

Dear Friends

"Well that's another fine mess you've got me into," was the wearied comment by Ollie to Stan, if I recall correctly. Ollie, so sure he knew the right way, always blamed the compliant and eager to please Stan. It was usually that fault lay on both sides, but we had the laugh on them both, because we were watching and could see so easily how their antics were going to end in trouble.

It appeared at first sight a master stroke, the opposition way behind in the polls, with an unpopular leader. It was to be a done deal with a large majority. Some say it was quite cynical. I do understand that a larger majority would have helped Mrs May, but a crushing victory would only serve to silence voices that need to be heard. The problem is that, as in the Referendum, the Government were trying to deal with issues in their own party as much as the country.

A few weeks later we can review the whole situation. People are 'tired of austerity', there was an opposition leader fighting on the basis of a 'populist' set of policies and a Prime Minister who presented a programme for care for the elderly in a fairly disastrous way. The way out of this conundrum is to cosy up to a party that forms one half of a very delicate balancing act which, therefore brings other concerns into play.

In a situation where a fine balance has been drawn and has brought a divided province to a peace that it has not known for many a year, great care must be taken to build on that situation. Giving one of these parties greater influence by being involved in Government does seem to me to be worrying.

As I write, we are also about to start on the 'Brexit Talks' with the E.U. With the desired enforcement not forth coming in the Election, we enter the talks with a weakened Prime Minister and that only seems to make the issue more difficult. The good thing though is when the powerful voices are made to listen to the smaller ones, then we often get to hear a wisdom that might be otherwise ignored.

By the time you read this much of these things will be history but there are some things which will not go away. Despite the reassuring statistics that most terrorist activities are prevented, we have now had three atrocities on the streets of London and Manchester. All of which has the usual mix of senselessness, tragedy and heroics.

With all of this we continue to see some very strange political movements on the other side of the Atlantic. The presidency of Donald Trump continues on its way with allegations here, there and everywhere. Perhaps more concerning to us is the U.S.A.'s withdrawal from the Paris agreement on climate change. One striking comment was 'when was America first meant to become America alone?'

If I had time and space I could probably say more. It does seem though that Northern Ireland has something to teach us in all of these things. If a situation, where allowing voices to be heard, results in two deadly enemies (Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness) to become "The Chuckle Brothers" and forge a workable arrangement that brings benefits to the whole community, isn't there something to be learnt here?

It would be my prayer, that in a situation taken as weakness, we have an opportunity to do politics in a different way. In an old liturgy we were asked Sunday by Sunday to pray for the 'Common Good'. We might struggle to pin down exactly what that means in detail, but isn't it precisely what we should be aiming for? One of the reasons suggested as to why people voted for Brexit, was that people felt they were not getting their rewards of living in today's society. If we could only find a way to make arrangements so we could all benefit from the vast richness of our world. However, when I say that I mean from the whole world's perspective, not just those of a region, a country or a continent.

In May I attended a conference at Top Barn Farm organised by the World Prayer Centre in Birmingham. Our speaker talked about how our world was being shaken and suggested that the turmoil was increasing across the world, with political upheaval, famines and wars all getting worse. It was suggested a further issue was that people had lost their fear of God. Not that we should be afraid of God, but that we need to understand that God was real and He should be shown due reverence and honour.

Of course many Christians see these things as a sign of the times and look forward to the Kingdom of God coming in its fullness. The Kingdom of God though is not something that will be imposed by political action or by force of power but by the hearts and lives of people being surrendered to God and by the subsequent revelation of His Almighty Love. Christians look forward to the time when Jesus returns to bring those living in His will to His side. Then living under His just and gentle rule we will know the fullness of His blessing.

While we wait for this wonderful happening we must have patience and forbearance. We are exhorted often to pray for the coming of God's Kingdom, not least when we pray "Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in Heaven." in the Lord's Prayer. In London and Manchester we also saw many examples of people acting selflessly in the face of danger, to confront the attackers or help the afflicted.

I believe that we need a new sort of politics. A readiness to listen to every voice and a willingness to share the resources we have. What would it look like if the British and European negotiators sat down together to work out how Britain's leaving the E.U. can be managed to everyone's advantage? The question is, do we have the wisdom to do this and to set aside selfish interest to achieve this?

It is likely though that we will not heed this wisdom. Politicians are as frail as any other human being. Would any of us do any better unless powerfully motivated not to do so? It is suggested a true fear of God might well help keep us all on the "straight and narrow."

In the end, it's not about a fear that makes us afraid of God, but a reverence that puts Him in the right place. A place where we can then experience his love working to change our lives. I have learnt that it is much better to trust the God of Heaven to guide and lead us, than any human being. I therefore, invite you to take a step of faith and let Him guide your life.

May the Lord richly bless you.

Robert