

A time to Plant and a Time to Uproot  
I have never owned a Vauxhall car.

I've driven one once when my car was being serviced at the garage, but apart from that - no!

I've never owned one and I wouldn't look to buy one and the root of this blind prejudice is my father who did not like Vauxhall cars at all.

I've no idea why not.

I'm left with an unreasonable prejudice for which I have no foundation whatsoever.

A lot of prejudice is like that – unreasonable.

Our Gospel reading introduces Nathaniel who is prejudiced. The story is there to show us that someone who is regarded as a good, true, decent Israelite would almost inevitably have doubts about Jesus Christ who, as far as most people were concerned, was the son of Joseph the Carpenter from Nazareth.

Whatever expectations Nathaniel had concerning the longed for Messiah, he wasn't likely to be the son of a carpenter from a place like Nazareth.

If Nathaniel was the sort of person Jesus described him to be, a genuine decent Jewish man, then it is logical to assume he also had the prejudices of his time and culture.

- He would have a dim view of Gentiles – i.e. any other nationality other than Jews.
- He would have a really dim view of Samaritans – it was perfectly acceptable for Jews to hate Samaritans.

- He would have had the traditional view of the place of women!!!!

Until he meets Jesus, Nathaniel is unaware of his prejudices. He's also unaware that his expectations of who and what the Messiah would be like were mostly wrong. But he would be no different from anyone else.

On a day when our sentence from Ecclesiastes is

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the gospel leads us to look at a flaw in Nathaniel's character – prejudice - as something to be uprooted in order for something new to be planted in his life.

Before we explore that further and reflect on it for ourselves – let's think about this sentence.

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It has been translated in different ways in different bibles, it all depends upon the decision the translators take on various words, and the vocabulary they were using.

Two translations I found give the sentence a fairly obvious meaning.

CEV – planting and reaping  
Message – a right time to plant and another to reap

What we learn from this is rather limited and to virtually anyone reading this from a subsistence agricultural background it's just a simple truism. There is a right time to plant and to reap.

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There is though a spiritual right time.

In the New Testament two words are used for time. Chronos – means Chronological time, like a day or an hour and Kairos means “the appointed time in the purpose of God”. As a church there is a tremendous list of things we could do, or might do, or even should do, but we seek God in order to determine not only what His priority is but also His time.

I and the Wardens and the PCC felt that this January was the right time to plant these new services. We hope they reap rewards in the quality of our worship and the growth of our church and in aiding you in your discipleship. The Kairos time to plant and reap.

God’s intervention in history is not hurried or accidental but at just the right time. For a church and for followers of Christ we don’t just do anything when we feel ready...we wait on God’s time to plant and to reap.

Another translation hints at recognising when something is no longer of value...

NRSV – a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted.

Now that can be a tricky decision.

All you gardeners – how patient are you with something that doesn’t develop or won’t flower or doesn’t produce fruit??

You’ve watered it, fed it, saved it from bugs and disease and it won’t grow. How long will you wait to decide – you are coming out!!

Or maybe it was once a good plant or fruit tree, but no longer. Time to get it out!

Speaking spiritually, the church can really struggle with uprooting something it has either planted or been committed to.

Because we become committed, loyal, fervent, passionate, it can be really really hard when it’s time for something to cease. We do get very exercised about it. All the more reason to be humbly seeking God and His Kairos time. Is it time to uproot? That said, we’ve uprooted the Lectern and moved it to a more prominent place. Not every uprooting is to dispose of something.

The last translation has perhaps the broadest meaning and has helped shape worship this week.

NIV A time to plant and a time to uproot.

Indeed it’s just as valid for us the other way round, in order to plant we often have to uproot.

Spiritually that would apply to Nathaniel – his prejudice and false expectations of the Messiah need to be uprooted.

But what about us?

We can cling to old hurts and old stories. We can hold onto the memory of disappointment and failure.

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We can be fixed in our views and opinions as if somehow we are the only ones in the whole world to have the truth.

We can have false expectations too, of church, or the Vicar, or each other.

All of us need to be open to whatever needs uprooting.

The church needs to be mindful of this scripture too. As we consider our welcome, our activity, our theology our practice, is there anything that needs to stop, or change, or be uprooted??

There is though the other half of the sentence a time to plant. If God is at work in you uprooting – you can be sure he is also planting and what He plants is for the good of your Soul, life-giving and eternal.

I was praying and asking God what was to be planted in us as a church. The answer was “a love for God’s Kingdom”.

A love for God’s Kingdom. It’s not a simple answer, in fact it invites questions. What does that mean? What does it mean to me? “A love for God’s Kingdom” isn’t a simple neat answer – it’s more of a gateway through which we are invited to step.

God wants to plant in us a love for His kingdom.

So that would be justice and mercy.

Grace and forgiveness.

Generosity and abundance.

A welcome to all, a place to belong.

If we love God’s kingdom, we will want Holy Trinity to be a sign of God’s kingdom – a place where healing, reconciliation and peace are to be found.

This verse comes from a song based on the puritan prayer, it’s a good prayer to offer in response to allowing God to plant in us a love for His kingdom.

*Here I place without reserve  
My soul in faith and meekness,  
Trusting in Christ's power and love  
To flourish in my weakness.  
Cause my days on earth to be  
Through time and through eternity  
A trophy of His victory,  
A monument to mercy.*

Lord help us to be living signs of your Kingdom and to love your kingdom above all.

Grant us wisdom, understanding and a willingness to allow you to uproot whatever prevents your will, your way and your kingdom

Amen