

If the BBC are to be believed, it really is neck and neck. We're going to be kept guessing right through the night on 23rd June. And no, I'm not referring to the battle between Messers Trump and Clinton. At the time of writing this, it is a dead heat, 45% of those polled say Remain, 45% say Leave, 10% are undecided. The constant buff and bluster that's been the hallmark of the EU referendum seems to have been going on forever. In some ways, polling day can't come soon enough, particularly if it releases reporters from Boris' grip. One could argue that neither side of the political divide has done themselves any favours. Any semblance of open, honest debate has been drowned out by an increasingly shouty campaign. One political commentator has mused that, as people become increasingly thirsty for reliable information and understanding, official statistics and established institutions are at risk of being trusted less than the saloon-bar bore. We find ourselves in uncertain and turbulent territory; if these recent figures are to be believed, it really is too close to call. Perhaps Providence has provided us with a selection of Bible readings that can help us think through the issues that face us today.

Of course, Scripture doesn't tell us how to vote in the Referendum but the Bible does speak into the pros and cons of our close relationships with those outwith our national borders.

King Solomon broke an absolutely fundamental rule of intercessory prayer – don't compose a shopping list of demands that we expect God to fulfil. We've just heard a short snippet of the Prayer of Dedication he composed for his newly built Temple in Jerusalem. Far from trying to persuade God that a multicultural society was a good thing, Solomon was keen to have any 'votes' (Jewish or not) counted in the spiritual ballot that told God what to do next. 'Lord, I know these people are outsiders and you don't really have a care for them. But if they say and do what we say and do when we pray, then please treat them like one of us. That is, at least until we get what we want.' I wonder whether Solomon would have voted Remain if only to keep any vestiges of the Brussels Gravy Train on track for his own advantage. Paul, on the other hand, was clearly annoyed with a bunch of Gentile Christians.

During his visit to them, he'd gone to great lengths to teach them that it's what you believe in your heart that matters, not what you do to 'purify' your body. Soon after he left them, some Jewish-Christian missionaries from outside Galatia arrived and demanded that proper male Christians needed to be circumcised. Any 'complete' Gentiles were only playing at their faith. One might hear in Paul's words echoes of, 'Leave us alone' and perhaps even 'Get stuffed!' uttered irritably by the Leave Campaign.

So then, what do we make of the scene in our Gospel reading? In this unique account in Jesus' ministry, Jesus hailed the humble respect paid to him by a highly ranking Roman soldier who symbolised a deeply hated invading power. Why did the people of the town may loved this non-Jewish local governor so much? Perhaps they saw in him a picture of the antithesis of Roman brutality. But he must also have been aware that his significant generosity in building them a synagogue would have secured an enduring, peaceful acceptance of foreign rule in his 'patch'. Having decided to help, Jesus used the Centurion's public self-abasement to shame God's own subdued people. Our Lord labelled this otherwise unwanted outsider a surprisingly perfect example of faith and trust that his fellow countrymen and women should ape.

I often hear people speaking fluffy words about God's love and the fuzzy closeness of God's presence that they quietly enjoy. But St John describes the greatest expression of love in his account of the Gospel; 'There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends'. Perhaps we might set aside some time to reflect on who our friends are in relation to the EU referendum – are they those who agree with our politics or strangers whose fragile livelihoods hang in the balance? What might sacrificial love look like when we come to post our slips into the ballot box?

Every time we stand at the polling booth with pencil in hand, we're asked to help shape a national, political, democratic process of government. We also have to square our private conscience with whichever box we place our cross or crosses in. As Christians, God calls us be aware of our own view but also to look beyond them. The great commandment, 'Love your neighbour as yourself' is not an easy ask but does, one hopes, also contribute positively to the debates that bombard us and influences the choices that we have to make.