

WEEK 1: FRIDAY

Those of us who now use computers take it for granted that they will have a large internal memory. This is stored on what is called a 'hard disk', as opposed to what we used to have, back in the 1980s, which was a 'floppy disk', which you had to put into the computer and take out again. They didn't hold much information, and you always had to be putting them in and taking them out. It was a nuisance. But you get quite attached to the machines you use a lot, and I remember trying to get a technician to fit a hard drive and disk into the old machine I had been using and wanted to carry on using.

Eventually, as we discussed it, he took a deep breath. 'What you need', he said, 'is not to add more bits onto this old machine. What you need is a new machine.'

That wasn't what I (or my bank manager) wanted to hear. But he was right. The new machine duly arrived, and I quickly realized it was, of course, what I had been needing for some time.

If we get attached to computers and other machines, we get far more attached to the traditional ways in which we have organized and run our lives. And though we all know that things could be better, we all hope that we can simply add the better bit on to the way we do things at the moment, so that we won't have to change too much, if at all. This is a challenge every generation has to face, but for Jesus and his contemporaries it was massive. They had lived for many centuries with a traditional way of life. They assumed, naturally enough, that if and when their God came back to rescue them he would support and vindicate that way. And Jesus was telling them that something new was happening. God was indeed doing what he'd always said, but the old machines they had been working with — the things they'd expected to happen — simply weren't adequate for this new moment.

They were wanting God to put the world right, with them- selves coming out on top as the ones who'd always been on his side. What they hadn't realized was that God would do this for individuals, too, including individuals who up to then had not been on his side. Jesus used a picture for this: the doctor doesn't go round visiting people who are fit and well, but people who are sick and poorly. In other words: he wasn't just supporting the status quo. He was doing something much better, much more exciting, much more encouraging for people like us.

In particular, he was replacing an overall mood of sadness and longing with an overall mood of celebration and hope. They used to fast regularly, to remember the times long ago when their nation had suffered awful disasters. Jesus was coming to do something that would always be remembered with celebration — so fasting wasn't appropriate! That was revolutionary. But it was appropriate.

We today fast during Lent, to remind ourselves of the sorrow and sin that still abounds in the world and in our own lives. But we do so as a people whose basic mode of life is celebration. God has brought the new world into being in and through Jesus. Don't try to put the new cloth on the old coat, or the new wine into old bottles. God is making everything new, and he's inviting us to the party.

TODAY

Thank you, gracious Lord, that you are the doctor who has come to cure us. Help us to celebrate your new life with gratitude and love.