

SERMON PREACHED BY THE REVEREND JONATHAN ANDREW
AT 8 AND 10AM SERVICES OF HOLY COMMUNION ON 21 JULY 2019,
TRINITY 5

Genesis 18:1-10a; Colossians 1:15-28; Luke 10:38-end

As you might expect, over the last few weeks I've been thinking a lot about change - my retirement will be a big change for me and for my wife Jackie, but there'll also be changes here at St Peter's. As you all know, when we started our search for a new vicar we looked hard at our beloved parish and celebrated many wonderful things about it, but we recognised that a fresh start would be needed if its slow but steady decline was to be reversed. Over the coming months, Jackie Richardson and the PCC will be starting to put this into practice, and it'll be an exciting time. Part of me is very sorry that I won't be part of it.

And so, as I thought about the changes we all experience, I've been thinking about the tension that's integral to our Christian life. On one hand the Christian life is a journey – indeed, the earliest name for the Christian faith appears to have been 'The Way' the stepping forward in a new direction. On the other hand there is the Christian virtue of stability – rootedness in the faith.

If you remember your school biology, you'll know that the characteristics that scientists look at to see if something is alive are generally about whether it changes (moves, grows, reproduces, reacts to its environment), and so, if we are to be alive in our faith, we must be called to embrace change, even when it's uncomfortable. And, yes, embracing change can be painful, it can be scary – it involves letting go of possessions, of places, of people, of habits to which we've grown accustomed, things we've learned to love and which we've woven into a cocoon in which we feel safe and comfortable. Stepping out is hard. But, of course, a butterfly that stays in its cocoon will die – it's only when it breaks out that it can shake the heavy moisture from its wings, come to its full beauty and take flight. I gather that these days one can employ something called a decluttering consultant, someone who'll come into our homes and encourage us to throw out the accumulated detritus of the years – the books we'll never read again, the china that never comes out of the cupboard – the objective of this decluttering being to free us from the shackles of the past and to help us travel light into the future. One of the jobs on my list for the early months of our retirement is to clear our loft – I actually started a few months back - throwing away my childhood soft toys was indeed painful, but it had to be done! An important part of the final stage of life is accepting the need to let go, to travel light – after all, as they say, you can't take it with you!

But if the Andrew household needs to travel light, so does this church. Of course you must hang onto the basics that make St Peter's "St Peter's" – a parish church, open to all, aspiring to be at the heart of the community, but over the coming months the PCC under Jackie Richardson's leadership will be debating priorities, and my guess is that making those priorities real will involve some letting go, some decluttering to make room for the new.

So, with those thoughts in mind, what do our Bible readings have to say to us today? Well, we started with Abraham – the father of three faiths. Our ancestor

who is described as 'a wandering Aramaean'. There he is, sitting outside his tent. He's a nomad, who by very definition, is set up to travel light. He's camping out in the cool of the oaks of Mamre, but not himself putting down roots. In an earlier passage, he followed God's call - he unquestioningly set off for that Promised Land of which he knew nothing. And in today's reading he's open to the further calling of God even in the strange and seemingly impossible words of those three mysterious strangers as they promise him and Sarah that long-awaited child.

And then, in our second reading, we hear from Paul – a man who was jolted out of his stability, his comfortable Pharisaic certainty, in the most dramatic way possible. And now he's a great traveller, willing to follow his new master's 'Way' right across the known world, even if that journey ends in death. And, in the passage we just heard, we have a wonderful summary of the faith that despite his travels roots him – the cosmic Christ, the firstborn, the foundation of all creation – but also the very intimate Christ, the instrument of our personal reconciliation to God.

And finally, we heard that so familiar, and so human, story of Martha and Mary. It's a great story to act out in school assemblies – Martha, locked in her house-proud, established mindset, full of indignation, banging and crashing about in the kitchen, asking Jesus to lift his feet so she can sweep the floor under them. Mary, seeking the Way, looking to future possibilities, trying to hear what Jesus is saying, and the Master himself increasingly exasperated. Decluttering is not just about physical possessions, it's about priorities and focus.

And so, as I move on, I leave you with those thoughts. My prayer for myself and for this church is that we will remain rooted in the faith that has sustained us through the years, but that we will continue to look not just to the past, but more importantly to the future. May we travel well and travel light!

Amen