

A politician and a priest die

They are met by St Peter and shown to a small room with only a washbasin, desk and bed. The priest is invited to enjoy his new room and the politician is then seriously worried ... he thinks to himself, ‘ if this is what the vicar is given what sort of hovel is my place going to be like? ‘

Surprisingly, they arrive at a mansion with stable block, swimming pool and servants and St Peter announces ... ‘this is your new accommodation’.

Somewhat astonished, the politician asks for an explanation. “Oh, it’s quite simple, we get plenty of priests up here, but you’re the first politician we’ve had for a while!”.

I wonder would you describe St Peter as a better vicar than a politician – he certainly wasn’t much of a diplomat!

General Election

Jesus as king of kings, invites Peter to be Prime Minister and to form the next government. If I ran an exit poll at the end of this service I might ask these three questions,

1. “How would you characterise Peter’s premiership? Transparent, diplomatic, combative?”
2. Who are Peter’s core voters? Middle-Galilee, disaffected shepherds, hard-working fishermen, Southern prophets.
3. If not Peter, which of the apostles would you have appointed as leader? Judas Iscariot?

What a relief it is that God seeks affection

not perfection. Notice he doesn’t say to Peter you are the rock on which you will build the church – rather, he says you are the one I’ve nicknamed Rocky and upon your ministry, I will build my church.

Our role, our calling, our election

is to vote with our all our hearts and all our souls and all our minds to love and obey and worship the creator of reality.

God chose David as a man after his own heart who, unlike King Saul, rejoiced in the successes of others and prayed that the Holy Spirit wouldn't leave him.

Jesus chose Peter as a man after his own heart, not because he was flawless, but he was faithful.

What would it take for this nation to vote for Jesus as their leader?

I'm not content to manage decline and watch the church shrink. The waning tide of faith might well be turning but we are called to play our part in winning back the nation for Christ.

On Friday I attended a fascinating course in Cambridge on Apologetics – it's sound like saying your sorry but rather it means providing a defense for what you believe.

We must strive to find ways to communicate the gospel in a way that our culture can understand and to address the stumbling blocks that prevent belief in Jesus.

I consider it vital we try to engage with the beliefs held by our community and begin with how they see the bible and Christianity if we are to convey it as good news.

One approach Jesus deployed when engaging with a lawyer was to enter his worldview and highlight its contradictions.

In the good Samaritan Jesus shows the lawyer that his understanding of neighbour was too narrow and that without loving our enemies as well as our neighbours we do not have the love of God that is the heart of Christ.

We can use an occasion like the general election

To enter the worldview of voters and then highlight the contradictions.

Entering the worldview....exposing the contradictions

To draw out from voters that they have very strong views but may not have considered the basis upon which they hold or entitled to hold those views.

We begin with drawing out the complaints about the state of the nation or the poor character of politicians but then here's the rub without any ultimate purpose to life, without God there can be no agreement about right and wrong, no objective morality.

The atheist voter has no basis to protest about the gambling scandal, 14 years of chaos, false accounting, dishonesty, injustice, unfairness, nepotism, racism, sexism or even to express frustration.

Having facts checked makes no sense if there isn't absolute truth. But if such a thing as facts exist, then we can claim this approach for the overwhelming evidence that Jesus walked this earth, died and rose again.

If life is mere gene propagation, survival of the fittest, then don't complain that it's short brutal and unfair. Hard luck, get used to it. Bears sometimes eat their cubs and aren't judged for it, even Stalin cared for his own family.

An atheist professor actually argued we should set a higher value on an adult pig as compared to a human newborn because it has greater neural complexity.

So here's the contradiction we all feel ... and highlights the contradiction of the worldview

We know this to be false, we feel it untrue. We rail against disorder, against chaos, we demand that things be put right and work properly – says who? Why is there so much order in the world, why is there so much good – why so many random acts of kindness every day?

Until recently it was thought that what you did in your private had no bearing on suitability to perform in public office. Ministers are so called because their purpose is to serve and not to be served, to err minister, like a

minister of religion is meant to serve the parishioners, a minister of politics is meant to serve his constituents not vice versa

Then we move from the general as in 'Who do people say I am?' to the personal 'Who do you say I am?'

Jesus preferred asking questions to giving answers.

Like the opening, middle and end game in chess, we see Jesus' dialogue with Peter move from a general discussion about people out there and who they say Jesus is to you and me, what do you believe, who do you believe I Am.

Are we much different, we are all sinners, and it isn't relative. There's a leadership challenge going on inside all of us – whether to go the way of Christ or the devil. The real leadership contest is between good and evil, God and Satan, our enemies are in the heavenly realm and between our flesh and spirit.

Jesus was contending for the hearts of women and men to follow him instead of worship Pan at the temple of Casarea Philippi and a Roman emperor with claims to divinity.

Jesus allows himself to be worshipped as LORD and adopts the title I AM - the name of God the eternal presence in the Old Testament.

Without an ultimate purpose

There is no such thing as achieving anything or not. You can't be a good disciple unless you know the identity of the messiah you're supposed to be transforming into and what they stand for, who they are. Equally, there's no such thing as a bad politician if laws are relative and morality is a free-for-all.

On what basis does anyone get to write the code that will make the software programme called reality actually function well. The one who created it of course.

We discern from the wonder of creation before our very eyes as in the book of Romans that everyone really can tell there must be a designer and a highly intelligent one at that.

Intelligence ultimately means choosing, discerning, zeros or ones, on and off switches and this supercomputer of life builds DNA and gives meaning which we call logos which St John names as Jesus.

Why do we insist upon justice, integrity, honesty or transparency from others if nothing has any meaning ultimately – might as well grab what you can for yourself and to hell with everybody else.

Yet we know we are conscious that there must be more to life than is materially apparent.

Reality must define truth rather than our feelings being allowed to say what's true

Relativism says, you can believe what you want, decide on what feels right for you. Trouble is this stance isn't as liberal as it purports to be since I'm not free to believe that you can't believe what you want. Forcing me to adopt your beliefs and vocabulary is the opposite of liberal. None of us is important enough to dictate the language we use to communicate – that would mark a return to thought police and burning books.

Peter wasn't sure his gaol break was real until he was outside in the street and the angel left him.

Peter wasn't flawless, politicians aren't flawless, and we the voters aren't flawless. Flaws arise only because we have objective morality as defined by the creator of reality itself. It's called sin and that's why we need a saviour.

The Greek for stumbling block is *skandalon* and it's the relentless instances of *skandalon* destroy democracy and stop people bothering to vote.

Our election as disciples following in the way of Christ and in the footsteps of Peter is to clear away all other spiritual stumbling blocks, all other *skandalon*, and allow the Holy Spirit to allow our sceptical society to overcome the foolishness of the greatest scandal of all, that God himself

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would die in our place, rise again for all humanity and perpetually reach out to save us from ourselves and love us into the fullness of Christ.

Let's ask the Holy Spirit now to help us in our endeavour to as the band begin to play a couple of modern tunes you might be unfamiliar with and allow the LORD to minister to you as you sing or listen as you feel moved

Revd Andrew Doarks

Rector, St Gregory's & All Saints, Sudbury

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