

## Politics

As this is my last Sunday with you, may I just express my personal thanks for the welcome, kindness and friendship that I have received from you all. It has been a great privilege to be with you in Broxbourne and Wormley and I will miss you all.

It may come as a surprise that the Church has been involved in Politics for many centuries – Church wardens in a parish even as late as the 1850s were looking after roads and local amenities and being responsible for the poor of the parish in so far as they were able

The Christian church also has a great history of setting up and running schools and colleges for many centuries and many of the first hospitals were associated with monasteries.

So from early days, communities needed some sort of organization to look after roads, almshouses, and public amenities in a village or town. And in many cases it was the Christian church that did the organizing.

And even today we need our communities organized whether on a local scale as in Broxbourne or in our county of Hertfordshire or at a national level. Refuse needs collecting, traffic organized, help for those who cannot help themselves, health issues addressed, roads, railways and airports controlled for the benefit of all.

It may be an unpalatable fact but every part of our lives is affected by politics which is basically about the organization of our various communities.

The control of noise when we are trying to sleep, the safety of our food at breakfast, the safety of the roads and transport we use on our way to work, the conditions under which we work, the provision of leisure activities at evenings and weekends and the freedom to worship God in our own way – all these are subject to decision making. Politics has been called the process by which we make decisions as a group or community.

If we look at the ten Commandments what you have there are rules for the safe and efficient organization of the Jewish community. There is reverence to God and law and order for the people.

I get very cross when I hear people say that we should keep Christianity out of politics – it was Alistair Campbell, adviser to Tony Blair who said, “we don’t do God”.

I hope I have shown you that politics is about every aspect of our daily lives including the freedom to worship. We want as many Christians in politics as we can get so that Christian values and morals are a major part of our government and our country’s life –sadly these days this is not always the case as we live in an increasingly godless society.

You may be asking yourselves why am I talking about politics – for 19 years I served as a local councillor for Bengeo in Hertford– during that time I held various posts of responsibility. I was fortunate that during my time I was able to work with many councillors who were themselves Christians or who supported the Christian ethic.

There were people from all parties who gave of their time freely because they cared deeply and passionately for the area they served. In all my time I never came across any suggestion of any malpractice – no suggestion of the bribes that are supposed to be around. There was one councillor who would switch off his hearing aid if he disagreed with you.

Sadly the recent revelations about MPs expenses has dented our view of those in politics – but we need to remember that it was not all MPs and that in some cases it was the rules that were wrong. As Christians we must not fall into the trap of being cynical and we must remember that as Christians we recognize that we have all fallen short of perfection – we have all done wrong at some time or other.

We need to recognize that to be in politics is just as much a calling as any other profession whether it is at local or national level. Politicians are called to serve their particular community. As a councillor or MP you are called upon to do a great deal of listening and then you have to try and help people as much as possible. You are not the master but the servant of a community. And this is where some people – but not all – go wrong – power is for the good of the community not the good of the individual. As in any public profession, there is the temptation of pride – “look what I have done” rather than “look what we have done”.

In Peter’s letter we hear, “God opposes the proud but shows favour to the oppressed” and Peter is also saying that we are all “to be shepherds of God’s flock.”

We are to be “eager to serve” and not pursuing dishonest gain”. We are also to “clothe ourselves in humility”

This theme is continued in our Gospel reading “do not store up for yourselves treasures on Earth” – instead we are to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven and we do this by being faithful to God – serving him as master alone –not being tempted by worldly fame and money which do not last.

It will not have escaped your notice that in a few weeks time we have an Election.

Firstly I hope that each one of you will see it as a Christian duty to vote – a privilege that has cost lives to get.

Then how do you vote ? Well, I would suggest that you look for candidates who are Christian or who are sympathetic to Christian values and ideals. One word I have used a lot is the word Community – look for someone who is passionate about the community and someone who is there not on an ego trip, but who will serve the people they will represent. Look for someone who will stand for Christian justice and love.

And finally when you have an elected MP or councillor, don't forget to pray for them and the decisions they will have to make – for be assured it won't be easy for any elected representative in the coming months and years.

But voting isn't the end of our involvement in Politics – we must be alert to the need and worries of our communities and be ready to give voice to those needs and concerns by writing to our elected representatives to let them know what is going on in the community and in doing this we must make sure that we are standing up for Christian values and ideals for we must make sure that our Christian faith is not sidelined as some in power would wish – in our own small way we must be defenders of our faith.

Amen.