

May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I must confess that on Monday morning of this week I woke up slightly nervous. With the retirement of Ken on Sunday – and thank you so much to everyone who made it such a good retirement - I felt a little daunted at the beginning of a new chapter in the life of this parish and of my own ministry.

We stand today at the turning of a page, the unfolding of a presently unclear future for this church. Through ministering to many people at the point of new realities unfolding, I have learnt that standing in such places is always a bit disorientating. There are always many questions and not many answers.

In preparing a sermon Preachers read the readings for Sunday at the beginning of the week and though feeling somewhat disorientated, I turned to today's lessons and am so glad I did. I have reflected on them and walked with them all this week and I realise that they speak to us right here and now. They speak of Christ bringing a new reality and of God's work in bringing any community of faith forward. The readings for today point us in the right direction.

First we have Ezekiel's confident declaration, powerfully written in the first person; '*I will do these things*' says God.

'I will take, set, plant, bring, make ... I will accomplish it'.

The prophet doesn't doubt that there is a promised future for the faithful community, one which God himself will bring to bear. God did not create and then sit back to leave the whole thing spinning ... the word of God continues to sustain God's idea. A timely reminder on this Father's Day of how faithful God's Fatherhood is to us all.

In the Gospel Jesus also speaks of God's work among the community of faith. He describes the invisible and silent nature of God's process. His hearers struggled to believe when God's work was not obvious to human sight and so Jesus' parables stress that invisible and steady movement into a new reality. The silent growth from seed to shrub - the emergence of the big from the tiny - all driven by the invisible force that brings good to fruition.

There is a Christian truth here; whenever we are entering a new chapter and feeling disorientated, we are to know that this is often God's most fertile ground. God is already busy ... taking, setting, planting and growing.

Yet it is so easy to forget the things we can't see. There is an especially great risk when encountering change to seek security in the measurable and physical things. Faith can get tested when people are disorientated. This is where Paul's letter comes in useful.

In the second letter to the Corinthians he sets out a whole new view of reality for Christians. I'm not sure what exactly the Church of Corinth was up to, but they had certainly been trying to shape their new church according to worldly judgments and human constructs. Paul in this letter seeks to redirect their hearts towards a future shaped by Christ.

Paul's encounter with Christ is the driving force of this letter. Everything he thought he knew about the world was turned inside out when he met Christ. Something remarkable grew out of the disorientation he felt through encountering Christ heart-to-heart. Paul learnt firsthand that to be a Christian means that everything looks different and new realities become not just possible, but inevitable.

So while Ezekiel and Jesus talk about what God *does*, Paul is most concerned with how the Christians see and shape their new church. He stresses that they 'must walk by faith not by sight' ... and he is absolutely right.

As our own future unfolds in front of us, we can first trust, as Ezekiel did, that God is already at work. And then in hopeful faith we pray for the new reality that God will unfold for this church if we are truly open to Him doing so.

Amen