

Galatians sermon series week 5

26/06/16 08:00 St Peter

& 11:15 St Margaret

We come to the fifth week of our sermon series on Galatians. We have thought about Paul as messenger of Christ, with his message of God's Grace. Last week we thought about Inclusion and Exclusion. This week we come to the heart of the letter, with Paul's central thesis that we are all one in Christ Jesus.

I'm not sure how you reacted to the referendum decision. That would depend partly on how you voted I imagine, and it is not my place to ask you that personal question. It is clear however that, however you voted, at least 16.5 million people in the nation disagreed with you! As with the Scottish referendum, pollsters and political parties couldn't call the vote as it remained too close to call right up until the day. Some of us went to bed convinced that one side or the other would win, and many people woke up I know amazed at the decision. Watching the news - talking to members of the public on how they view the result - some are elated, and some exactly the opposite. Some people now feel we can have our country back, and some deeply fear what will come and the direction we will go in.

In the last week of campaigning a good deal of reflection has taken place on the tone of the referendum campaign. It does seem to have been one where, more so than in general election campaigns, the political temperature has gone up, and the hostility between parties got worse. There has been considerable name calling, and distrust of the opposing side. Of course, we need to remember that members of the same political party found themselves on either side of the argument, and finding fault with one another.

In this mix came the murder of Jo Cox MP. With all the news of the referendum result, it feels almost that her murder is slipping from our consciousness. Whatever your views on whether there was a link between her murder and the tone of the referendum campaign, it is clear that her murder touched a chord in many people. Why should a young MP, with so much to offer and such a loving family, be cut down in her prime for simply doing her job and standing up for what she believed in? MP's were confronted with their own mortality. We the public were confronted with our negativity towards our MPs. And those leading the referendum campaigns must have looked deep within themselves as they witnessed how one crazed man actions can devastate not only one families life, but affect a whole nation. They must have wondered whether the tone they were setting had caused this murder. Perhaps in Jo Cox's death we have paused to ask of ourselves whether humanities capacity for depravity, when allowed to surface by misguided debate, can result in such actions.

Now, after the referendum, comes an important question. Away from the political process that will see Britain extract itself from the EU, we need to ask ourselves how we can journey forward as a nation. Scotland it seems will face another referendum on its place in our nation. Other parts of the nation question whether they are out of step with the national mood. How do our political parties come back together when then have spent weeks taking pieces out of one another? How does our nation heal itself?

We come to the second half of Galatians 3. "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus". Paul needed to teach the Christians of Galatia, those who were Jewish in background and those Gentile, that they needed to heal their divisions. For it is in Christ that we have our common identity.

Yet how difficult we find it to live by this verse. The divisions of our lives are overcome in Christ - and yet we still want to be divided. In our referendum debate we seem to want to separate native born, from immigrant. We want to separate those with money, from the poor. We still have much to learn about the separation between people of colour and those not. We separate between Tory and Labour.

But in Paul's words, "there are no separations - you are all one in Christ".

The Church will have a vital role to play in helping our nation heal itself. And that means you and I. We need to try to model what it means to move beyond political rhetoric, and show in our lives as Christians the transforming love of God shown to us in Jesus. In showing that we can get along, in spite of our differences, our nation might learn to do so as well. The referendum decision is made - our future will now be defined by it. But we need to find a way to understand our need to be one nation - and to do that the Church must help show that it is in Christ that we are one.