

Sermon for Sunday 23.6.19 Rev'd Jenny Simson

We've got an interesting story in the gospel this morning and it is interesting by virtue of the fact that it is about something that affects us all –and that something is *change*.

One could argue that change is part of life that challenges many of us, because we are - in general terms that is - creatures of habit and as such, there is a certain security in being habitual – change therefore can threaten the security of our lifestyle.

So change for many of us needs to be avoided at all costs – yet in the broader sense, change is something we can't avoid– because in our world, we live in forever changing times.

Since the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the winds of change blew throughout the world like never before. Change began to take place at an amazingly fast rate. It seemed as if we awoke one morning and things were different - we didn't have to wear hats and gloves to church or to the city anymore. Men didn't wear felt hats or carry Gladstone bags to work.

At the pictures we didn't have to stand for the national anthem – God Save the Queen - which was also in the process of change – we didn't have to dance in a certain way anymore – boys didn't have to have short hair and girls could wear jeans.

Phones were changed into flat screens that we carried in our pocket, typewriters changed into computers that corrected spelling mistakes and the prized collection of Encyclopaedia Britannica was sent off to Lifeline because something called *Google* provided us with all the information needed by the simple click of a gadget called a mouse– and with most of these changes we were, and continue to be, simply swept up in an era of changing technology, science, theology and social attitudes that are in some ways more inclusive, aware and accepting.

Now all these “changes” are on the wider scale, which we don't have a great deal of control over. But what about change in an individual sense? Is there any difference between individual and broader corporate change?

Well yes, I believe there is, because individual change is personal. And when things get personal, we do have a certain control over outcome - for our acceptance or resistance is much more at the ready and about personal choice. Perhaps this is a good thing, because personal change can be very disruptive – very disturbing to our very being.

The Christian faith, however is largely about change.

We call it *transformation* and it is part of our salvation – in terms of wholeness, liberation, and forgiveness.

Let's look at the gospel reading today. The demoniac is full of demons – a legion of them. He does not want change - *What have you to do with me – I beg you don't torment me*. He cries out to Jesus. His fear of change is paramount.

Jesus, however, engages with him and in their encounter Jesus does change him – he does transform him. He sends out, and over the edge all that dehumanises him.

The man has his dignity restored. He is clothed in his right mind. He is freed from the chains that held him in bondage, and salvation has come to him in wholeness, liberation and forgiveness.

Understandably because Jesus has done this for him, he wants to stay with Jesus but his request is denied— Jesus tells him to go and witness to what God has done for him.

He is to go out and share with others, for In the Christian faith salvation is both a personal and corporate blessing.

It is for one and the many, as we pray in the Great Thanksgiving Prayer at the Eucharist.

This doesn't mean that salvation will be accepted by everyone - and in the gospel story this is clearly depicted. When people witnessed the transformation of the man they believed was beyond help – they asked Jesus to leave them for they were seized with great fear.

I believe it is helpful for us to remember that in the context of personal change, God carries each person along a different route, because each person is unique. As theologian Ian Matthew writes, *although God's pace is to deliver his goodness to us all at once, it has to become ours at our pace and so little by little.*<sup>1</sup>

An example of this is our baptism- all at once we are at one with Christ in his death and resurrection- in the power of the Holy Spirit who descends upon us – all at once we are cleansed – and all at once we are welcomed into the church, as part of the body of Christ.

All this then has to filter down as ours. And to do this it has to be fundamentally flexible for this alone does justice to the dignity of each person and to the laws of growth, which is a gradual process. God's teaching method is to give himself in a way the person can handle.

God treats us with order, gentleness and in a way that suits the soul. In the first reading from Kings we see an example of this. We read that God is found in the sheer silence. He was not in the great power of wind or the earthquake or the fire.

Now for some, the silence may be silence of the soul – for others it may be silence of an attitude, for others it may be silence of the mind, for others silence of the tongue.

It may be found in different places for different people.

The meaning is flexible, for without this flexibility we tie the verse to a meaning that not everyone can benefit from.

This is the beauty of scripture – in the readings we are gifted the flexibility of the love of God for us. A love that is not rigid nor controlling – but rather patient and gracious.

One that caters to our uniqueness. And one that universally calls us all into transformation.

In the gospel reading today, Jesus crossed the boundaries of separation within humanity when he entered gentile country and cleansed the demoniac. As Paul tells us In Galatians – in Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek slave or free male and female for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Salvation as wholeness, liberation and forgiveness is for everyone.

So for those of us who are comfortable in the security of our usual habits and in fear of change, be reassured that there is one constant in our lives and that is God's love for us. It never changes. It remains closer to us than our own hearts. God initiates our change only for the good and waits patiently for us to accept it and come gradually into its fullness.

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<sup>1</sup> Iain Matthew. *The Impact of God; Soundings from St John of the Cross*; Hodder; London, 1995. P15.

Let us pray;

Dear lord the psalter of long ago reminds us;

As the deer longs for the water brooks, so our souls long for you, o God.

May we be patient with ourselves and with each other.

Help us to let go of our fears and continue to open our hearts and minds to your transforming ways that work for the goodness within us.

In Christ we pray. Amen.