

Pray. We've had a little time now to consider the fallout of the referendum on EU membership. It seemed the Brexit/Bremain argument was a choice between two kingdoms. Depending on who you believe and trust, one choice leads to a kingdom of sweetness, light and prosperity while the other to the outer darkness. The problem was discovering facts to allow you to believe and trust one side or the other. I felt there was rather too much appeal to emotion from those on the campaign trail and not enough appeal to fact in the whole debate. Indeed where a fact or figure was quoted by one side the other could quote another, or turn and twist it or just simply ignore it. It was almost impossible to discover the truth.

As it turned out, whichever way you voted, about half the UK voted the other way so we are bound to find ourselves in a situation where you are likely to have disagreements with at least some of those around us about whether the outcome was good or bad for our long-term future. With emotions running high even now it is not easy to have a balanced and rational debate on the way forward; there are still too many contradictory things being said, both on our streets and in the corridors of power in London and Brussels. The two sides often reviled each other during the debate, and the acrimony hasn't ceased even now, though the financial markets seem to have recovered some of their cool despite the initial panic.

Is there anything we can say into this situation as Christians? After all, both our Archbishops said there was no "Christian" way to vote so how are we to react to the vote and the uncertainty, divisiveness and disappointment, or exultation, triumphalism and unacceptable xenophobia, it has caused?

It goes without saying that we must pray. And then we must pray, and pray again for our nation, our politicians and other leaders. But I want to concentrate now on the lessons in our readings. As in the EU referendum, our Gospel also has a premise of two kingdoms and a choice to be made. Jesus sent his seventy disciples out with the message that the kingdom of God is near. The choice offered was between accepting the peace, healing and kingdom of God, or rejecting it. The consequences of rejection, spelled out by Jesus in the Gospel section we skipped over, were dire, and significantly more catastrophic than anything we heard about from those on the referendum campaign trail, because of their eternal consequences. Colossians also speaks of these two kingdoms: we Christians are rescued from the power of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Col 1:13).

As in the referendum, accepting one side means rejecting the other. So with spiritual things: the Gospel indicates that rejection of the kingdom of God means acceptance of the kingdom of Satan, whom Jesus said he saw fall like lightning from heaven. This may sound a bit harsh, but the logic is that if you are not facing in this direction, then you are facing in another – you can't face two directions simultaneously.

As Christians and followers of Jesus we claim to be facing in his direction and following the ways of his kingdom. But Jesus' words to his followers are surprising – perhaps not our idea of a loving saviour at all! He sent his disciples out as 'lambs among wolves' – easy meat for the wolves you might think - and without what we might think of as prudent provisions for the journey. Life as a Christian may well not be easy! Yet Jesus also told his disciples they were to be the hard men – shaking off the dust from their feet where towns wouldn't receive them. That

hardly sounds like a loving, forgiving and patient God! But surely it is a striking metaphor for those who don't listen to the message, the facts of spiritual versus worldly reality.

There's more. Jesus said we may well be reviled for our proclamation, as the two sides in the debate have been, and as it seems our politicians are still being reviled – or blamed – for the outcome. As Christians, even if we are reviled for our faith we are not to revile others, and that is a key way for us to deal with the outcome of this debate. In Colossians, Paul goes further and gives several instructions as to how to live as followers of Jesus in a world that may well revile us. We are to grow in love for all the saints – regardless of how they voted! (Col 1:4). But we're also to lead lives worthy of the Lord; bear fruit in every good work; grow in the knowledge of the Lord (Col 1:10). Our faith is not to be a static thing, it is to grow, the church is to grow, as we're learning at the moment.

And, as I hope we're also learning, we all have a part to play in that growth. The gospel tells us of seventy anonymous followers being sent out to grow the church of Jesus' day. It's not the inner core, the specially trained elite of the twelve but a wider group, the 'ordinary' followers who are sent out on Jesus' campaign trail. I think that today is no different. As followers of Jesus we are all called to this campaign trail to share God's kingdom of healing and peace, it's not just the job of the 'official' leadership. The message he gives us to proclaim to others is that, as in the referendum, each of us has a choice – to accept or reject the healing and peace that he offers, so that their names may be written in heaven.

Unlike the alternate kingdoms promoted by the two sides of the referendum debate we can be absolutely certain about the kingdom of God, and the truths about it are incredibly simple.

It is a kingdom of healing and peace which cannot be shaken by the vicissitudes of the financial markets and the uncertain worldly political systems. This is guaranteed, not by the Chancellor or the Governor of the Bank of England, but by the one who has ultimate authority as the creator of the universe, the one from whom all authority derives, God himself.

It's the only kingdom that has survived the test of time – all other human kingdoms and systems of security and hope have disappeared. It is a kingdom that doesn't seek to subjugate or control people but rather calls them to be what they are ultimately created to be – sons and daughters of the living God whose names are written in heaven. Jesus tells us this is the highest good and we should rejoice in it. As a final thought, perhaps with Brexit, there really is no way back; remember and proclaim that with God, in his grace, there is always a way back to his love.

To end. As I said earlier we should pray earnestly for our nation and politicians, that they may have the wisdom to deal positively with the opportunities that God has allowed us to explore. But particularly in these days of uncertainty it is important that we proclaim the certain hope the simple truths of God's kingdom bring, that we go on the campaign trail to proclaim the good news about his kingdom in the authority of this God, the king above all kings. There is no other authority in heaven or on earth that is so powerful, no other hope that is so sure, either in London or Brussels! Whatever the coming days and months bring, pray hard; keep your focus on these certainties of the kingdom of God, and its king, Jesus Christ. And, above all, play your part in growing his kingdom here on earth. Amen