

Lent 2 year A 2014

For me, when I read these readings ready to prepare this sermon, a theme seemed evident, one of change if we let God into our lives. "God said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.'" Abram had a big change ahead of him, one perhaps we can in some ways empathise with, as we have all moved to another land.

Abram had grown up in Ur of the Chaldeans, an important city in the ancient world. His father, Terah, started to go to Canaan with Abram, Sarai, Abram's wife and Lot, his grandson by Haran, Abram's brother. For some reason however when they came to Haran they settled there. It wasn't until much later, after his father's death, that Abram heard God's call and obeyed, and set out for Canaan. He was 75 years old, perhaps quite old in our eyes for such an adventure, but then his father was 205 when he died.

Paul writes that Abram believed in God, and he was saved by his faith, not by his works alone. Often we worry if we have enough faith, if we are we good enough, is my faith strong enough to save me? However it is Jesus who saves us, he is strong enough however weak we may be from time to time. We are offered salvation as a gift, by God's grace, not because we have earned it. This was an area in which Jewish thinking needed to change, they were not saved by law alone. Abraham believed in God, and was blessed by God, long before laws and rituals were introduced.

When we have faith in Jesus our lives change, Jesus describes it to Nicodemus as being born "again". Nicodemus takes this literally, but Jesus explains it is meant spiritually. We have to give up control, it's like being blown along by a strong wind, we need to be moved along in God's direction and at God's speed.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a learned man himself, but he came to Jesus, as we must, with a mind and heart ready to learn. Nicodemus supported Jesus later when the Pharisees were attempting to arrest him. However well Nicodemus knew the scripture he had not understood about the Messiah. Our God is not one we can just know intellectually, he is one we need to believe in, to have a relationship with.

Letting God take over our lives can be scary, quite often we want to keep control over some areas of it, giving over total control requires trust and faith, it is healthier to take questions, doubts and difficulties to God in prayer than to pretend they don't exist or feeling guilty about them. God wants us to grow spiritually, to reach our full potential.

With all these very natural fears of change, as we step out in obedience, we come to the heart of the Gospel in John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." What a gift we were given. He didn't come to condemn us but to save us, the enormity of that is difficult sometimes to understand.

If we need further reassurance the Psalm for today is number 121, one of the lovely ones we can turn to: The Lord himself watches over you;The Lord shall

preserve you from all evil; it is he who shall keep you safe. The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in, from this time forth for evermore." He wants only what is best for us, despite sometimes challenging us.

One of my favourite poems is written by Joy Cowley
Springtime Jesus

You, springtime Jesus,
just as I'd settled down for winter,
you broke into my heart
and danced your love right across it
in a mad excess of giving.
Just as I'd got comfortable
with bare branches and unfeeling,
just as my world was neatly black and white,
there you were,
kicking up the flowers
all over the place.
Springtime Jesus,
I tried to find a way to tell you
that there were places
where you could or could not dance.
I wanted to guide you on my paths
and have you sign the visitors book:
but you laughed right through my words
and sang to me your melting song,
causing sap to fire the branches,
causing the flames of buds
to flicker into green bonfires,
causing a windquake of blossom,
causing burstings, searings, breakings,
causing growth- pain,

causing life.
Springtime Jesus,
the fullness of life can be frightening
and I'm lacking in courage.
It isn't easy to live with a heart
that's wide open to invasion.
Teach me, Jesus, how to move with you,
step for step, in your love dance.
Touch my fears with your melting song.
Gift me with your laughter,
and, in the mystery of your Springtime,
show me the truth of the blossoming cross.