

St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick

The Thought for the Week

Sunday 2nd May 2021

Well, after weeks of posturing and campaigning, the polling and hustings and the raging rhetoric are almost over for the time being!

Speaking to a friend last week about the forthcoming Election to the Holyrood, he said that he hadn't the foggiest clue who to vote for because he just couldn't trust any of the politicians. "None of them say what they really think," he said. He went on to say that they all make promises that they don't keep, feed lambs, kiss babies, drink pints, all in an effort to look normal and human, and offer banal and shallow soundbites that don't really reveal what they are about. I, for one, feel that he has a point!

I love the story of the four-year-old girl whose Dad had been watching the Scottish Leaders' Debate on the BBC, and she tugged on the leg of his trousers and begged him to stop and read her a fairy tale. Weary from all the political haranguing, he agreed and began to read the story. No sooner had he begun, however, than she interrupted and asked, "Daddy, do all fairy tales begin with "Once upon a time"?" He answered, "No, sweetheart, most fairy tales begin with "And when I am elected....".

Like most ministers, I don't preach party politics, for God has not called ministers to tell folk for whom to vote. I do believe very strongly though, that God's Word has a great deal to say about our relationship to government and the kind of society that God wants, and the issues that are very prominent in our country today. Doesn't the Psalmist write, "Righteousness exalts a nation."? Selecting our leaders has very serious ramifications.

St Paul writes, "Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity."

So, are you looking for the perfect Political Party? Sorry, you will not find one. Often it may be a matter of selecting the best of the worst. But, at least, we are given a choice which is not the case in many countries. Voting for our leaders is at once an amazing privilege and an awesome responsibility. The wrong leaders can drastically change a country for the worse – think of what happened in Germany, in the USSR, in China and Venezuela.

A candidate for the Scottish Parliament was doing some door to door campaigning, and things were going pretty well, he thought, until he knocked on a door which was answered by a grumpy old man. After he gave his speech, the old man growled, "Vote for you? I would rather vote for the Devil himself!". At this point, the candidate, realising that there was no way he was going to sway the elderly gentleman, responded with a smile, "I totally understand. But as it seems that your friend is not standing for election, may I count on your support?".

We are most fortunate to live in a democratic society and that you and I have the responsibility of voting for those whom we want to lead our country. Do we vote for the colour of their tie or the colour of their character?

The fact remains that our God has standards for those who lead His people, so how do you and I get beyond the rhetoric of the candidates and really vote in a Christian manner?

There are no perfect candidates out there in any Party, but there are Christians and others of genuine goodwill who desire deeply to do the right thing, politicians who are not in it to advance their own careers, men and women who genuinely are not out to feather their own nests, but are at pains to really serve the people.

Listening to the radio the other morning, a lot of folk were phoning in to share their views.

And a woman called in and she said,

“Well, obviously, at the end of the day, everyone is going to vote for the Party that they think will be in their best interests, which will put money in their pockets.”

Well, obviously.

If you are on a fixed income, getting no interest in your savings right now, who promises you most?

If you are very well off, and paying a lot of tax, who will offer you paying less?

If you rely on benefits, perhaps not able to work because of a health issue, who do you trust to maintain that support, and who do you fear might take it away?

Who will fund our NHS properly?

If that caller to the radio programme was right, it is obvious we will just all vote for whoever we judge, in both the short and long term, will be best for our bank balance, whose policies will most advantage me, you, individually, with our wants and needs.

If we are going to bring our Christianity into this, we will ask about the common good as well as our individual interests here, and we will listen intently to each of the Parties' promises about what is good and right for our nation as a whole.

Now, our Lord is not a candidate in the election Himself.

But the different parties and candidates make claims, offers, promises, warnings that paint different pictures of who we are and who we can be – and it is essential that as Church members, as followers of Jesus, we need to weigh these up against a Christian vision of what is good and right.

It is not easy. We must try and find our way through all the lies and the deceit and the false promises to see who is going to seek the common good, who is going to build a country where each lives for the other and all live for God.

In a few days' time, the ballots will be cast, the polls will close, and the election will be over. But the voting will never be over. We vote every day, not by the ballot box, but with our lives, our choices, our priorities, our words and our actions.

How will you vote?

The Reverend Fraser R Aitken, Locum Minister