

Sermon on First Sunday of Creation Time 2017 – 3rd September 2017

Reading: Matthew 16.21-28

I wonder how many of us are still in denial that time has moved on and the summer holidays 2017 are behind us now? Post-holiday depression or post-vacation blues is a known phenomenon – it even has its own Wikipedia entry. According to Metro newspaper last year there are 10 emotional stages to post-holiday blues.

It's a common enough human experience, being in denial that one time has ended, and it's time to move to the next.

This happened in the ministry of Jesus as portrayed in the gospel reading today. "From that time on.." Matthew 's gospel says, "Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." A new time, a new phase of Jesus' ministry was being entered. It was time to move forward. The days of preaching and teaching beside the lake and in the towns and villages of Galilee were coming to an end. God's call upon his life was becoming more insistent; the right time was approaching.

But we read Peter rejects the idea and rebukes Jesus for even thinking of it – suffering and death were not what must happen to Jesus , to the one whom Peter had confessed as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. But Jesus' return rebuke to Peter is even stronger – those thoughts of Peter's were from Satan, the evil one, that was a denial which denied God. As the words of Jesus to Peter affirm, it was an all too human reaction. In the religious thinking of the time, the Messiah was not expected to suffer and die; Peter was simply basing his thinking on what he had been taught previously, a natural human tendency. Added to that of course the time in Galilee had been an amazing time of signs and miracles, popular acclaim from the crowds; and as we know from post-holiday blues it's all too human to want to stay in a time of temporary comfort and bliss rather than face the struggles and exertions of necessity, of what life requires of us, of what Good may be calling us into.

But Peter and the other disciples too are consistently portrayed throughout the gospels as failing to read the times correctly. They try to fit Jesus' life and teaching into their existing worldview. Instead, they and we need to learn from Jesus, to be challenged and guided by what he shows us of God's way.

An attitude of openness to God is what Jesus teaches is the paradoxical way of following him. "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." We are to be willing to face sacrifice and opposition as a consequence of following Jesus' way. Life and self will be found in the paradox of leaving behind whatever seems to give us security – being aware when the time is right – in God's time - when we need to make make a change, to move forward into a new time.

This Sunday is the start of the season of Creation Time; when we focus our worship on the gift of the natural world and consider our calling as Christians to be responsible stewards of God's creation. Living as we do in a consumerist finance-driven economy which has been, and in most ways still continues, treating the environment as if its an unlimited raw material for our never-ending cycle of production consumption and disposal, our sense of the respect and reverence in which we should hold the earth is muted, our capacity as individuals to effect change on our own is restricted – but it is not impossible.

There is a sense that now is the time for change to happen in the way our society – the way we all - care for creation, especially on climate change. There remains an urgency even if now the only

time climate change seems to hit the headlines is when someone denies it. Ironically, this gives unwarranted credibility to those who cannot face that the time is now. We are in a new time for humanity; a time of danger and yet of immense opportunity too, to transform and renew the human relationship with the earth.

In the gospel message, in the love of a faithful God, and in the example and teachings of Jesus, we are offered hope of a better future, and we are taught that this way may not come without leaving behind former ways and making a change. If we look honestly and with humility at ourselves and the world around us, if we acknowledge the damage being done to creation and hear the cries of suffering people, we should be aware , we find ourselves at a time where things must change; a time to commit to a new way, alongside others trying to live out God's love for all.

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