



Sermon:-28th February 2016

BEHOLD I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW

If you're a fan of cookery programmes, or even if you're not, you have no doubt heard of Nigella Lawson. Nigella specialises in recipes which taste delicious and can be prepared in minutes. Sadly that means they are also full of calories. However one of her healthier recipes is for green eggs and ham which is basically pesto flavoured omelette with ham. So, as Sam-I-am's friend discovered, green eggs are actually quite tasty.

We can all be a bit anxious about trying something new. We can all be a bit anxious about change. That's why we joke about it.

The other day I came across some jokes about changing a light bulb. There are hundreds of them. How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb? One, but the light bulb has to want to change! How many Christians does it take to change a light bulb?

Three, but they're really only One. And so on and so forth, and there are many others related to church.

How many Pentecostals does it take to change a light bulb? One, their hands are in the air anyway.

How many TV evangelists does it take to change a light bulb? One. But for the message of the light to continue, send in your donation today to the address at the bottom of the screen.

How many Anglicans does it take to change a light bulb? None, they use candles.

How many members of the Church of Scotland does it take to change a light bulb? ... Change? But we've always had that light bulb. It's a perfectly good light bulb. It'll see me out!

Most things are only funny if they have a kernel of truth in them. We joke about change because deep down we don't really like it.

Yet our God is a God of change, a God of surprises. Just when we think we've got it all worked out, just when we think we have got him sussed, just when we have got comfortable ... he changes things. Think of Mary being told she was going to give birth

to the Son of God. Think of Peter being told he could eat things which were, he thought, unclean. I've already indicated that no-one is more surprised than I am over the change of direction that I have recently undertaken.

"Behold I make all things new", God said, and as far as I am concerned, hasn't he just! And like Sam with his green eggs I'm discovering that parish ministry is much more appealing now I've tried it than it looked from the outside!

But although change can be threatening and difficult, it is also necessary for growth. There is no growth without change, and where there is no change there is stagnation.

We know that the Dead Sea in Palestine is too salty to sustain any life at all. It is actually and literally dead. There is no life whatsoever in it. Nothing grows there. Because the water never changes. Water may come in but none goes out and so the result is stagnation and death. Changes are an indication that there is life; they are signs of hope to us. A sign that there is a future.

Contrast the Dead Sea with the Sea of Galilee into and out of which the Jordan River flows. Its shores and its waters are lush and vibrant and teeming with life.

I think the problem, to some extent, is that changes are also challenges. Change, or the prospect of change, challenges us to loosen up our thinking, to look at things in a new way, with a fresh eye, to be prepared to consider accepting what might once have seemed unacceptable.

A friend of mine related a story of an encounter which he had had. He had been invited to speak at a local church which was adventurous and energetic in its style of worship. After a lively, joyful and very well attended service, he was speaking to an elderly gentleman over coffee. "How long have you been coming to this church," my friend asked him. "As long as I've lived in this town," was the answer, "and I've lived in this town for sixty years." "Sixty years is a long time in one church, I bet you've seen a lot of changes", my friend said. "I have indeed," said the old man proudly, "and I've opposed every one of them!" ... I suspect that the life and joy evident in that congregation happened in spite of that old man, and not because of him. Although on a more positive note, it is to his credit that he was still there in the church, in spite of all the change which he seemed to find so uncomfortable.

But why do we have to change? Why can't we just stick with what is known and comfortable? Some change is thrust upon us. Before Sandra left you were not thinking of getting a new minister but her situation meant that you had to face that change. But if nothing is forcing us to change, why should we? Perhaps the clue is in the passage we read today. Why does new wine require new wineskins? Jesus explains that new wine will burst old wineskins and then you will lose both the wineskins and the wine. Is there not a sense in which we are seeing that very principle at work in the church today? We are facing a crisis and it is a crisis of people. People are deserting the church; young people are deserting the church. Every year the equivalent of one congregation disappears from the church in Scotland. The world out there has changed, and if the church does not take that into account, it faces the danger of becoming so irrelevant that it will be as if we are talking a different language. No one will understand us anymore. The wineskins are straining at the seams under the pressure, they are leaking under the strain, and it is time to change old for new before the wineskins burst asunder.

At this point I suspect that some of you might be recalling Peter Neilson's story from the night of the Induction about the session clerk who was asked to speak at his minister's induction into a new parish. The session clerk stepped up to the lectern, looked around at the building and said thoughtfully, "I wonder how much of this will still be standing in a year's time!"

Don't worry. I'm not suggesting that we need to turn everything upside down or tear everything apart. I am very aware that for all of you there has been a recent significant change. And even if I were to do everything exactly as Sandra had done it, it would be different, because I'm different. I'm also aware that there has been a huge change for me in coming into the parish. And all these changes take time to settle down. Change is necessary for life, but too much change too quickly can also be a very bad thing.

However, given that this is the start of a new ministry, given the challenges facing the church at large, as well as the challenges facing us here in Campsie, I think that we do need to consider the prospect of change.

This Sunday, as well as being my first Sunday leading worship as your new minister, is the third Sunday of Lent. Lent is traditionally a time of reflection. It mirrors Jesus' time in the wilderness when I think he was probably reflecting on all that had led him to that

point and all that was still to come. And so perhaps for us Lent should be a time of reflection.

And so our challenge in the next few weeks and months is this. Not to precipitately begin to change things. Rather to consider, reflect and pray: what is God calling us to at this moment in the life of Campsie Parish Church? How does he want us to engage with our community? What are his priorities for our church and our village? And what changes might following these priorities involve?

Those who think deeply and theologically about Mission have a phrase. It's not, "let's take God out to the people outside our walls", rather it's, "let's find out what God is doing outside our walls ... and join in!"

We do need to be brave, we do need to have courage, we do need to be unselfish, and we do need to be prepared to change. But mostly I think we need to trust God. We need to trust that if we take the scary steps outside our front door, that he is already there, waiting to take us by the hand as we encounter those outside our walls and offer them the love of Christ.

As we stand at this moment in time, I believe that God is giving us a vision. I believe that God is calling us into a future that is much greater than we can foresee. I believe that he is challenging our preconceptions, our comfortable acceptance of the way things are. I believe that he is challenging us to trade in our old wineskins for new ones. Can we have the courage to follow him into this new future, to trust him to guide and lead us into the future, to trust him not to let us down as we leave behind the things we hold dear? Can we be prepared to take a risk and discover a new way of being church, a new church for a new millennium? We have already committed to this in principle in our mission statement. Let's consider how that might look in practice.

As we enter this time of new ministry, let's be resolved to be, together, even more faithfully,

"A Voice for Jesus in the Life of Campsie".

Rev Jane Denniston

Campsie Parish Church