

If you had to pick one word that captures the essence of this whole 2-year journey, since the very first time you heard the words Covid 19 ... what would that word be? For me it's a no brainer. It's this word. Uncertainty. Because there is no paradigm of how we do life that **hasn't** been caught up in the grip and clutches of uncertainty.

Be it the paradigm of how you do school, how you do university, or your workspace. How you plan your travels, how you function in your relationships and catch up with loved ones. How we come to church and how we do church. And even, how we spend our final days saying goodbye to those we love. Everything single paradigm of our lives has changed. Without question, it's been a paradigm shift. And just to add to the uncertainty, the paradigm is still shifting.

Which means that you and I, have an ongoing challenge.

How we respond and how we adapt to these changes, I believe is one of the most important challenges for all of us. Individually - as a nation - AND as a worshipping community. The fundamental question I posed a few months back, hasn't gone away.



What difference does our faith make, to how we respond DIFFERENTLY to this paradigm shift? And how important is it that we have an adaptive spirit?

As St Paul said to the church of Corinth, **“I have become all things to all people for the sake of the Gospel.”** This is what you call an adaptive spirit.

All of which brings us, to the truly fascinating dynamic between John the Baptist and his cousin Jesus Christ.

BUT LET'S BEGIN BY SETTING THE CONTEXT

Firstly, the one thing no-one could accuse John the Baptist of ever being... is FLAKY. As we join the story, John is in prison because he dared to call out Herod for the corrupt power he truly is. Secondly, John is the one who predicted to his people that a divine Paradigm shift was a coming and it looks like Jesus Christ.

“I baptize you with water. But one who is far more powerful than I will come. I'm not even worthy of untying his sandals. Because He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Which is a pretty ringing endorsement from John. But things are changing - because John is now being tormented by feelings of **uncertainty**. WHY? Well because of this.



2 When John heard about the deeds of the Messiah (Jesus), he sent his disciples.

John's own disciples are bringing back troubling reports about Jesus' behaviour and deeds. So, John sends his disciples to ask Jesus a hard question. **"How is it that we AND the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?"** Incredulous as this may sound, what this all boils down to, is that John actually has a problem with the religious standards of Jesus.

But see it from John's perspective.

John has mostly lived in the desert simply and frugally. He's not into fancy foods, fashion is definitely not his forte. He rarely cuts his hair and **never drinks alcohol**. In many ways he has a lot in common with the Pharisees. Because he observes the key laws and requirements of their religious faith.

The creeping uncertainty for John... is over the reports he's getting about Jesus. Not just the lack of fasting but also the amount of feasting. Jesus as we know has gained a reputation for drinking and feasting. A wine bibber. Even worse, is the company that Jesus is keeping. Which is basically **everyone** considered undesirable by the religious. So now John's uncertainty about Jesus actually reaches point that we read this.

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 John has gone from "I'm not fit to untie your sandals Jesus", to – "are you really the one."

John sent his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" John has gone from "I'm not fit to untie your sandals Jesus", to – "are you really the one."

AND THIS IS WHERE IT ALL GETS VERY INTERESTING

Because Jesus now gives one of his legendary responses that causes people to stop in their tracks. WHY? Because it disturbs our set patterns of thinking. As St Paul puts it, our conformed patterns of thinking. AND WE ALL HAVE THEM.

But the power of these wisdom parables of Jesus, is that IF we are open minded enough, can take us on a deeper and more rewarding journey to a place of self-awareness. And this is really KEY. Because **self-awareness** is ALWAYS the first step to true and lasting transformation. How can we be transformed by the renewing of our minds if we are not actually aware that our minds NEED renewing?

So what does Jesus say to John's disciples to challenge their set patterns of thinking? Well, he says this.

Matthew 9:17-18
 "No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the skin are ruined. What people do, is pour new wine into new wineskins, so both are preserved."
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Matthew 9¹⁷ **No-one puts new wine into old wineskins: otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the skin are ruined. What people do, is pour new wine into new wineskins, so both are preserved."**

SO WHATS THE POINT JESUS IS MAKING?

Well he's saying that as wine ferments, so wine expands. Old wineskins have already assumed a definite shape. They've already stretched to their adaptive limit. The challenge of the new wine stresses the old wineskin beyond its capacity to yield and cope, so they tear at the seams. And both the skin AND the valuable wine are lost.

New wineskins on the other hand, ARE able to adapt. They are more rigorous, more robust more pliable, and more agile. Therefore, more resilient. They can adapt to the new shape required by the challenge of the new wine.

Isn't this a wisdom as telling and as pertinent for you and I today, as it was for then.

Who of us over these past 2 years hasn't felt a bit like an old wine skin?

Being stretched to our limit by the ever-changing paradigm.

Who hasn't felt a tad stressed beyond our capacity to cope?

Who hasn't felt a little torn at the seams?

What Jesus is saying to John's disciples and you and I and our St G's community is this.



Everything is changing. So you need to respond differently and adapt. I AM the paradigm shift of the Gospel wine says Jesus, but it will look different. You can't see everything through the lens of your old expectations. Stretch the wineskins of your minds. A NEW creation and a new challenge, requires a NEW mindset.

So back to that fundamental question for our times. What difference does our faith make to how we respond and adapt differently to radical change? For You and I individually, and for us as a Church here at St George's.

