

Our reading from Ecclesiastes reminds us that there is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven. Each and every one of us are subject to times and changes over which we have little or no control.

We all change; how we look changes; we grow older. When we are young we grow taller and many of us as we grow into our later mature years have started to become smaller. We can spend huge sums of money in an attempt to prevent or disguise these changes but the plain and simple fact is that we and the world we live in, is constantly changing.

On 23rd June 2016, this country voted to change and leave the European Community. Last month, 40 weeks after the referendum, Theresa May signed Article 50 triggering the process which begins our formal exit from the EEC. The moment the signature was dry on the page it signaled the start of a new era; what had gone before or what the current status quo might be would change. Absolutely nothing would prevent things changing.

No one, not even the Prime Minister herself knows what the future holds in store for us; what we might come to regret or come to rejoice about.

Everyone might hold their individual and differing hopes, expectations, fears and anxieties, but the one thing for certain is that a new era has started.

In just the same way, events here at Holy Trinity Sunningdale have parallels with those national moments of change. It was also in June last year, when David announced he was leaving and it was also in March, just a few weeks ago that our new incumbent, Jon, signed his letter of resignation, triggering his exit from the Nottingham Diocese. A new era is upon us; what has gone before or what the current status quo might be, will change.

Let me repeat what I said just a minute ago: Absolutely nothing will prevent things changing. No one knows what the future holds in store for us; what we might come to regret or come to rejoice about. Everyone holds their individual hopes, expectations, fears and anxieties. But the one thing for certain is that a new era has started.

Before anyone has a heart attack, let me refer to the verse from Hebrews: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever”

When everything around us is changing and we don't know what to believe or what to think, we can take heart from the fact that Jesus remains the same. His love for us remains the same; his truth remains the same and if we believe what we proclaim that we as a church family desire to live by faith, to be known by love and to be a voice of hope here in our community then that knowledge will sustain us during this period of change.

Yes, there will be change because that is what our Parish Profile – the job description for want of a better phrase – asked for.

The profile asked our new leader to prioritize four things:

1. To reinvigorate our efforts to engage with and to attract young people of all ages.
2. To energize our outreach and evangelism ministries so that we may become a beacon of light, drawing all people to a new life in Christ.
3. To facilitate heartfelt music and worship that will encourage everyone, regardless of age or tradition, to encounter the living God.
4. To develop facilities that will enable us to support the mission of this church.

These four priorities cannot be achieved without change of some kind. But the reality is that I do not expect Jon to arrive and make immediate far reaching changes on day one or on day twenty one or even day fifty one.

I say this with some confidence because the profile majored strongly on the leader being an individual who would help us, the church family, grow in our ministries.....and although I was not part of the selection panel, Bishop Andrew did share with me subsequently that in his presentation Jon said that he believed he could do the things we were asking of him but only with the help of God and the church family. And I think that statement is really important....only with the help of God and the church family.

There is no doubt whatsoever that Jon is excited to be coming to lead us and that excitement is not just based on what he read in the profile or what was said in the formal interview situation, because before coming for the interview Jon came and joined one of our Sunday services, albeit in disguise, so saw at first hand the reality of who we are and what we do.

He was also highly encouraged by what he heard when he had the opportunity to meet and talk to 20 or so individuals during the day he spent with us in between his interview assignments, particularly how we have held together as a church family during the vacancy and that many individuals have stepped forward to assist.

And that, I think is the key point I want to leave you with – that Jon is interested in us as both individuals and as a church family; in developing ministry with and through us, and helping us to not only sustain but grow in faith. And that will take time. Time that word, again.

No one knows what lies ahead for us but based on the Ecclesiastes reading, my prayer yesterday, today and forever will be that we are entering a time to build up and a time to embrace; a time to heal and a time for peace; a time to laugh and a time to love.

Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship; a relationship with Christ; the Christ, who “is the same yesterday, today and forever”. And it is that knowledge, that relationship, which will sustain us through the changes which lie ahead.

It is the unchanging Christ in changing times which will sustain us.