

**Joshua 1:1-9**  
**A Rock in a Sea of Chaos**

“Everybody’s changing and I don’t feel the same”. This was a lyric from one of my favourite songs “Everybody’s changing” by the band Keane. When asked what the song was about, a member of the group said “The song is about trying to work out where you are in the world, while some of the people around you are going off and doing different things.” I want to ask you this morning, how do you feel about change? Do you feel, like in the song, that everything’s changing around you and you’re being left behind or is Michael Jackson’s “Man in the Mirror” more relevant to you with its line “Gonna make that change” – where change is something you embrace and actively pursue? All of us go through major changes in our lives, starting new schools, going to university, new jobs, new relationships, maybe a new house or even moving to a new country! Or dealing with illness, either ourselves or a loved one, or having to deal with grief and loss. In some cases change can be something which excites us, but in many cases it is something which we find unsettling and in some cases scary. It is no coincidence that some of the most stressful moments in life are the major periods of change. It will probably come as no surprise to hear that the top ten items on the Holmes and Rahe stress scale used by psychiatrists to assess how stressful your life is, are major life changes including the death of a spouse or close family member, divorce and losing your job. Because of this, when facing big life changes, it can seem easier to try to stay where we are rather than make any change.

One man whose story I heard recently and found extremely encouraging was Rev Paraic Reamonn, a Church of Scotland minister, who last month took over the charge of St Andrew’s Memorial Church. This may not seem that big a change until I tell you that St Andrew’s Church is the Church of Scotland congregation in Jerusalem, at the centre of the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. As well as being responsible for the worship life of the congregation, he will also be responsible for building up relationships with other churches and faith communities to work together to help heal the great divides that exist there. I think most of us would agree that choosing to give up his previous role, working for the church in Geneva, to take up this position was a major change for Rev Reamonn, one which he might well have found a scary move and been tempted to stay where he was, but he felt that this was where God was calling him so he made the move to Jerusalem, to lead the work of the church there.

The Bible is a book full of changes and today we are going to focus on a major change which happened for the people of Israel in Old Testament times. In the passage which Tillie read for us from the book of Joshua earlier, we see Joshua and the people of Israel having to deal with a major change. Moses, the man who had led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, who had delivered God’s commandments and led them in the desert for 40 years, ultimately to the edge of the Promised Land, had died. The people of Israel are mourning their loss – we read at the end of the book of Deuteronomy that they mourned for Moses for 30 days – and now they have to face a huge change as they prepare to enter the Promised land without the man who led them there. One of the reasons that change can be so hard for us is that in many cases we are mourning the loss of what we had before – this might be mourning the loss of a loved one but can also be mourning the loss of our jobs if we are made redundant or if we move somewhere new we are leaving behind the people we know and the places which are familiar to us. Or if something changes around about you, for example your workplace or your church changes, then we often mourn the loss of the familiar ways

we are used to. This mourning is perfectly natural and right, but at the start of our reading we see God come to Joshua and tell him “Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites.” God recognises the hurt that the Israelites are feeling but encourages Joshua to continue the work that Moses had started, leading the Israelites into the Promised Land. It is very tempting to live in the past, particularly when we have experienced huge change or loss, as Joshua has, but God tells Joshua to look forward as well as he has plans for him and the people of Israel. Now, please don’t misunderstand me and think that I am saying that we should forget about the past – anyone who has studied any history knows that “Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it” – and we know that Joshua didn’t forget about the past, the book of Joshua makes 51 references to Moses. God is telling Joshua to take what he learned from Moses, looking at v7 we see God “Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you”, and continue the journey that Moses had started.

However, Joshua had big shoes to fill – something I can empathise with being stood up here today! And his new job was to lead more than 2 million people into a strange new land and conquer it! Joshua must have wondered whether he would be able to carry out this role which God had called him to. But God goes on to remind Joshua of something, which if you only remember one thing from this morning’s service, please remember this – that amongst the major changes that Joshua was facing and amongst the changes we face today, the one thing that is constant and never changes is God himself! God is the anchor for dealing with all changes because He is the one thing that can be counted on to not change! In v.5-6 we read “No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.” The God who is calling Joshua, is the same God who called Moses more than 40 years ago and who made covenants with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob centuries before, promising to give them the land which the Israelites were now about to enter. And importantly for us it is the same God who calls us today!

We saw this in our New Testament reading, when the author of the letter to the Hebrews quotes from Psalm 45, telling the Hebrews that “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever” and goes on to quote Psalm 102 when they say:

“In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth,  
and the heavens are the work of your hands.