I OFFER 3 THOUGHTS FROM THIS WISDOM OF JESUS CHRIST.



- **Firstly, I think our starting place, is that we acknowledge that our anxiety and resistance to change is a perfectly understandable human response.**

Because we often associate change with loss. We don't so much fear change, we fear the loss, that we believe, we will find on the other side of change. So when we're faced with an adaptive challenge, our first instinct, is to preserve, conserve and resist.

But every now and then, something comes along in life, (like Covid) that makes our resistance to change futile. The forces of change are so intense, and so inevitable ... we have no choice but to roll with the tide and go wherever the wave takes us. **You**

and I are in such a moment. And painful though this can be, it can be a blessing. Because now we can make room for the new possibilities begging to be born into this world. As Jesus said... **“Only when you lose your life, can you begin to gain it.”**

The fundamental truth of our Christian faith.
The Resurrection Christ, and the power of
Christ's love. God is always redeeming the world
to Himself. And the Church of Christ, should
always be leading - by the example of Christ.
Brené Brown defines daring leadership:
“It's the courage to show up when you can't
predict the future.”
“Why has God put us here, and how can we best
show up for the new challenges?”

Secondly, we remind ourselves of the fundamental truth of our Christian faith.

That through Jesus Christ, and the power of Christ's love, God is always redeeming the world to Himself. And the Church of Christ, should always be leading - by the example of Christ. And **I love the way Brené Brown** defines daring leadership ... she said **“it's the courage to show up when you can't predict the future.”** At the core of an adaptive response is ALWAYS the question... **“why has God put us here, and how can we best ‘show up’ for the new challenges?”** If we try to see everything through the old lens, of the old familiar paradigms, with the same old expectations, then we can miss out on the new possibilities that God is bringing.

Ultimately, it's not about the wineskins.
It's about the wine.
The Gospel wine of Christ.
We don't even use wineskins anymore
we use wine bottles.
But the real point is still the wine.
In the Kingdom of God there
is no tradition in the tending of the fire,
and the taking care of the ashes.
“You need to keep the fire going,
and not just hold a bucket of ashes.”

And finally, we remember always, that ultimately, it's not about the wineskins, it's about the wine. The Gospel wine of Christ. Things always change and evolve. We don't even use wineskins anymore we use wine bottles. But the real point is still the wine.

For any church trying to be adaptive to radical change, there's a brilliant quote by Gustav Mahler about tradition. He says this... **“Tradition is the tending of the fire, not the taking care of the ashes.”** We need to stoke the fire and keep the Gospel fire blazing and not just hold a bucket of ashes.

I'LL FINISH WITH THIS.

As you can imagine I've been thinking and praying a lot about what it means to be adaptive these past 2 years since the first Lockdowns. The changes have at times been giddy, particularly these past 7 months since the August Lockdown. And I've wondered at times if we as a community would be stretched beyond our limits to cope and adapt.

But we spent over 5 months as an online community with a weekly Zoom get togethers, with many a beautiful and inspiring moments. All of this culminated with our Christmas Specials. As a community we responded incredibly in sorts of kingdom ways, including over 1,500 people tuning in to these Christmas services alone.

We then pivoted in January to our Pandemic Epiphany conversations with people from our own community. These have also been seen by over 1,000 people. These have also been seen by over a 1,000 people. I'm not saying this as a statement of

pride, I'm saying it as a statement of encouragement for the adaptive spirit of this community. **New wineskins to keep the Gospel wine flowing.**

At Traffic light Orange we returned to being an IN PERSON worshipping community for the first time in over 5 months and it was a truly beautiful celebration of God centred worship. And we did it without excluding anyone from our community. And I have to be honest this was incredibly important to me, because a Church that excludes, may be many things but it's not the Church of Christ.

But then of course, just as we literally sang our final worship song of the service, we found out that we were back at Traffic Light Red. How would we respond? We need an adapt.

By the end of the following week, we had all the equipment installed for a Live stream Service. And the motivation for this was very simple. We wanted to be an 'in person' worship community and we wanted to include anyone, who for whatever reason couldn't be here in person.

We are also now in the process of looking for someone to replace Steph as she answers God's new calling on her life.

Have I at times felt a little overwhelmed by all this giddy change? Absolutely.

Have I at times felt a little despair? Absolutely.

Have I ever lost the passion and the faith? Absolutely not. Because this is life, this is church this is our faith. Change, transition. Loss and gain. Death and resurrection. But one thing remains the same. **The Gospel wine and how we respond and how we adapt to these changes?**

I'll leave the final words to Jesus, which also happens to be the final words from Jesus to his cousin John. And it's the most profound and telling wisdom of them all



"Go back and report to John what you hear and what you see: The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. (Matthew 11:4–6).
In the end, says Jesus, whatever the paradigm, whatever the change, whatever the challenge, it's all about the Kingdom fruit we bear!

LETS PRAY

Loving God we pray for our ST George's community.

We pray that in all the challenges and changes that lie ahead we can continue in the unity of Your Spirit and your bond of peace.

We pray that we will continue to walk together with an adaptive spirit celebrating the opportunities and possibilities that lie within these changes.

We pray that we continue as a people who walk together in surrender and trust to your good providence and Spirit's wisdom leading.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ Our Lord and our saviour. Amen.

Take a moment to reflect on the changes you may be facing at this moment.
How might you be called to adapt.