

## Seasons of Change

As we write this, it's a beautiful, warm, sunny day. It's a welcome reminder that summer is really here. Our minds wander to thoughts of barbecues, ice-creams, sitting out in the garden and enjoying the buzz of summer wildlife. Sitting with the warmth of the sun on our faces, we reflect on how nice it would be if we could hold on to this moment, this season, rather than watch the days start to grow shorter, the temperature cooler, the hedgerows quieter, as summer inevitably passes the baton onto autumn then winter.

We reflect on the common human reluctance to accept change, preferring instead the certainty and familiarity of what we have and know now - whether it is our well-practised routines, our friendship groups or even our approaches to Christianity and our relationship with God. We were reminded of a scene in the first episode of the 'Vicar of Dibley' where the villagers were discussing change in respect of the recent arrival of the (in their eyes) highly-controversial female vicar, played by Dawn French. One of the characters comments that things have to change – it is inevitable. Another agrees, saying “Look at traffic lights: if they didn't change there would be terrible congestion. And what about the Changing of the Guard!” “But on the other hand,” says one, “there's gravity – if that changed, we'd all go floating into space.” Their conclusion was there is good change and bad change.

Whether good or bad, there is an understandable tendency to like, and need, the reassurance of the familiar and the security it offers. Change can be frightening, undermining our understanding of the world and our position within it. People have sought to control, or at least make sense of and predict, change as a way of coping since the start of time. Whether through the continuous quest for scientific understanding or simply through our obsessive preoccupation with the weather forecast, we don't want to leave things to chance, but to know what is around the corner as much as we possibly can – to demystify life.

It is not always easy to put our faith in God, to trust that He knows best. We feel maybe that God offers a safety net of last resort, but we need to do everything we possibly can to predict the outcome of a situation or to influence it first, in a way we think is best for us. A, perhaps trivial, example, is a literal leap of faith – a work team-building event. Several years ago, our department visited Go Ape, an aerial assault course high in the trees. Although it involved safety harnesses, at one point we had to launch ourselves off a platform 10m up and jump into a cargo net suspended from another tree. We knew it was safe, with our harnesses, helmets and the safety net below, but still it was petrifying, needing reassurance, checking and rechecking our ropes before we finally, one by one, jumped with our hearts in our mouths into the net which embraced and supported us.

The Bible teaches us that God is steadfast and unchanging in His love for us, but that doesn't mean He is not calling us to change or that the world around us should remain constant. In Hebrews 13:8, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever”. In Ecclesiastes 3, we are reminded there is a season for every purpose under heaven – change is constant. We are challenged to see injustice, to be God's agents of change in the world for the better, and to grow in love and compassion for those who need it most.

Reflecting on the seasons, the inevitability and predictability of the changes (notwithstanding the impact of climate change), there is something reassuring. The lush green leaves of early summer begin to look tired as the summer heat draws on, as they wilt and dry, producing a final spectacular autumn flourish of colour before swirling to the ground, leaving the trees bare and lifeless. But we know that after a few months they will be rejuvenated, the swelling

buds promising new life and renewal, much as God's repeated promise of forgiveness and renewal to every one of us.

On the beach, the sand is gently smoothed away by the endless tides. In Lamentations 3:22-23 we are reminded, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end, they are new every morning."

Without the changing tides, the beach would be crowded with the footprints, sandcastles and the mistakes of yesterday, rather than giving us the opportunity of a blank canvas on which we can start afresh, learning from the experience of yesterday. God's love for us and His forgiveness wipe the sand/slate clean – giving us the gift of change. God speaks to us and challenges us through certain changes, whether changes within our lives or just changing our perspective, changing how we see something familiar in a new light, if we are open to it. Without change, there would be no fresh beginnings. We are certainly not saying all change is positive. However, we can recognise God's work through changes within and around us. With the knowledge that He is with us, helping us to face change and uncertainty, we can be helped to loosen our grip on today and look forward to tomorrow and to support those around us at the same time.

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