

GOD CHANGED HIS MIND

PREACHER : Canon Neil Thompson, Precentor

Sunday, November 8th 2009
Remembrance Sunday

9.30am
Rochester Cathedral

If I say the word 'Jonah' what is the first thing that you think of?

Go on, be honest – has anybody thought of anything other than a whale?

Well, yes, it **is** a rhetorical question and I am pretty certain that I know the answer!

And on this Remembrance Sunday, the Second Sunday of the Kingdom, I want to share with you a much, much more remarkable association with Jonah and the Book of Jonah which we have heard this morning.

This is something that challenges us to the very core.

In verse 10, the final verse of the passage read this morning occurs the phrase: *God changed his mind*.

And that is what the good news of the Bible is all about.

God changelessness doesn't mean that he cannot change his mind.

God's eternal holiness and otherness does not prevent him reaching out to us as a brother and a redeemer.

God who is the all-righteous, ineffable judge does not prevent him forgiving us and healing us and making us his friends in Jesus Christ.

Now, if God changes his mind, can we?

Because that is the call of God in Jesus.

Just as he invites Simon and Andrew to leave everything and follow him, so God asks you and me and all who love him to do the same.

And above all, that leaving everything is about changing our minds, our hearts and our souls.

Or rather, allowing God to change them.

But that isn't just an individual call.

Can we, the Anglican Church and the Church of England, change our minds?

Sadly, we are lampooned and caricatured as being a church and communion that doesn't know our mind, of being hopelessly muddled, compromised and beset by questions and doubts.

And that I believe is the most honest state that we can be in, if it is God who is going to do the changing.

This past week or so, there has been a great deal in the press and media about Pope Benedict's invitation to Anglicans to form an 'ordinariate' within the Roman communion on papal terms.

Perhaps it is a generous gesture but in essence it seems to lack the humility and love that is expressed by the God who changes his mind.

Forgiveness to the Ninevites was indeed conditional in that they believed God, proclaimed a fast and repented.

In Jesus, God gives himself as unconditional love and mercy.

That is the meaning of the cross.

On this Remembrance Sunday God wishes us to allow his grace to change us as people so that there are no losers and everyone is a winner.

That, according to Jesus, is how politics has to be revisited by the values and power of God.

Many people want to keep religion out of politics – and I am sure that that is both wise and prudent.

But we mustn't keep God out of politics. For only if God's love operates can mercy and compassion temper our understanding and practice of peace and justice.

When God is at work, then everything is bound to change.

Cardinal Newman, soon to be beatified by the Pope in the process of canonisation, wrote eloquently about the development of Christian doctrine as he recognised in his century how much the Church lives in an ever-changing world.

All creation is in a state of flux, and within that change, God changes his mind.

As an Anglican and someone passionately committed to the Church of England in all its glorious vulnerability and beautiful incompleteness, I pray for the Roman communion to learn to live more freely outside of a worldly authority that cannot change quickly enough with God.

That is, I believe, the call that God makes us to follow him in Jesus.

Change is the hallmark of his saving love.

Petru Dumitriu, the Romanian dissident writer, wrote these shattering words:

“Jesus Christ is always on the side of the crucified, and I believe he changes sides in the twinkling of an eye. He is not loyal to the person, or even less the group; he is loyal to suffering.”

Petru Dumitriu

That is why he changes his mind.

God is loyal to that which only he can redeem.

It is a hard and beautiful truth.

He risks his life in the bread and wine of this Eucharist by the miracle of the Spirit which is the breath of eternity.

God changes.

God changes his mind.

God changes the bread and wine into the Saviour's body and blood.

God changes the terrors and the tragedies of war and natural disaster into the promises of the peace which passes all our understanding.

Thanks be to God in change and in eternity.

Amen.