

Brexit

Readings: Jeremiah chapter 29, verses 1-7; Matthew chapter 5 verses 38-48

You will not forgive me if I do not preach on the issue which has dominated all our thinking this week. On Thursday Britons voted to opt out of the European Union. That vote has created immense uncertainty and our future seems fraught. Change is inevitable and this morning I want us to reflect on how we should respond and react to that change. I begin with a parable which I have told you before.

Three men were marooned on a desert island. And they were told that overnight the island would be swamped by a tidal wave. What would they do? The first man said; "I would eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die". The second said; "I would retreat to a sacred grove and offer sacrifice and say prayers to my God." The third said; "I would call my wisest men together and study how to live under water".

Three responses to the challenge of change. And all three are evident today. There are always those who refuse to face reality, who live for the moment in complete abandonment with not a thought for the future. That's a purely selfish response. The second response is characteristic of a certain type of religion. Retreat into a sacred world of piety and hope to God that He might do something. The third is to my mind, the Christian response. Accept that things are going to change and try to adapt to that change.

Its no good bleating about the result of the Referendum. Nor is it any good indulging in recriminations and blame. We have simply got to get on with it and try to manage that inevitable change. We have got to study how to live under water!

It's what Jeremiah recommended to those people who had been carted off into Exile in Babylon. Settle down. Make yourselves at home! Work out how to worship God and live as the people of God in a strange and hostile environment.

And it's the policy that God adopted in order to save humankind. Faced with the reality of a human race which had rebelled and turned its back on Him He became human! — in order to save humanity.

Its going to take us at least two years to negotiate our way out of the EU so we have time. It's a question of how we shall use that time and what principles will undergird and inform our decisions.

One principle is that we are responsible for each other. You remember the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis. Cain murdered his brother and when God asked him where his brother was Cain replied; "How should I know? Am I my brother's keeper?". The answer is Yes. It would be quite wrong if we used our exit from Europe to erect a barrier against European nationals and others, We must not behave like little Englanders and regard England as a *sceptered isle; a fortress built by nature for herself*. We have a responsibility for the 1000's of Europeans already amongst us and for those refugees fleeing persecution and violence in their homeland. We live on an island but we must not become insular.

Another principle is the recognition that nothing is ever final. I am an adherent of *Process Theology* which is built on the principle that everything is in process of change. Nothing in life is fixed and static. Rather life itself is dynamic and fluid. The decision taken on Thursday is not the end of the story but merely another chapter. To me life is akin to a game of dominos with an infinite number of pieces in play. And each piece you put on the board opens up the possibility of another piece being played. The final pattern which emerges is not fixed in advance; everything depends on who plays what piece when.

St Paul expressed this principle when he said that "God works in all things for good" and our task is to work and pray for the Kingdom of God to become a reality, not only in Heaven but here on earth. The Kingdom of God is justice and joy, mercy and grace. It is a community in which the needs of the poor and dispossessed are met, the hungry fed, the stranger welcomed, a community in which racial, economic and social barriers are broken down and we live as the family of God.

How that finds expression in political structures following on Thursday's vote is another matter. But Christians cannot rest or be content until the values of the Kingdom are embedded in our life together, nationally and internationally. We work and pray to the end that "The kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ."