in Mark we see this same challenge made to us. Mark has already taken us on an action packed journey with Jesus. Just in chapter 3 alone, Jesus has healed a man who had a withered hand; to the crowd that followed, he had proclaimed the good news of the Kingdom and signs and wonders had then followed - healing and deliverance; then he had appointed the twelve, and now, coming back down the mountain, he went into a house to get something to eat. Yet Jesus couldn't even do that because of the crowd that gathered again outside.

And the question that this passage asks us is - Who is Jesus? This I believe is a question that every single person has to answer and will have to answer, and it is a constant question of Mark. Who is Jesus? Who do **you** believe Jesus is?

There are 3 sets of people here to answer this question. Firstly his family - at this stage, they thought he was insane - out of his mind - and his mother, brothers and sisters arrive to take charge of him. Secondly, there are the religious leaders. The teachers of the law, thought he was evil, a man possessed by Beelzebub, having an impure spirit. And thirdly there are his disciples, whom he had just appointed, who believed in him and who we know from the other gospels, believed him to be the Messiah.

And as we read God's word and encounter this Jesus, there is **no** evidence of a Jesus who **didn't** claim deity for himself, and who certainly never claimed to be one of many deities either. As Chris Tiegreen says, instead we find that He implicitly claimed to be the one true God, even taking the 'I am' name for himself. He wasn't just a religious teacher, or a philosopher or a role model... he regarded himself as more than all that. As Colossians says, the invisible God became visible – Jesus made the unseen God, visible. As it was announced at his birth, God came to us in the flesh.

C S Lewis says, 'The only Christ for whom there is a shred of evidence is a miraculous figure making stupendous claims'. He goes on to say, 'We are faced, then, with a frightening alternative. This man we are talking about either was (and is) just what He said or else a lunatic, or something worse. Now it seems obvious to me that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend; and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God'.

Just as we celebrated Trinity Sunday recently, so we remember that Jesus said to his disciples that he was going to send one who was exactly like him. And so we see that Jesus is exactly like the Father, and the Spirit is exactly like Jesus - 3 in 1 and 1 in 3 - God is his title like Revd, Dr, Mr., Mrs ... but the three persons are Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Intrinsicly joined in a relationship - entwined together, inseparable. But amazingly an invitation to join in this relationship is extended to us through Jesus, and only through Jesus, - one that will reconcile us to the Father, that will cause the Spirit to live in us - the Godhead active in our lives, living in us - joining in the Family of God.

And this is the Family of God - all those who believe in Jesus and who do God's will. Jesus isn't rejecting his family here, but explaining the higher priority of his spiritual relationship to those who believed in him. Relationship in God's family is seen by obedience to him. Jesus sees us as his family and he wants all of us to have a close intimate relationship with him. This relationship is nurtured through the word of God – both by hearing it and then doing it. His words have power to change us. The more time we invest in reading, studying and applying God's words to our lives then the greater the benefit there is for, and in, our lives.

The truth is, we need Jesus. He is our Saviour and Lord and he is always with us and lives in those who believe. Yet we need more of a sense of his Presence in our lives. We need his character and his will to be made manifest in our thinking and behaviour. We need that sense that he is there and that we are operating in His Spirit – we need the Presence of Jesus.

Psalm 86 v 11 says, 'Teach me your way O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name'. A divided heart is our greatest weakness. It has many loves, gets torn in so many different directions, and that is what makes us weak. It causes us to grow casual with God whereas an undivided heart makes us single-minded towards God, putting 'everything at his disposal' as we say in the Covenant prayer. It gives us an attitude of respect and reverence for God – of awe.

Our relationship with Jesus transcends all others - it is above them all. This vision of the family of God is the definition of the Church, and the value of human relationships goes beyond physical to spiritual. Who are my mother? My brothers? My sisters? Those who do the will of God; those who love like Jesus loved because they have his heart, and beat in time to it.

Our decision about who Jesus is has huge consequences. The disciples came to the conclusion he really was the Son of God, the Word made flesh - a man who was God. And it transformed their lives - and turned them upside down. And this same Jesus calls us to be with him today, and appoints us to take his message to the world. ...He will transform our lives too - and turn them upside down if we truly are faithful and obedient to him. Then there really will be no more 'normal' or 'business as usual'... Because we're called to be counter cultural - not successful in the worldly sense but successful in being faithful and obedient to him and to him alone.

Mark takes 3 sets of people and asks 'who is Jesus'? And then he turns to us and asks us 'Who is Jesus?'

Who is Jesus - what is your answer going to be and are you prepared to let it change and transform your life? Amen.