

A Proper 7 am
Place: St Mary's
Theme: Change and
Conflict
39

25th June 17
Jer20.7-14

Rom6.1-11 Mtt 10.24-

- ◆ Last week I went to the hair dressers and as I looked in the mirror I realised that I had significantly more wrinkles than the last time I had been. It made me think about the change. What are the changes we would like to see in ourselves and what are the changes we would like to resist?
- ◆ Change is often unwelcome. Human beings spend a lot of time, money and energy on resisting change. We often want to enlist God in our struggle with change. How many of our prayers ask that things should not change, or should go back to the way they were?
- ◆ What our readings today tell us is that God is in the business of change. That is not to say that all change comes from God; but if God is saving the world then that is going to involve changing things; in particular it means changing us. That is what Paul is talking about in the letter to the Romans when he says we must consider ourselves 'dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ.' While the destructive changes that death brings have been conquered, the only alternative is to be changed by God instead.

- ◆ In 'Mere Christianity' CS Lewis says that when we first encounter God we are rather like someone living in a decaying hovel. God says 'Let's sort that out. Let's fix the roof and stop the draughts coming in.' And we are delighted that God is helping us change the things that we know need to change, but then God starts to say, actually lets knock down that wall and build a new kitchen. Let's replace all the walls with ones made of brick and make it big enough to be hospitable. Let's take off the roof and put a second story on' and we start to worry that the old shack is disappearing and we are not sure that we are going to like what comes in its place. But Lewis says God doesn't want us living in an upgraded hovel, he wants us in a proper house. This is hard for us, because it means letting go of all that we have known and all that is familiar and trusting God because we cannot see where He is leading us.
- ◆ I think that this is at the base of Jeremiah's complaint that God has enticed him. God offered Jeremiah something he wanted, but now he thinks he has got more than he bargained for. Jeremiah wanted to bring God's word to the people of Israel, but now he realises that the word is difficult and challenging and the people do not want to hear it. The word is warning and doom, even his friends have turned against him and everyone is out to get him because they want

to shut him up. God's word bring conflict because God's word calls for change in a world that wants to resist it, hold on to what it has and insist that it is in control.

- ◆ Jesus too warns us that listening to God's word bring conflict and change. That is why he tells us 'Do not think I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.' It is profound conflict which will extend to our most intimate relationships. We have to decide where our allegiance lies, is it with the world or with God? Is it with our family and friends and all that is familiar or is it to the as yet unknown mystery that is the Kingdom of God? It is not surprising that the Gospels tell us that there is a moment in Jesus's ministry when a lot of people decide that what Jesus is teaching is too hard and turn back.
- ◆ We too need to ask ourselves 'Is it worth it?' Jeremiah decided that even though it was hard it was worth it and ends his prayer, which begins with angrily accusing God of enticing him, with praise and thanks giving to God.
- ◆ The answer to the question 'is it worth it?' is hidden in the final verse of today's Gospel 'Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.' Change is inevitable and unavoidable. We do not have any choice over it. Those who try and resist change and hold on to what they have are those

who have found their life and will lose it. If however we respond to God and let God change us and the world around us. If we are willing to let go of what is familiar and be lead to something new we will discover the abundant riches of the kingdom of God which far outweigh what we have left behind. Those are they who lose their life for Christ's sake and find it as a result.

- ◆ This is what I have discovered to be true for myself. Just over a year ago I loved living in Streatham, I loved St Leonards and I thought I would stay there until I retired. They the Archdeacon asked me to think about coming here. It has been a painful and difficult change. But I know it is what God called me to do. Things have happened that I never thought were possible through God's grace, both in my circumstance and in myself. God is faithful and will lead us into all life if we can trust in his grace and let go of what we have known before.

