For parish magazines – October 2022

The same yesterday, today and forever

Many of us know well Bob Dylan’s song ‘The Times They Are A-Changin’. Was it written with us in mind? None of us could have predicted the changes that we have seen in 2022. The death of our beloved Queen Elizabeth, the accession of a new King, a war in Ukraine, a cost-of-living crisis. None of these were on the cards as we made our new year’s resolutions on the 1st of January.

Yet happen they have. And whether we like it or not, we’re forced to agree with Bob Dylan’s lyrics that the times are indeed changing. What can see us though these days?

A phrase that’s often used about the period through which we’re going is ‘unprecedented’. I’m not sure it’s entirely valid! Previous generations have faced situations as challenging or more than ours – seasons of plagues, wars, famines and conquest. The times in which the New Testament was written were, for its writers, periods of profound uncertainty. Its writers faced violence and vulnerability, conflict and dispute. Yet into their times they were able to speak words of hope, confidence and assurance.

One such phrase that stands out for me is a line from the letter to the Hebrews. Hebrews was written in response to a time of persecution and the possibility of people falling back from the faith as a result. Into its time and ours, the writer of the letter makes an extraordinary claim: ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.’ (Hebrews 13:8)

Just imagine! The one who walked in Galilee has been there for his people throughout time, is with us now, and will be whatever the future may hold.

So respectfully, I have to disagree with Bob Dylan. In his song he tells us that in the face of times that are ‘a-changin’, we’d better start ‘swimmin’. Much better than hyperactive splashing, I suggest, is to live out our vision to ‘live and tell the story of Jesus’. For it’s as we do so that we can hold fast to the one who is constant and unchanging, who holds us always in the palm of his hands; Jesus Christ who is ‘the same yesterday, today and forever.’

Bishop Michael