



26 June 2016
The Fifth Sunday after Trinity
Sung Eucharist
Galatians 5 vv. 1, 13–25
Luke 9 vv. 51–end

On Leaving the Future
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May the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord our Strength and our Redeemer.

Until recently when you travelled North up the A14 heading out of Cambridge and towards Peterborough, there was a prominent piece of graffiti on the side of the building,

It read - 'You are now leaving the future'. Amusing; knowing; but of course visible only to those travelling from the South.

So - as they say: here we are.

In 1947, Winston Churchill observed:

Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time....'

One could of course add to that well-thumbed reflection, the observation that occasional Referenda are almost always problematic because at the end of the day the people's motivations for voting – this way or that – do not usually align closely with the key arguments. The referendum was in theory about membership of the European Union, but unsurprisingly, voters seemed to have taken it to be asking a different question: what kind of country do you want Britain to be? At stake, on Friday were two different visions of England and her future, and a range of contingent future possibilities for the other nations of the UK.

The overwhelming majority of politicians, those with leadership roles within our society, our friends abroad all advised against leaving; The young, the Universities, This University and indeed over 70% of Cambridge voters agreed. Whatever polite things are said in public, many would describe the course of action taken as akin to a herd of lemmings heading for a long drop and a pretty cold bath.

Now, it is convention to say that religion and politics don't mix – but, it would be disingenuous of me, as my views are on record, to pretend: I am, as they say, 'gutted' and I know that I am hardly alone in this Chapel in that. But, there is of course, as always, with every political project, another side to the story, another repertoire of feelings, which indeed may well be experienced by some others in this Chapel morning: Feelings of excitement, freedom, a sense of independence.

Strangely, or perhaps providentially we have in our readings this morning both a stark choice and a difficult journey ahead.



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The difficult journey is that of course of Jesus, who we read, sets his face to Jerusalem. And from this moment in chapter nine, Luke's Gospel is dominated by this difficult journey for the next ten chapters before Jesus arrives to face his own inevitable death in Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem which held such great promise as a place of liberation, yet whose fate, born of stubborn rejection, turns out so tragically, archetypically, as the place of 'sin and woe'. The place where true religion, that of God's prophets, is seen as blasphemy, hope is dashed and the foundation flecked with the blood of the prophets. The destination comes about because Jesus has set his face, because as he says, 'I must journey', must, the little greek work, *dei* – it is necessary. It is necessary to die. And yet within that grim and hopeless trajectory, which seems to speak of nothing but hopelessness and abandonment, lies the seeds of hope: It is necessary to die, for without death, there cannot be resurrection.

The stark choice, on the other hand, is that presented by St Paul who writes to the *Galatians* with an extraordinary, passionate forcefulness: Either we are to stand firm as Christians - for freedom - or we will be enslaved. His readers have been tempted to seek the security of Judaism with its rules and historic sense of identity, rather than take a take a leap of living in the freedom of Christ.

It is fascinating, especially at this moment of political meltdown, that when asked to sum up the difference Jesus Christ makes in one word, the Apostle Paul chooses - freedom, liberation:

'For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.'

As it turns out, Paul's arguments could easily be fileted for slogans and deployed to the satisfaction of either the Leave or the Remain camp. Such a strategy would of course be trivial and artificial and misleading, not least because Paul himself knows perfectly well that Freedom is a dangerous idea. And that 'from' is not the only word that can be appended. In addition to 'freedom from' we have of course 'freedom for'.

In Paul's language our freedom should not be 'an opportunity for the flesh' to use his words but for love of one another, or put another way, it should not be for 'narrow self-interest' but in the service of the 'common good'. The Christian has only one law to follow (and it is the antithesis of all forms of bureaucratic legislation): 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' – this is the whole law. This is what the Christian is to do, discerning what that means in time and space is what the Christian is called to discern and seek. And the list of virtues and vices that follow in Paul's reading all take that as focus – it is all about relationships with others, how they can be enhanced or degraded.

Human beings are inescapably moral (and immoral) agents and people's participation in the recent debate, their motivations and justifications and their voting decisions are wrapped up with their moral commitments. Many of what we might call the 'losers', which includes both Archbishops, believed that the path of Remain held the greatest promise for the Common Good, for the love of Neighbour, leading to a hospitable world of inclusion and opportunity based on interdependence, on cosmopolitanism and on an acceptance of others.

Maybe it did, maybe it didn't. We will never know.

But, we have to recognise that those on the 'winning side' in 'this world of sin and woe' as Churchill put it, were predominantly from outside the 'golden triangle', outside the 'cosmopolitan elite', the more highly educated and informed, they were heading down a road where people weren't smirking at the knowing graffiti, but preparing themselves to visit for a short time more opulent and well-resources spaces and places

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Christians believe in a God who has entered into history, believe that at some level, rather than being ‘one damned thing after another’, history is a God-given medium of encounter with God. Obviously that doesn’t mean that everything that happens is God’s will, that would be absurd, but it does mean that we are called to pay a deeper, more searching attention to find the movement of the Spirit in our times.

In opening up the idea of freedom, St Paul is clear we will only discover deep freedom through Christ in reaching out to our neighbours. Coming to a greater realization of who each one of us is and might be, requires us to stretch out, to make connections with the world and all our neighbours; to engage in those deeper personal questionings about freedom, identity, where or what is home through a more humble and direct engagement with our neighbours, even if, especially if they, voted (according to our own lights) the wrong way. A different future lies ahead, and, as those who seek, stumblingly, to follow Christ we need to pray afresh: