

Sunday 25th February 2024

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

Introduction -story I am Henry Finch ([listen here](#))

How often do you stop and listen to your thoughts?

How often do you stop and listen for God?

When Henry was in the beast his thoughts were troubled, until he was quiet and listened to the thoughts around him. Then his thoughts became constructive and creative, and world changing.

Sharing his experience helped others to experience hearing and gave them courage.

Reading Genesis 17:1-7 & 15-16

Reflection

Life was to change a lot for Abram and Sarai, their names to begin with and then they were to have a child, in their old age, and this was to be the sealing of God's covenant that Abraham would be the father of all nations and his offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky. We are a part of that tradition as are all people, we can trace our roots back to the earliest human and for the people of Israel in exile that was very important.

Many today delve into their ancestry to learn of their roots, perhaps looking for someone of note, someone heroic, someone who changed things. How will future generations look back to our time? Where will they find their heroes and gamechangers.

For many in the early church Paul was a hero, and a gamechanger, although initially you would have not expected that. As Saul, he was pretty stuck in his ways, he did not approve of these new followers of the way and actively discouraged them, bullied them even, then he had an epiphany, his own life changing event on the road to Damascus. His eyes were opened although at the time it felt like being blind. He changed his name, just like Abram, and became an ardent exponent of the Jesus way, setting up and encouraging new communities of followers, churches.

Paul was on his own journey and if we read his letters chronologically, which is not the biblical order, then we can see how he changed his mind. Initially he veered towards the law, that was his background it was what he knew, but over time he came to realise that faith was more important and that God's grace was the most important.

We are called to journey in our faith and belief, and to be open to change.

Reading Mark 9:2-8

Reflection

Most of us will have heard that story many times, it crops up in the lectionary multiple times in the year. It is a story about change but what changes? It is a story written from the perspective of an onlooker, it is not told by the three disciples, we read about what happened but I want to ask the question did Jesus change or did the way the disciples saw him change?

A few verses before this reading Jesus asks the disciples who do people say I am, and then he asks who do you say I am? As followers of Jesus we are called to share our perceptions, and to do that we have to be open to change our minds. Church is the place we can encourage each other, it should be one of the places where we are nurtured by people who bring out the best in us but there will be other people who do this also, we need to recognise them and recognise the changes they nurture in us.

We have all watched films where someone changes -The Shipping News tells the wonderful story of one man's transformation from a weak-willed man with low self-esteem who works as an ink setter into a sensitive father, a caring relative, and a talented reporter. Life doesn't come much worse than Quoye's and yet he is transported to another place where slowly he learns to look at things differently. It is not paradise and the people who surround him all have their own problems but whilst they give each other space they also support, encourage and share with each other and Quoye is nurtured into a new way of being.

We have to learn from life's experiences, the disciples certainly changed as a result of the experiences they shared. In the film Groundhog Day the main character Phil Connors talks to Rita in the cafe about living the same day over and over and also talks to two guys at a bowling alley about being stuck in one place and not knowing what to do. Sometimes life can be like that – we feel stuck on a treadmill but God offers a different way to look at things. In the film it takes a while for Phil to realise he has to learn from experience, the transformation God offers happens when we realise we want something different. Sometimes we are forced to see ourselves as others see us, like Scrooge in A Christmas Carol, and we realise we want/need to change.

The world is in shades of grey and then suddenly you see all the colours of God's rainbow just as when Dorothy is transported to the land of Oz. Moved out of the place she knew and experiencing something very different she comes to see home in a different light. When she returns home she is a different person and relates to those around her in a different way.

The church should offer a place to reflect and share. Somewhere we can find space to learn from our experiences, and find pointers to reflect upon the experience of life. Somewhere where we are surrounded by others who struggle as we do, but who encourage one another in the challenge of change and transformation. Sometimes simply being around others who nurture the best in us can move us in our journey. In Star Wars the character Hans Solo has little affinity for the notion of being part of something that offers a different perspective but being around those who practice the Force changes him and opens him to a new way.

We have accepted the call to walk the Jesus way, to offer a different perspective on life, and show a different way to those around us but that walk means change, we must be ready to change our minds, ready to embrace a different approach and ready to let go of preconceived ideas. Are we ready to let that happen?

Three excerpts that offer illumination -

In Hope for the flowers by Trina Paulus, a caterpillar, named Yellow, is seeking to discover what a butterfly is encounters a caterpillar already partially in its cocoon. Asking if he needs help she is told that he has to do this to become a butterfly, she is instantly alert and asks what is a butterfly. The cocooned caterpillar explains it is what she is meant to become, 'It flies with beautiful wings and joins the earth to heaven. It drinks only nectar from the flowers and carries the seeds of love from one flower to another.' Yellow asks how she can become a butterfly and is told, 'you must want to fly so much that you are willing to give up being a caterpillar.' Alarmed yellow asks if that means she must die and the other caterpillar replies, 'yes and no. What looks like you will die but what's really you will still live, life is changed not taken away.' To become what we are meant to be means change, for the world to become the Kingdom means change, change in us.

In the book Who Dies by Stephen Levine the author explores many facets of death. Moving on whether in life or death means embracing change, we have to be prepared to let go. When we cannot be open to alternatives, to change then our vision narrows and the possibilities become limited to what we already know.

In the book *When the heart waits* by Sue Monk Kidd the author tells of a conversation with a friend who has had a breakdown after working to achieve her goal in her business life. She explained to the author that she had 'reached the black bottom'. The author asks what she did then, and her friend explains that she went on retreat but approached it in much the same way that she had approached her business life, it became an all consuming passion until she chanced upon a spider weaving its web. It occurred to her that she had never done something which seemed so irrelevant and she sat on a tree stump and simply watched the spider. As she sat she heard a voice telling her that this was how she was meant to pray, be still and quiet until you see the thing that God is already weaving.

This form of prayer, a waiting stillness is rather like being in a cocoon and just as transformative.

It is not enough to sing joyous hymns and do good deeds (mission), we also have to take a spiritual journey, to allow ourselves to be changed, to be set apart for transformation. If we could ask the disciple's one question it might be 'what was it like to be with Jesus', and the answer might be it was a rollercoaster we were constantly on the move, constantly being changed. The journey of faith is all about embracing change prompted by listening to the stillness that is God.