

Red and Yellow and Pink and Green, Purple and Orange and Blue! I expect you remember the song? So, who are you going to vote for in the General Election! Which colour of the rainbow best represents your political views? Or perhaps, like many, you have had your fill of the various platitudes oozing from the television, radio and newspapers at every turn and the last thing you want now is for me to preach about it!

Perhaps you are one of those that think that Religion and Politics are like oil and water. Best kept apart. I am reliably informed that the Church of England is the most right wing Christian denomination in mainland Britain. You are twice as likely to vote Conservative as Labour. The Church of England has long been referred to as the Tory Party at prayer. But you are also more likely to vote UKIP than any other section of the electorate.

The House of Bishops have released a Pastoral Letter on the 2015 General Election, which is now just around the corner. You can download it from the Church of England website. All you have to do then is find the time and the will to read all fifty-six pages. Then, based on the Bishop's wisdom, you have only to read the full range of manifestos to

make a truly informed decision. The Liberal Democrats have written one hundred and fifty pages; others are considerably shorter.

The reality is that you may well simply fall into one of two categories. You always knew who you were going to vote for or you still don't know who you are going to vote for. A traditional voter or a floating voter?

The Bishops entitled their letter 'Who is my neighbour?' And I think that this famous question posed to Jesus does give us some interesting food for thought. Those of you that were at the evening I presented during our Lent course have a bit of a head start, because I took this parable and this question 'Who is my neighbour' as the theme for exploring why we would consider talking to other people about our faith. So why would we take it as a starting point when we are thinking about how we are going to vote.

I must say that although the letter from the House of Bishops came in for a good deal of flack – there is much in it that enables me to commend it to you as worthy of your attention. The Bishops write:

‘The privileges of living in a democracy mean that we should use our votes thoughtfully, prayerfully, and with the good of others in mind, not just our own interests. Pursuing the common good is a Christian obligation and is expressed in how we approach our role as voters as much as in our personal priorities.’

And it is this notion of the ‘common good’ that has been occupying not only the Bishops, but also the General Synod and most of our ecumenical partners. Prioritising the common good is something that it seems all Christians can find some agreement about. And that is rather a rare occurrence these days. Also, the spirit of this, it seems to me has something of the Easter we celebrate at its very heart. The document continues:

‘Christianity is an incarnational faith – Jesus Christ lived as one of us, shared the joys and hardships of ordinary life and died a violent and shameful death. Wherever we find ourselves, he has shared our condition. His resurrection is a sign that the sufferings of the world are not the last word and that God’s transforming power can turn the material world – not just the spiritual – to work for good.

Christians believe that we are called to share in this responsibility for bringing to birth a new creation.’

I am not going to go through the whole document exhaustively – if you want to look at it – you can and I would certainly encourage you to.

In the Sundays after Easter we hear the stories of the post-resurrection appearances. Last week, that vivid account of ‘Doubting Thomas’ and today again Jesus appears as proof of the resurrection. On Good Friday, I commented that, unlike the disciples who had not anticipated Jesus’s death and were bewildered by what happened, we approach the Cross in full knowledge of the resurrection. We cannot unknow what we know. But, likewise, Jesus appears to the disciples. They know he has risen from the dead and cannot unknow it and so the Good News of Jesus Christ, spread and spread and spread. We however, have not seen the risen Christ as they did and are totally dependent on faith. Perhaps it is this that makes it so much more difficult in the present age for us to spread and to spread and to spread the Good News.

And yet, our politicians, who promise one ideology or another are knocking randomly on doors and

producing literature and getting into discussions to gain as many followers as possible. What seems so easy for them – is it really so hard for us?

I suppose it boils down to two things – promises and trust. Are we promised something we value and do we trust the one making the promises to deliver on them. And that applies to so many of our relationships doesn't it, including the one we strive to grow between Jesus and us. And when it comes to promises and trust, it isn't always plain sailing.

We have some challenges ahead of us as a parish and as a Benefice. Today we will hold our APCM. It's a time to take stock and also to look forward. It's a time to reconsider our commitment and our stewardship. We also approach this APCM knowing that in a few months time we will enter a period of vacancy as Jane moves on to a new ministry. Our relationships are going to be really important. The promises we make and the trust we have in each other and in God will be what shapes our future. And we need to do this openly and generously bearing in mind, the common good. Vacancies can be really creative times, but they can sometimes be a time of division and we must prayerfully swim with each other in the opposite direction if we can.

Words from our Gospel today:

“Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?’ ...in their joy they were still disbelieving and still wondering.”

If we are honest, that is often where we find ourselves in our faith too isn't it.

Let us pray:

Risen Christ,

You filled your disciples with boldness and fresh hope:

Strengthen us to proclaim your risen life

And fill us with your peace,

To the glory of God the Father.

Amen.