

**Sermon for 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2010**  
**General Election**  
Easter 5

It's General Election week. I don't know about you, but I'm getting a little tired of the election campaign.

Sadly, I heard about one MP who was knocked over while out canvassing, and died. When he arrived at the pearly gates St. Peter welcomed him and explained that they didn't know quite what to do with him, because they didn't have many MPs turn up.

'No problem, just let me in,' said the MP.

'Well,' said St Peter, 'I'd like to, but I have orders from upstairs. What we'll do is have you spend one day in hell and one in heaven. Then you can choose where to spend eternity.'

'I've made up my mind. I want to be in heaven,' said the MP.

'I'm sorry, but we have to follow the rules.'

So St. Peter took him to the escalator and he went down to hell. He found himself on a beautiful golf course and he saw all his friends, many of whom had also been politicians when they were alive. They were very pleased to see him and made a big fuss of him. He played the best game of golf he'd ever played and they reminisced about the good old times in politics. Then they went for a lobster and champagne dinner at the clubhouse. The Devil was there too, and he was very charming, and enjoyed dancing and telling jokes. He was having such a good time that before the MP realized it, it was time to go back up the escalator.

At the top St. Peter was waiting. 'Now it's time to visit heaven.' So, the MP spent a day with a group of contented souls sitting on clouds and playing harps. He had a good time and, before he realized it, the day had gone and St. Peter returned.

'You've spent a day in hell and a day in heaven. Now choose where you want to spend eternity.'

'Well,' said the MP after some thought, 'Heaven has been delightful, but I think I'd rather be in Hell with my friends.'

So St Peter takes him to the escalator and he goes down to hell. At the bottom is a barren wasteland covered with rubbish. The MP saw all his friends, dressed in rags, picking up the rubbish and putting it in bags as more rubbish fell from above.

The devil came over and put an arm around the MPs shoulders. 'I don't understand,' said the MP, 'yesterday there was a golf course and we had a wonderful dinner ... Now there's this wasteland and my friends are miserable. What happened?'

The devil looked at him, smiled and said, 'It's simple. You see, you've voted now. Yesterday we were canvassing.'

We had an interesting discussion in home group 2 weeks ago about whether Christians should be involved in politics. Of course, many politicians are Christians, but in this country politicians tend not to wear their faith as a badge as they do in America. Over the years, there have been many committed Christian politicians. Lord Soper was a Methodist lay preacher. And Richard Harries, the last Bishop of Oxford, took his role in the House of Lords very seriously. In the days when the Church is urged to speak out on the issues of the day, it's a good thing that bishops and archbishops wrestle with issues like just war, immigration, the ethics of our medical and financial systems and share their wisdom in the public arena. We have much to learn from their wise arguments, rather than sound-bite politics.

This is the sort of politics Christians, like you and I, must be involved in – the politics of concern for justice and the well-being of all society, especially those who have no voice. We should speak out for asylum seekers, the abused and oppressed in mind and body, the neglected, the poor. Why? Because Jesus did. Read Luke's gospel. Jesus never shied away from controversy or politics – that's why he ended up on the cross. For us, if we call ourselves Christians, justice and politics are part of the Way of the Cross we are called to walk.

If the resurrection is to mean anything, it can't stay a wonderful story that we hear once a year, and then the vicar bangs on about for another few weeks, and then we forget until next Easter. The resurrection is not an event, it's a characteristic of God. We believe in a resurrection God, a God of new starts and new life. And if we believe that, it will transform our lives so that we start to act for the voiceless and the oppressed, and not leave it to someone else. And if it transforms our lives, it will transform the street and community we live in, and our friends and our families, and our world. God is in the business of transformation and justice for everyone, not just the rich or the powerful, or the lucky, but everyone, even you and me.

In the gospel reading, Jesus told his disciples that they must love one another. Because he knew that love is the only power strong enough to transform the world, and that there would be a time when the disciples would be wracked by dispute and would hate the sight of each other; a time when only this command from Jesus – and it is a command, not a request – to love one another that would keep them together and trying to live out this challenging way of life that Jesus had called them to.

We too are to be known for loving one another, and loving those who are unloveable and downright awkward. This is what will mark us out as different from those around, this is what will

mark us as people to be admired and emulated because we are people of love and integrity, people of truth and justice, people who are little pictures of God for the world we live in.

This must be the politics of Christians, not the world's way of soundbites and photo opponities, mud-slinging and personal glory, but the way of Christ, the way of loving others, whatever the cost to ourselves. We pray that the leaders elected next Thursday may be people with the courage to lead in such a way. Because only then can we have real transformation.

Blessings,  
Gill