

**This Sermon was preached by The Venerable Ian Naylor, The Archdeacon of France,
at the Service of Institution and Licensing of Revd Caroline Sackley
on Thursday 30th January 2014
at La Chapelle Palluau**

A couple of weeks after his Institution and Licensing a priest was at the back of the church, unseen as two members of the congregation came in. Looking round he heard one say to the other sotto voce 'What's he changed this week?' In this month's diocesan letter the Roman Catholic Bishop of Portsmouth writes of a couple who had attended a local church in Portsmouth for a life time. When the time of the Mass was changed from 1000 to 1030 they stopped going. The priest visited them and asked why they were not coming to church anymore. Their answer was that later start of the Mass did not give them enough time to get the Sunday lunch ready. A chaplain in the Navy on going to HMS SULTAN, a shore establishment in Portsmouth, found the chapel chock-a-block with chairs. Before the first Sunday service he had sixty surplus chairs removed to the lay apart store providing some good space for liturgical movement. Sunday by Sunday for the two years that he was there two of the congregation asked him when the chairs were going to be put back.

Now I don't say this to members of the congregation of the parish of All Saint in the Vendee because I have prior knowledge that The Reverend Caroline in the coming week is intending to make radical changes to the furniture in the church. Nor Caroline to warn you that you move a flower vase at your peril, but to wonder if what attracts and keeps some people coming to church in the wider church is the belief that in this constantly changing world the church should be an oasis of unchangeability. As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end in doctrine and belief, in biblical understanding, in the language of the liturgy and where the flower stand is placed. If it is a belief then it is a wrong belief because it is in the nature of the church, as of the world of society, to be constantly evolving, constantly changing and developing as it meets new challenges and engages with knowledge.

Today 30th January 2014 marks officially the beginning of the ministry of The Reverend Caroline Sackley as Priest in Charge of All Saints in the Vendée . It marks the beginning of a new experience of life in this gathered community of Christians here in this parish of All Saints. In Roman mythology the god Janus, from which we get the name of the month of January, is the god of gateways, endings and new beginnings, pivotal points in life He is depicted in art with two heads one facing the past and one looking to the future. There have been significant gateways in our life. Finishing school and starting work, or beginning at university. Changing from being single to being couple. Being uncoupled in divorce or by death. Moving from working life to retirement. Today marks a gateway in the life of this church. One looks to the past from the present in order the better to re-orientate it to the future. As the Reverend Caroline becomes part of the experience of the life of the church in the present she will learn of its past

through the stories of those who carry its history. Those stories will help her to shape with you its future. The Reverend Caroline brings to the parish his experience as a human being and a priest of many years and those gifts and graces and skills will contribute to the shaping of the life of this church in the future and impact on individual lives in a changing way. There will be pain no doubt at times for her and for you because change brings to birth something better often only as it negotiates pain and passes through it. Part of the pain for some may be the need to let go of things during the interregnum that they have taken on but now may need to be passed on to another. Letting go can be a bereavement and bereavements are always a hurting time.

But change is not only about pain, it is about the excitement of challenge and the frisson that comes with the hope of the new.

The three readings this afternoon at this Service of Institution and Licensing seem a strange combination in that on first hearing them read in conjunction they do not seem to connect in a meaningful way. However as I pondered on them they seemed to be a resonance with this phenomenon of change that I have been speaking about.

The words from Isaiah, though spoken into a particular context to support exiles are words of warning of judgement but also a message of encouragement of God's promise of the gift of restoration. Jesus took Isaiah's words as a mandate for his own ministry "today in your hearing" he said in the Synagogue "is scripture being fulfilled", and by extension the words of Isaiah can be read as a paradigm for a priest beginning a new ministry in a new place. At the heart of each requirement placed on prophet - to bring freedom to the captive, release from darkness for the prisoner, sight to the blind, to help bring those who mourn from whatever bereavement into a new acceptance of life "to exchange the ashes of mourning for the joy of the oil of gladness" as the Prophet Isaiah says, to bring good news to the poor, - is a ministry of facilitating change in the being of his hearers helping them move from imprisonment to that which diminishes to a freedom which brings new life and hope through the ministry of freeing. Reciprocally in the reading from Ephesians we hear Paul encouraging the community there to bring into being that which is not yet. He is saying to the community there that each member of the congregation has a gift to bring to the building up of the whole body of Christ in its local gathering. The ministry of the Priest is a facilitating ministry, that of bringing to birth the gifts and graces that each in his or her own way can contribute to the community. In the gospel reading from Matthew the petitions of the Lord's Prayer described there are petitions to God to bring about change from what we don't yet have to what we need to have for our flourishing as a human being and a human being that is a spiritual being. Bread for our human nourishment, release from the effects of sin that we may live again spiritually. Give us this day our daily bread that we may live. Forgive us our sins that we may be freed to live again in good relationships with others and an acceptance of ourselves. Both readings resonate with a better future that can grow out of a constraining past.

I like the practice in France of extending the celebration of the new year through January with people wishing one happy new year, good health and prosperity long past 1st of January, and so may I take this opportunity as January comes to a close of wishing this community on behalf of local guests here and the wider Diocese a flourishing of this church by grace of God in this year in the years to come as the Reverend Caroline builds on and develops the work and commitment of locum priests church wardens and council members and the gathered community here. In the memorable words of John Cardinal Newman:

"To grow is to change and to have become perfect is to have changed often".