<sup>11</sup>They will perish, but you remain;  
they will all wear out like a garment.

<sup>12</sup>You will roll them up like a robe;  
like a garment they will be changed.

But you remain the same,  
and your years will never end.”

It is likely that the Hebrew Christians, whom the letter is written to, were considering reverting to Judaism, partly due to persecution but also partly because they were struggling with the change from the Jewish faith to Christianity. With Christ’s coming, the Law and the words of the Prophets had been fulfilled and the barriers to God which had existed before were broken down – salvation,

the opportunity for a fresh start with God, and eternal life were now available to all who followed Christ. The Hebrew Christians, used to thinking and worshipping in traditional Jewish forms, struggled to accept that the Messiah whom they had been waiting for for centuries had arrived. They were mourning the loss of the Jewish traditions that gave them such comfort and were scared of accepting Jesus as the Messiah. So the letter to the Hebrews is written to show them both the superiority of Christ over everything and everyone and the superiority of faith in God's promises. The passage we read is designed to demonstrate that Christ is higher than the Angels and by quoting the verses from Psalms, the author is showing the Hebrew Christians that Christ is the only security for them in the changing world - not their Jewish traditions, which they were tempted to revert to. Christ was there at the creation of the Earth and will remain long after the Earth is gone. He is the same today as he was then and will remain so. They are trying to show the Hebrews that Christ is the only firm foundation, as he will never change. To quote the 19<sup>th</sup> century hymn, "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less", by Edward Mote, "On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand".

The same is true of us today. Jesus Christ is still our solid foundation, the same today as he has always been. Living in a time where things are changing at a faster rate than ever before, this is even more important today. To have someone who stay's constant while all around us is changing, gives us something to depend on – a rock in the sea of chaos!

But because God the father and Christ the son are unchanging, a constant in our life - this should give us confidence when dealing with the change that we experience in our lives. God tells Joshua in verse 9 "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." In fact, God had been preparing him for this moment. We see in verse 7, God tells Joshua "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go." And in verse 9 "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." Because Joshua had served under Moses for many years, he had been taught God's law, heard God's commandments and been equipped to take over the leadership. Today this might be known as succession planning, and is an example many churches could learn from. So when the moment came Joshua was well prepared to take on the leadership, and with God with him, was ultimately able to lead the Israelites into the land that God had prepared for them.

God does the same for us today. You may not face leading 2 million people into a new land and conquering it, but he does equip us for the major changes that we face in life. He does that in a number of ways. It may be practical experience – like Joshua serving under Moses. One of the biggest changes for me in recent years, has been my growing involvement in preaching both in this church and elsewhere. Looking back I can see that God helped prepare me for this by providing me with a number of people I could learn from and be mentored by, including our own minister. But he also equips us in another important way. God tells Joshua to remember the Law which he had been given. In v8 he says "Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." We also have God's law, through the bible. This should be our main guidance in the way we live our lives and prepares us for the life that God wants us to live, whatever changes that may involve. Not all change is a good thing – and any changes that we make in our lives should be held up against scripture to see if they match God's plan for us.

So, going back to the start, which are you – is “Everybody changing but I still feel the same”? If so, I warn you that change may come when you least expect it. I said those words to a friend of mine a few years ago and within a few years I had changed my job, started preaching, was getting ready to move house and most importantly, that friend was now my brother-in-law! But we shouldn't be afraid of any change that is to come. We have seen that the one thing that is constant and never changes is God himself. He was there at the creation of the world and is the same today as he was then. He is the one thing we can depend on in a constantly changing world. He was with Joshua as he took over the leadership of the people of Israel from Moses, just as he had been with Moses and all of his ancestors. He had been preparing Joshua for this big change in his life and would be with him as he took on the job which God had chosen him for. He also prepares us for the changes which we face today and has given us the best possible preparation through his word contained in the bible. The Christian church faces a number of difficult decisions over the next few years and it is inevitable that changes will be needed to how we do church. In Juniper Green we have started this with the Shaping the Future process we are currently going through, more information on this is available from the Minister or on the website, to help us decide what change is needed here in Juniper Green. But whatever decisions we make and however things change, we should remember God's words to Joshua “No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous”. We know that whatever changes around us, the God who we come to worship is unchanging and will be with us, like he was with Joshua, whatever happens, which should give us courage to deal with the changes that God is at work in our lives.

Amen