

Remembrance Sunday 2022

The Collect: Almighty Father, whose will is to restore all things in your beloved Son, the King of all: govern the hearts and minds of those in authority, and bring the families of the nations, divided and torn apart by the ravages of sin, to be subject to his just and gentle rule; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

John 15:9-17

Sermon. Decisions and consequences. Revd David Treharne, Vicar.

I caught a piece the other evening by Ros Atkins on the BBC news channel. It was about decisions and their consequences

America... the decision of who to vote for in the recent elections and the consequences of those decisions. Egypt... leaders meeting to make decisions about what we do about climate change and the consequences of those decisions.

Elon Musk's decision to buy Twitter and the consequences of that for him, for the company, for users and for information and communication in general.

The Prime Minister's decision regarding who to appoint in cabinet and the consequences of those appointments.

The decision made in 2010 to award Qatar the Football World cup and the consequences of that decision.

Decisions and consequences

One could add to the list...

The decision of Vladimir Putin to invade Ukraine and the decisions of Ukraine, Nato and the nations of the world in response and the resulting consequences.

The decision of Margaret Thatcher to go to war over the Falkland Islands, 40 years ago in 1982 and the consequences for her political future, the consequences for the Argentinian Government, the Islanders and of course those involved in and scarred by the conflict.

The decisions around Afghanistan, the Balkans and Iraq and the consequences.

The decisions and consequences of Covid... and of course the decisions of the referendum in Scotland in 2014 and the Brexit referendum in 2016 and the consequences.

Whilst these issues and the decisions and their consequences related to them might be seen to be beyond our immediate sphere of influence we still have personal decisions to make in relation to them... which have consequences.

What I think is very concerning in the decision making and responses of our time... is the adversarial dualistic debate and behaviour that is now overly commonplace in public discourse. Dualism, a philosophy or doctrine that everything in the Universe is divided into polar opposites: right and wrong, yes & no, ALL your fault / not at all my fault.

Whilst it was there before the Brexit vote, dualism seems to have become more extreme with division difference, opposition, conflict on so many issues seem to have become more acute since 2016. "What's your view?" "Where do you stand?" "You have to have a position and if you're not in agreement with me

then we don't agree to disagree we block on social media, we argue with anger, hostility and unpleasantness, we fall out and don't speak on any matter. We are polar opposites. It's 'me verses you' and/or 'us verses them'. You have to have take my side and have pure beliefs and stand with me on all issues or you're out! My way or the highway." Politics and religion have been very good at being dualistic and adversarial over the years and we've seen the consequences!! Most of us are pretty good at it now too!

Dualistic thinking results in groups that try to eliminate and banish anyone and anything they deem is not acceptable to, or part of, their vision. This expands into societies that are intolerant towards the weak, the sick, the unproductive, and the simply different. It's leads to scapegoating and it leads to extremism and it leads to conflict and war.

I think it's pretty frightening, anxiety inducing and not the way of Jesus Christ.

No wonder some people chose to disengage from the issues and debates of the day. There is less space now to disagree, to ask questions, to gently challenge, to hold competing viewpoints in tension together, and to change one's mind. More issues are seen as black or white with little room for grey and different perspectives. Once you've chosen a view or a path it's becoming harder to pull back from it.

The media loves the battle lines, social media sees the most vociferous voices take centre stage, and many of us want quick and easy solutions to complex situations all of which can contribute to polarisation.

Dualistic thinking seems acute not only with Brexit where people are still labelled as Leavers and Remainers with decisions, alliances and friendships still seemingly made through this one lens, but in political life all around the world where the debate has become really polarised... as shown with recent elections in America, Brazil and Italy.

Yes, there are opposites and yes we need to take a view and a stand on issues... there is truth and lie, right and wrong, but the simplistic dualism and adversarial debate has consequences in sowing the seeds of division, hatred and conflict and leaves little room for negotiation, creativity, compromise, bipartisanship, change, growth or redemption.

In our churches and at acts of remembrance at war memorials across our nation this week, many observances will take place in the shadow of the cross. The Way of Jesus Christ offers us another way of dealing with each other, dealing with issues and dealing with the decisions of our day and their consequences, other than the dualistic way.

Things can be different. We can break the boundaries of separateness and difference, we can learn to disagree well, we can see the good in another, we can solution find rather than just blame, we can bless and pray rather than curse and we can have the humility to admit our mistakes and start again. We can choose to make a decision to follow the way of love.

In the face of hostility, fear and deprivation... decide to follow the way of love: charity, humility, kindness, restoration, forgiveness, peace and hope, openness, awareness, constructive engagement and faithful, steadfast loving service.

As St Francis of Assisi prayed... Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

As we remember the decisions and consequences of war, and particularly the enormous human cost from the Great War to the Second World War and the conflicts that have followed to this very day. As we remember let us commit ourselves to the way of love; to be people of peace and love who do relationships as well as we can in our homes, churches, work places and in our politics and with the major issues and decisions of our own lives and of the day.