

Trinity 14 Sunday 5th September 2021 – with Revd. Roy Woodhams

8am and 10am Holy Communion at St Nicolas

Isaiah 35:4-7a and Mark 7.24-37

‘U-turns’ can be a hot issue! Over the years, successive Governments, on both sides, have been notorious for their making of ‘U-turns’! I can think of things like:

- NHS Reform
- Financial Issues
- Education
- Scrapping school milk for under 5s
- Scrapping Targets for this, that and the other
- And never more so than our present Government as it has lurched its way through the pandemic.

I could go on and on giving more specific examples, but enough is enough!

For sure, however, Government ‘U-turns’ are generally scorned by everyone – the press, the general public, the back-benchers of the party involved, and even the opposing political party who have been campaigning for the very issue over which the ‘U-turn’ has been made, and who will seek to make political gain by scorning them. And this is perhaps surprising, when there is usually one very good reason for a ‘U-turn’ – simply, that the policy or whatever it was, had been flawed in the first place! And it’s not just Governments who make ‘U-turns’ is it?

Just about every decision-making body in history has done it – and not least in this has been The Church! But it could be argued that there is some Biblical precedence, and in this this week’s Gospel reading we discover Jesus himself, making the biggest ‘U-turn’ of his earthly mission! This is a pivotal moment in his ministry!

So, what is the great ‘U-turn’ which I have spoken of? Well, it’s this that until this moment, Jesus whole earthly mission has been solely to the Jews. But the Gentile woman challenges him, and it seems to be at this very moment that Jesus suddenly realises that his earthly mission must go also to the gentiles. In this moment, he begins to think the unthinkable for God. Through this encounter with the gentile woman, Jesus begins to question the Jewish attitude towards those of other races, which had been at the heart of Judaism for centuries, and still is today. And then he has to take a decision which requires great courage, because he knows that if he associates

with gentiles he will be despised by his fellow Jews and he will be regarded by them as being in a state of uncleanness (and think back to his dispute last week's Gospel on this very topic)!

But, being Jesus, he makes the decision quickly, and once done he goes into it in a big way. He not only heals the woman's daughter, but as soon as he returns from Tyre he goes into the gentile Decapolis region to continue his ministry. And the very next story is about the healing of a deaf, gentile man. And the consequences of this change of thinking are enormous for the history of the Christian Church – it's almost as if this is the birth moment for the church, because until now, Jesus has been doing everything within the realms of his Jewish upbringing, but from here on he's going it alone!

In fact, I doubt that the Christian faith would have taken hold, flourished, and survived in the way it has for two thousand years if it hadn't been for this very fact that Jesus chose to take his mission to the gentiles! Of course, many Jews rejected his teaching, but the gentiles 'lapped it up', and it was in a very real sense, that it was from them, that the early Christian Church sprang! And they 'lapped it up' because it was teaching which was relevant to their lives and to their situations!

We have a lot to learn from this! But thinking the unthinkable is difficult, because it can so easily feel as though we are going against God's teaching. And those who dare to think the unthinkable nearly always find themselves, as Jesus did, rejected by the establishment, especially in the early days when the unthinkable is very new and strange.

Remember – it was once unthinkable that slaves should be freed. It was once unthinkable that marching into someone else's country and taking it over, might be morally wrong. It was once unthinkable that a country could or should survive without capital punishment. It was once unthinkable that women could be priests and Bishops.

So, what does this mean to us? What does it mean to our Church, as today, we begin a new way of doing things, in our move towards a 'new normal'?

Well, it means that we are being called to accept new ideas, and to do it graciously. It means we're going to be challenged and led along new paths! But today, we are reminded that Jesus has already been there, and there is a real sense in which rising to those challenges is being Christlike – something which we have to strive to be if we are to bear the title 'Christian'!

Until we dare to begin to think the unthinkable, and to become a risk-taking Church, then, surely, we can never claim to be fully 'Christ-like' in our pursuit

of the Gospel, and we will never become that church which is Caring, Sharing and Daring for this community and for the Gospel of Christ!