

Change

Compiled from notes for the sermon preached by Rev Eddie Sykes
at our Joint Communion Service on 24 October 2021
The readings were Hebrews 7.23–29 and Mark 10.46–52

No guarantee of future success ...

If people had been asked in 1968 which nation would dominate the world of watch-making into the 1990s and into the 21st Century, their answer would have been the same – Switzerland – simply because Switzerland had dominated the world of watch-making for the previous 60 years.

The Swiss were the world's experts – they invented the minute hand and the second hand movements, waterproofing techniques and self-winding methods.

In 1968 65% of all watches manufactured were made in Switzerland and laid claim to some 90% of profits. By 1980, however the Swiss watch-making industry controlled just 10% of the market and had laid off thousands of workers.

Why? Because they refused to consider a new development – the quartz movement – ironically invented by a Swiss. As such Seiko and some other companies came to dominate the market.

The Swiss couldn't change in their minds the ways that watches could be made.

They had looked at their secure past, one which was very profitable, one where they were dominant, but it seems they did not have the ability to rethink how they did business.

Past success had blinded them to the implications of a changing world, and to admit that past accomplishment was no guarantee of future success.

The need to change

Now let us look at this scenario in relation to our faith.

One definition of craziness is to keep on doing things the same way and expect different results.

So it is we read the letter to the Hebrews – which reminds us of the need to change: to change how we understand Jesus today.

Most people will look back and see the Jesus in the Bible and admire this good man, this good teacher, and so on. However, when it comes to the relevance of Jesus today, many people remain unsure.

Or it may be to do with the way we have been taught about Jesus, about church, that we are confused or unsure about how to be the church, how to enable people to see Jesus today.

Our assumptions from the past may not carry us through in the present and, because we are unsure how to adapt the message to the changes of the present day, we simply hang on more tightly to the past.

Marilyn Ferguson describes the experience of change this way:

"It's not so much that we're afraid of change or so in love with the old ways, but it's that place in between that we fear ... it's like being between trapezes. There's nothing to hold on to."





When facing change, there are three stages people often go through:

- 1 **Resistance** to change – a bit like an earlier Duke of Cambridge in the 1800s who said: “Any change, at any time, for any reason, is to be deplored.”
- 2 **Tolerance** of change – that sort of reluctant, “Well, I guess it might attract the young people”, kind of attitude.
- 3 **Embracing** change – with the realisation that this will enable more people to come to an experience of Christ, and that we too may be transformed through the change.

Jesus, our great high priest

For recipients of the letter to the Hebrews, the change involved how they understood the way to God through Jesus as their ‘high priest’.

According to the law, Jesus would not even have qualified for the priesthood, as all priests had to come from the tribe of Levi. So those letter to which the letter was addressed had to change their perspective about the fact that the Christian faith is reliant *not* on the old law, but on God.

- Jesus is high priest by the fact that he is commissioned by God.
- Jesus is not only the high priest in the present, but for all eternity.
- Jesus as high priest continues for ever – his position is permanent, unchangeable, inviolable.

Before Jesus’ high-priesthood, according to the historian Josephus, there were some 83 high priests from the time of Aaron to the end of temple worship in AD70.

The thing with ordinary human priests is that they are prone to fallibility – but with Jesus we have a high priest who doesn’t get sick, or die, or go on holiday, or fall down on the job, or grow tired of our need, or compromise his office, or take advantage of us for his own personal gain.

In Jesus, we have a steadfast and faithful great high priest, who can be trusted always to make intercession for us.

What is amazing is that this Jesus knows exactly what it means to be one of us. He slogged through this human life – experiencing every test, undergoing every trial, and enduring every temptation. He is one who bore our grief and carried our sorrows.

So the picture has changed: Jesus as high priest takes us to the heart of God in a way that is different to anything or anyone who has gone before.

Being prepared for change

Going back to my earlier question about change — or, perhaps, to use the more comprehensive word, transformation — if we say that Jesus is our great high priest today, what needs to change in our life as a body, the church, and as individual disciples?

Often it is those whom we think cannot see who see most clearly of all. In the passage we read from Mark’s Gospel, Jesus is surrounded by his disciples and curious followers, but his attention is drawn to the shouts of a blind man who recognises a special power and presence near him.





The others want to silence Bartimaeus, but Jesus calls him to draw near, and asks, “What do you want me to do for you?”

Consistent with the high priest image in Hebrews, we too discover that Jesus can do something for us. This is not a “I want a million pounds” kind of request; it is more a “Jesus, please help me to follow you more faithfully”, or “Jesus, help me to understand what you want to do with my life” type of request.

Do we see Jesus able to use us in whatever situation we are in?

Some people hide behind busy schedules or justifications of their own creation as excuses for only living what might be termed ‘half-lives’.

Sometimes we really do not want the freedom to serve God openly because what lies ahead is unknown. Bartimaeus gives us inspiration and courage for the changed outlook that such a kind of freedom requires.

None of us can be complacent about our faith. It is easy to carry on as we have always done – never to move on. Jesus’ sacrifice for us is a turning point for us. It is a time to make a fresh start and to look at life in new and creative and hopeful ways.

We need to assess what we are doing as a church and as individuals. What we should hold on to, and what we should let go of.

Yes, it is about prayer, but more importantly it is about how we see Jesus – our high priest – who seeks to do *for* us and *through* us much more than we could ever ask or desire.

Hillary Rodham Clinton once said:

“The challenges of change are always hard. It is important that we begin to unpack those challenges ... and realize that we each have a role that requires us to change and become more responsible for shaping our own future.”

And I believe that begins with being prepared to be changed by Jesus, as through him we are taken directly to the throne of God to be transformed.

I pray that our lives may reflect Jesus – the one who has transformed our lives and continues to do so. It is Jesus whom we serve as individuals and as a community, loving God and our neighbour.

I pray too that we may always be prepared to be changed/transformed – and to be part of God’s power of change in the world today.

To God be the glory for ever. Amen.

The illustration of “Lord, that I might see!”, a 1970 sculpture in Matyas Church, Budapest, comes from “Art in the Christian Tradition”, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville.