

20th September

Reading: Ecclesiastes 3: 1 - 13

Sermon: Change

I'm going to be using a word today which some people in Churches the length and breadth of the country and beyond may consider a bad word. It's a six letter word. It's the word 'Change'. It's a word which many people hate to use in the context of Church and yet it is a word which ministers keep using even although many of us don't really like the word all that much either.

However, I heard an interesting story during the week. It began with a question: How many Church Members does it take to change a light bulb? What do you mean 'change'. You can't change that light bulb. That light bulb was given in memory of my Grandmother! My father installed it with his bare hands. He donated his time AND the use of his ladder to do install it. How can you possibly even think about changing it?

Someone else spoke to me during the week about change, about the changes which have taken place in our lifetime and it got me thinking.

My granny used a washing board as indeed did my mum and many of you here. My gran used a mangle. My mum was given a wringer as a wedding present and she thought it was the bees knees and it was certainly a lot lighter and easier to handle than the mangle.

At one stage, my mum had a boiler for doing the washing and in my lifetime, she moved on to a twin tub with

big wooden things to lift the washing out of the machine and into the spinner.

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Then one day, we got an automatic washing machine, possibly a lot later than some other folks because the twin tub still worked. Why change it? But we did eventually and what a difference it made to life.

When my grandpa was young, he went from having a big crystal set before getting a big radio which was replaced in my lifetime by a transistor radio and later by digital radios which we never got because we lived up here. In the meantime, you can get radio stations on your computer or your iPad or your iPhone and on your TV via satellite and no doubt on later technology which is way beyond be.

The point is, we embrace all these things or many of them in our daily lives. We take them into our homes and then get our grandchildren or someone else's teenager to come and explain to us how they work! At times, we get quite excited about new bits of technology and what they can do.

We can take digital photos on our phones as well as on cameras and we no longer even have to print them. We can see them immediately on the screen on our cameras and if we have GPS on our cameras, our laptops will even pinpoint on a map exactly where our photos have been taken. We find it all quite amazing. Well, I do.

Nowadays, we can even shop without leaving the house. We have created robots which can see and then there are those things which fly around in the sky without a pilot. Those things to me are mind blowing, but I have to

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say, some of the technology, like the robots scares us, at least, it scares me, because I think one day we will create a monster. However, much of what is produced we embrace in our daily lives.

And then there are our TVs. We have gone from black and white and a two or three channels, with a testcard when there were no programmes to watch, to 24hr TV and so many stations, we couldn't begin to count them. We can even pause a TV programme now and rewind it while it is on. Amazing!

We throw out the old and we embrace the new, or if you are like me, you keep the old in the loft or in the cupboard just in case! But the world has moved on. We no longer have cows living in the same building. We have new ways of heating our houses which our grans never had. We didn't have central heating when I was growing up. I remember seeing my breath in the bathroom mirror when I went to get washed in the morning before going to school. It was horrendous.

Can you imagine what life would be like if people had refused to embrace new inventions or had stuck with the old methods of treating illness and had refused to embrace the new?

It would have been unthinkable to stay in the past. Even if, at times, people were slightly sceptical or afraid of the changes which were happening, or even resisted them, they still happened and people did in time embrace them. We saw how much easier life could be, not that all changes make life easier or better necessarily.

Why all this reminiscing? Quite simply because I fail to understand why we resist change in our Churches so much and so fiercely, at times, when we embrace it in our homes. Why is God's house so different? If someone said to us that suites were going to be banned and we were going to have to sit on wooden benches in our homes, we would be up in arms and yet some wish to remain sitting on wooden benches in Church. Is it because we believe we need to suffer in God's house? Is it because we believe that there have always been pews in Church because there haven't? At one time, there were no seats at all.

Equally, music wasn't always provided by an organ or even a piano. There were harps and lyres, the instruments of the day. We enjoy when we have the Brass Band here, for example. How would it be if we introduced a different kind of music? Are the hackles going up on the back of your necks already at the very thought of it?

How many of us are still listening to music sung by monks or choose it for social gatherings rather than Scottish music or music by more recent singers, and by that I mean anything from the last 60 or 70 years. What we listen to may not be modern, necessarily, but it is at least from our generation.

If we were subjected to something like Matthew's Requiem at weddings, I suspect most of us would head for the hills! That is not to say that whatever was in the past is bad and to be avoided at all costs. It is, however, to acknowledge that there is a rich variety of music available, not just in the secular world but also for worship.

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Would God not perhaps appreciate hearing something new? Would God not appreciate meeting us and hearing us express what is in our hearts rather than what was in the hearts of people in the nineteenth century, in a language that at times we barely understand. It makes me feel that the Church is stagnating and as we know nothing much can live or thrive in a stagnant pool.

Is that why our Churches are emptying, because we are stuck in past centuries, not even the last century but the ones before that? I know I have gone down this road before from the pulpit and maybe you're fed up hearing about change but change is coming one way or another. The question is will we resist it or will we embrace it and delight in it as much as we delight in the new suite or the new iPhone?

You see, even if we resist it, change will come in ten or fifteen years but it may come with the closing of the doors of the Church. I would like to see us embrace change now to prevent the doors closing. Maybe what is new takes a bit of getting used to but we adapt quickly at home. Why not in Church? The thing is, we don't need to throw out the old to embrace the new. We can combine them and create something different but something which is worthy today of the God whom we worship and whom we praise.

Strange as it may seem, everything the early Church embraced was new. They stepped away from the Jewish traditions and embraced a new way of being which fitted the Christian life and witness in their generation. Can we

dare to do the same so that God is honoured but is also made accessible to those who never darken our doors?

It's not down to me or, at least, it's not down to me alone. For change to happen, we have to consider it and embrace it together. It's not change for change's sake but change for the sake of the Kingdom of which we are a part.

The thing is that when we read Ecclesiastes 3, we see that change is inevitable. There is a time for everything under the sun and although some things from the past return to be retro in the present, things still move on. There is a time to plant and a time to uproot. There is a time to tear down and a time to build up. A time to keep and a time to throw away that old lightbulb.

I face that same challenge as I move house. There is so much I want to keep - the lightbulbs of my life - but sometimes we have to let go and let God. That's where we are as a Church. Are we going to resist what happens in the natural scheme of things or are we going to embrace change, hard as it is, for the sake of God's kingdom in the 21st Century?