

## ***A Fickle God for Fickle People?***

*Exodus 32<sup>7-14</sup>; Psalm 51<sup>1-11</sup>; 1 Timothy 1<sup>12-17</sup>; Luke 15<sup>1-10</sup>*

*And the Lord changed his mind! [Exodus 32<sup>14</sup>]*

How do you make decisions? I know that I am the sort of person who takes time to weigh up options, to research as fully as I can and then to reach a conclusion. Once I have made up my mind, that is it: I don't like changing my mind and rarely do.

Had I looked more closely at the readings for today, I would have delegated the responsibility for preaching as all the readings for today are about the need to change our minds.

In brief, Moses gets God to change his mind, the Gospel calls us to change our minds (the literal translation of *metanoia*) and Paul is an example of someone who has changed his mind.

So what motivation is there to get this stubborn individual - or you - to think again?

### ✠ **Cows**

The Hebrews had become tired of waiting for Moses and, despite what they had known of God's deliverance in escaping Egypt, they had the need to worship something and so they made a cow out of gold! God was angry and sad that the people had **acted perversely** and then says **let me alone so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them.**

Moses' response was to argue with God reminding him that his reputation was at stake - and to remind God **how [he] swore to [Abraham, Isaac and Israel] by your own self, saying to them 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants.**

**And the Lord changed his mind** - is that evidence of a fickle God more interested in his reputation than the fate of people? Of course not! It is evidence of a generous God who may have cause for anger, but in his generosity chooses grace. If God can change his mind, then we have little defence when we refuse to!

### ✠ **Serpents**

Paul had known the influence of the serpent being **formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor and a man of violence.** But Paul discovered a great truth - **Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the foremost.** It was a work of God and a work of grace that brought Paul to the point where he could declare his conviction that **Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life.** For that reason Paul explodes in praise: **To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.**

Paul had to change his mind about everything that had mattered to him and that change of mind was the making of him! His conversion moved him from being an expert about God to someone who really knew God; from being a hater to a lover; from being right to being righteous.

That is a journey that we, too, all must take: from being self-reliant to being people of faith.

### ✠ **Sheep**

The stark contrast in the Gospel is between the **Pharisees and Scribes** who **were grumbling** and the **angels** who were partying! These very familiar parables speak about the importance of searching out the lost - the **sheep** and the **coin**, representing stability and security.

To the religious elite who didn't know their need of **repentance** Jesus, in his usual blunt style, speaks about the **joy** the sinful brings to heaven when they are honest about their need to change (and the misery that the religious sorts bring even to God himself).

Which side are you on - the joyful or the miserable? The access code to the party is simple - it is **repentance**: to change our mind about who we were and what we did and to embrace forgiveness and hope.

In a Church where there was the opportunity for anyone to pray one chap prayed every week and included the words, 'Lord, clean the cobwebs out of our lives.' It got too much for another worshipper who had heard this prayer once too often and changed his mind about saying 'amen'.. He jumped to his feet and shouted, 'Don't do it, Lord! Kill the spider!' The lasting change is surely best!