

So we can change our minds. At one level this gives us hope, at another, it highlights our vulnerability to sin. We can change our minds for good but we can also change our minds for evil, and the consequences are not of equal value in Ezekiel: *When the sinner renounces sin to become law-abiding and honest, he deserves to live, but When the upright man renounces his integrity to commit sin...he dies*, whatever good he or she has done before. This is not, however, quite the same as what Jesus is telling us in the gospel passage. In Ezekiel, the issue is changing the traditional view of collective and trans-generational responsibility – you suffer because of the sins of your predecessors – to one of personal responsibility, now. It's what *you* do that matters – not what someone else has done. What Jesus is saying is an extension of this way of thinking; to challenge the chief priests and elders of his day with the possibility that change remains possible for them too, that they can still become men of integrity by not only saying 'yes' but by practising what they preach. The ideal, then, is not someone who says 'no' and then says 'yes' but someone who says 'yes' 'yes' and 'yes.' Few of us, however, can do this. The fear in the Ezekiel passage that, no matter what good we have done we can still throw it all away, remains a real fear, but in Jesus we find someone who can change our 'no' to 'yes' because he himself lived a life of 'yes' 'yes' 'yes' despite the temptation to say 'no.' This is why Jesus is so important to us and why we have to cling to him to allow him to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. As the letter to the Philippians so beautifully puts it, *In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus*, and then goes on to explain why. He, *though God*, becomes as we are and dies for us as one of us so that all our 'noes' can become 'yes' in him. Tax collectors and prostitutes can join in this process of redemption as much as anyone else, as Matthew himself well knows! And it's never too late because, though the last can become first, this doesn't exclude the first who can still finish the race even as the last. Indeed, this is Paul's great hope for his people, Israel. The danger for us is to make any sort of judgement about who is first and who is last, for then we readily become like the chief priests and elders as described in this gospel passage. This is not our call. Part of our trust in Jesus is to know that all judgement is his and we can trust him to do this with love; indeed, with a love without end.

So there's hope even for priests and elders.

Br John Mayhead
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour