

St Peter's, Ealing  
Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2018  
Second Sunday in Lent YrB

Times they are a changing.

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I am sure you will have noticed, the world has seen more change since the end of WW2 than at any other time in human history. I suppose we just need to look into our pockets and handbags. I am sure most of you have one of these (hold up a mobile phone). We still call these phones but really they are hand held computers that have changed our lives whether we like it or not.

We recognise change must happen; but that doesn't mean we have to like it. Many of us don't like it. Our dislike stems from the uncertainty change brings. We know where we are when we know where we are. In the context of church, we come in Sunday by Sunday, we like the familiarity and the continuity church offers. It is comfortable and it is comforting. When we are faced with the new we feel threatened and we put up defences. At this point I should say we are not all the same; "One man's meat is another man's poison". We may be accepting of one thing and resistant to another, when another person accepts what we resist and rejects what we accept; like life nothing is simple. Rather than deal with change and how it makes us feel, maybe even trying to see the bigger picture, we may be tempted to walk away, feeling rejected and unloved because what we value has been rejected.

A name is an intimate part of us and says much about us. We are given it at birth and we can't imagine being anything else. Imagine then what Abram felt when God popped up and changed his name. Not only does God change Abram's name to Abraham and Sari's to Sarah, Abram is also told by God that their whole life will change. Abram set out to be a good husband and father, working hard for the good of his family. Now he is told he will be the father of a great nation – his whole purpose in life has changed – his only reassurance is the promise, within this covenant God is making, that based upon Abraham's righteousness God will always be with Abraham and his descendants. Not based upon law but upon righteousness, the rightness of Abraham before God; a point Paul makes in his letter to the Romans. A righteousness that helps open the way through Jesus for our salvation.

Any change in the life of faith of a worshipping community must be based upon faith and our desire to come closer to God, our desire to have a right relationship with God, to be righteous before God. At St Peter's we are reflecting on "It takes a church to raise a child" and what that means for our life of faith together here. How can we share in growing together in faith and love of God? What does that mean and what does it look like?

There was a story told to me a few weeks ago. A diocesan officer was visiting a church. He met one of the younger members. The member had been attending the church since she was very little. The officer asked what had kept her coming, she said she felt she belonged and when asked how that manifested itself she said it was because of an older member of the church who always welcomed her by name and talked to her, 'she knew my name'.

The important part of our phrase "It takes a church to raise a child" is easily overlooked. The word 'church' and what we understand by it defines what this phrase might mean and what its intention might be. We can understand church to mean "a place I go when I can't be with God"; it can be the place to go for revitalising fellowship. It should be both of course and we should work to get the balance right. If we don't get the balance right, we either end up as a group of individuals or a fun club. Getting the balance right means we can help each other to grow in faith and love of God and teach each other. We get to know each other, we can encourage each other – by name.

We've started gathering around the eucharistic table for the eucharistic prayer and distribution of the sacrament, not as a gimmick but as a way of physically embodying that hope of becoming a church where we draw together, in our journey of faith, to share in the experience of engaging with God, not as a group of disparate individuals, but as the body of Christ. We are the body of Christ and in the one spirit we are all baptised into that one body and we are called to pursue all that makes for peace and builds up our common life.

It takes a church to raise a child; let's work together at being church, remembering we are all children of God.