

Behold I make all things new

You've probably heard all the jokes: how many Baptists does it take to change a light bulb? There are several answers:

10, one to change the bulb and 9 to pray against the spirit of darkness

15, because you need at least 3 committees to approve the decision, and bring potato salad.

How many Baptists does it take to change a light-bulb? Change!

Change is often regarded in Christian circles as a great virtue. The sermon notes and music and prayer provided by our resource magazine for this morning's service, all were talking of the virtue of change. Why is that? If we are going to be lively and progressive and forward looking, then we have to embrace change! But actually, change is not a biblical virtue. The bible never tells us to change. Change is a modern cultural imperative, it has nothing to do with Scripture. In fact, our faith is in a God who does not change! Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday today and forever. Everything already changes, everything changes, but God changes not.

Scripture instead, talks of newness. This week has seen a new start for children all over the country as they go back to school after six weeks of holiday. At the beginning of the week I asked 8 year old, socialite, Willem, how he felt about it. Brimming with excitement he explained how it would be great to see his friends, go to a new class room, and have a new teacher – so he concluded – 'it's going to be really cool'. And immediately, in the background 5 year old 'try-nothing-new' Lewis, could be heard saying, "well it's not going to be cool for me." He really does not like the idea of change – he's had a great summer, been his own boss, and now his freedom is ending and he's entering the unknown. So, "it's not going to be cool for me".

Today's readings are about newness. Much better to talk of newness than of change. Change is something that we achieve – newness is something that we enter. Change is something that can be managed. Newness is something that is beyond our control. Change is something abstract. Newness is something particular and down to earth and concrete.

The question Scripture asks of us is how we cope with newness! What is our response to newness?

Simply to embrace change in the abstract is to be blown here and there by every wind of doctrine. This seems to be to be evident in a desire to have the latest Christian novelty, the latest Christian paperback, the latest Christian discipleship course, the latest Christian outreach material, the latest Christian novelty. The perpetual desire for novelty has already determined that our communal discernment is skew wiff!

On the other hand, when people encountered the Kingdom of God, it was something new and Jesus did call people to repenet – that is, the change the direction in which their lives were heading. And many people would not.

Well both of this evening's readings were about something new that God is doing. The context for both Isaiah and for the book of Revelation, is one of suffering and

oppression in the present. And it is into this present that God's promise comes, the promise of doing something new. In Isaiah, it is the nation as a whole, oppressed by hostile forces from outside, subjugated to idol worship within. Israel could not help itself. The inclination of the human heart is always, ever, only evil. Something had to change, but that change was not going to be generated from within Israel, with good ideas, or schemes, or even religious reform.

The world would be changed by a suffering servant, the agent of God's purposes in the world. Israel was to be, through suffering and vindication, the agent through whom God brought something new to the world.

In Revelation, you have a persecuted sect living under the oppression of an Empire that would assert its power through the strength of military force, and the rhetoric of ideology. And who can oppose the beast? Resistance is futile! But here, there is the promise of a NEW Jerusalem, and the one who sits on the throne promises to make everything NEW.

They are beautiful pictures. And of course, who would not opt for such newness? Who could not celebrate that God is doing a new thing. Who would not want to respond to this change?

Many of you will be aware that there was a tube strike this week. It forced people from underground burrows, out into the daylight. Underground stations provided people who knew their way around London via the underground, with maps showing them how the real world operates! How easy it is to think you know your way around London because you know your way around the underground! How different it is once you have ascended from this subterranean world and onto the streets. You emerge into a strange new world, with natural light, no escalators, everyone travelling in random directions, you actually use your own legs.

And although I suspect that many people will have discovered this week that they can walk through the real world and may reduce their dependence on the underground – many simply cannot wait to go back into the unreal world below ground. Sometimes of course, it is necessary. But often it is not. Often we simply prefer being processed alongside other commuters.

And Plato has reminded us that we like the dark prison of the underground – or the cave as he called it. We don't want to go outside because we are familiar with what is inside. In fact, it takes a miracle to emerge from the caves we inhabit. And yet Jesus tells us to 'stand up and walk'. The tube strike forced people out into the light. The national disasters that struck ancient Israel forced them out their godless city of Zion.

Our priority is not simply to change, but to encounter a life-changing God.

Change in the abstract is just cultural fidgeting, moving the furniture, rearranging the old to make it look new. But there is no genuine novelty here. Novelty requires holiness, otherness, something from beyond, holiness, and holiness requires the Holy Spirit.

But before we are tempted to think – great, I don't have to change, it is important to consider our response to the Jesus Christ who is the same Yesterday, today and forever. His mercy is New every morning, he makes all things New,

Of course, it is easy to be a person who readily wants to embrace change – but actually, when it comes to it – if the change was not something I already wanted to change – I am going to resist it with every ounce of my being. Sure, we can make noise about change – and rejoice in it and point the finger at those who don't like it. And in reality, I can be as resistant to change as any of the stereo-types I mock. Forget change – and instead consider what it means to walk today with the living God who makes all things new!