

One of the things I hate most, and here's an insight into my psyche, is changing room mirrors. Something about the combination of the lighting and the mirrors they use makes it feel like I'm always looking at a stranger. Changing room mirrors are never flattering I find, odd when you think about it, surely you should look in the mirror and be convinced that the item you're trying on is life changing. Normally I avoid the changing room, taking a punt that whatever item I'm buying will fit and dealing with the meltdown when I try it on at home. It's one of the reasons why I predominantly wear black, its very forgiving. There is something vulnerable about looking in mirrors; some of us hate it, some of us might spend a bit too long doing it!

In a sense all our readings this morning are mirrors, they all refer back to "you", drawing us into texts that suddenly put us front and centre.

Let's start with Paul, not always the obvious starting point! Because we've thrown in a few feasts over the last three Sundays, we've missed the laborious bits of Romans where it's difficult to work out where Paul is taking his argument. Here we move into the practical outworking of what, he at least, sees is obvious. The gospel we have been called to and saved by, and which will save creation is one that transforms us, but only when we allow it to. For

Paul, faith is worked out in our bodies, it's not just cerebral, it's not just emotional, it is also physical. It is our bodies that we offer as living sacrifices, leading into his picture, popular among Greek philosophers, of the body corporate. In the offering of our bodies, we go against the spirit of this world, or this current age, which Paul is setting up in opposition to the Gospel, the eternal age we belong to in Christ. We are transformed not conformed because our bodies are no longer ours, they are Christ's.

Here we are back in the changing room, looking in the mirror, the body looking back at us, hoping to be transformed by the ideal new garment that will tuck us in, lift us up and let us shine. For Paul, that's what the Gospel does for us, tucks us in, lifts us up and lets us shine, which is why he goes on to say, think of yourselves with sober judgement. Most of us probably have that one in hand, judging ourselves more harshly than others. I don't think that's what Paul means, sober judgement of ourselves is done in parallel with seeing where we fit in the body. For those who might think too much of themselves, the body reminds us that we cannot live without each other, it will not function well if one part dominates to the death of others; for those who think too little of themselves, the body reminds us that without each part the body does not flourish as it was created to. Our strengths and weaknesses are balanced

out by the body, we both compensate for others and are compensated for by others, that the whole body may flourish. The gifts that each one of us have to offer are vital to all of us.

That is where the renewal of our minds comes in, our physical bodies might not be gloriously transformed without some cosmetic help this side of the grave, but in the renewal of our minds we see how God sees us.

And here we are at Isaiah's prophecy. Here, as in Romans, there is a very definite focus on "you". "**You** that pursue righteousness ... **you** that seek the Lord ... look to the rock from which **you** were hewn, and to the quarry from which **you** were dug. Look to Abraham **your** father and to Sarah who bore **you**." The 'you' in context is the audience of Second Isaiah (40-55), the faithful remnant of Israel, hoping for the return which God will accomplish through Cyrus. Isaiah takes it wider and further though than this small group, he widens it out to the whole world and for all time, God's salvation, he concludes with, will never end.

In Isaiah's prophecy we are taken back to the beginnings, certainly to the beginning of Israel's story, to Abraham and Sarah, alongside whom we have

images of deserts becoming gardens, wildernesses becoming Eden. For the remnant and the exiles this is powerful imagery and reminder, God brings life out of what is seemingly dead or barren, even people. If we bring Paul into conversation here, he and Isaiah would be saying, “think soberly of yourselves in the light of who you are and what you bring to the body, and in light of who God is and what God can do with you, however tired, washed up or frightened you might feel. Be renewed.”

Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. The rock ... and here we land in the Gospel. Isaiah identifies Abraham and Sarah as the first rocks dug from the quarry of faithfulness; the writer of 1 Peter sees Christ as a living stone, the corner stone; and now Peter is called rock.¹

It's important to note what Matthew does with this story that is in all the synoptics. The titles for Jesus that are used here are added on to the Markan “Messiah”, Son of God and Son of Man are important for Matthew's Christology and so he adds them in.² The prophet Jeremiah is added to the list

¹ Charles E Hambrick-Stowe, *Feasting on the Word Year A vol.3*, p.384

² Mitchell G Reddish, *ibid*, p.381

Matthew copies over from Mark, because for Matthew Jeremiah is a figure of Jesus, he is named twice more in the Gospel, there are allusions to his prophecy and he resonates heavily in Jesus' Temple discourse.³ More importantly perhaps, is that Matthew has Jesus give Peter his nickname now rather than earlier as in Mark and John.⁴

And it is a nickname, it could even be translated as "Rocky", Peter is famously rocky in his understanding and his approach! But he is named the rock, the foundation on which the universal Church will be built, simply because of his confession of who Jesus is here.

You are rock. My guess is that quite a few times on the road with Jesus, Peter looked in his changing room mirror and couldn't see a rock. I doubt that on hearing the cock crow if we had put Peter in front of that mirror, he would have seen the rock on which the Church would be built. If we had snuck that mirror into the upper room anytime between the Resurrection and Pentecost, I don't think Peter would have smiled and nodded and said, "yeah there's the rock!"

³ Daniel J Harrington S.J., *The Gospel of Matthew: Sacra Pagina*, p.247

⁴ Reddish, p.383

And so we are back to Paul, “each one of you must have a sober judgement of yourselves.” Yes, Isaiah says, you’re a small, tired, scared remnant but look to the rock. Look to Sarah and Abraham who had given up hope because of their age, until God said look to me. Look to Peter whose rockiness was at best a liability to Jesus but whose confession of who Jesus is made him the rock on which you and I are built.

So, here’s the changing room mirror, are you brave enough to take a look? Are we brave enough as a church to take a look? Well, I have been taking a long hard look lately. I’ve been piecing together snippets of conversations, throw away comments and the response to the parish survey to try to picture what we see when we look in the mirror. And here’s what I think we see corporately, and some of us individually: we are too old, too tired, too infirm to make a difference, our only hope is to get families, children and young people in, we can’t make a difference as we are.

And then I hear Paul muttering, probably impatiently, “do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Because this age will tell us that, the world and even the Church will tell us that youth makes all the difference, that we need to grow younger to have any hope of survival. But God doesn't say that when God chooses Abraham and Sarah, Elizabeth and Zechariah, Simeon, and Anna.

And then I hear Jesus to say Peter, because of who you say I am, you are the rock, despite everything you get wrong, one day, thousands of years from now people will meet in the most northerly parish in a place called England and become my disciples. Because of who you say I am.

It is true that I have had more conversations about walking sticks and hearing aids in the last 15 months than I ever had before. But it is also true that those same walking sticks and hearing aids have made their way to study groups, to prayer, to learning about our faith, to worship. Friends, we need to be renewed in our minds; children and young people won't save us, although we are doing a lot of work in our schools so that children and young people can encounter Jesus as themselves and for themselves.

You are the rock!

I believe that God is calling us somehow to find the joy in those walking sticks and hearing aids, to mine the wisdom and experience, to experience now the renewal that God offers at every age. I'm not sure how we do that yet, I'm open to conversation and experimenting, we're in the changing room so let's try a few things on. But I am sure that Isaiah and Paul and Jesus are cheering us on, hear them say, "look to the rock, be transformed." Hear them say, "you, as you are, are the rock on which we can build here." Hear them say, "you, as you are, are a gift that we need."