**10th May 2015**

**John 14.1-14**

A few days ago millions of people across the country made a choice. They went into a polling station, got a slip of paper – went into a polling booth and put a cross next to the name of a candidate. Britain decided.

You may have been celebrating on Friday or you may have been in sorrow and despair. What is clear is that the polls, which had predicted no majority government, got it wrong. There has been a clear choice and a majority Conservative government. There has been a clear decision in Scotland too which was coloured yellow as the Scottish Nationalist Party swept the board. The decisiveness of this election has left many breathless.

Some of course are calling for a reform of the first past the post system which has prevented a representation of voter’s intentions being expressed in seats in parliament. But the present system does deliver decisive victories and strong government. We need to pray for our new government that they will govern with compassion and justice and particularly defend the cause of the weak and vulnerable. We spare a thought for all those people who have dedicated their lives to public service who are not out of a job. It reminds us that decisions have consequences.

Being decisive is of course a mark of leadership. Those who in hindsight are looked upon as good leaders are usually those who have been deemed to have made good decisions and brave decisions. Usually that verdict can only be given in hindsight. The other day we celebrated VE Day, the 70th anniversary of end of the Second World War in Europe. Churchill is widely regarded as Britain’s greatest leader. Not because of his track record on domestic issues, many of his actions particularly in the General strike were socially very divisive, but because at the darkest moment in Britain’s history he stood firm, was decisive that there should never be any surrender to the evil of fascism. It galvanised a war weary nation for heroic acts of defiance and bravery that eventually meant we live free lives today. Lest we forget the price of democracy that others paid for us.

Decisions make and change nations, they change the world and they change individual lives.

We have just witnessed Rachel publicly declaring her faith in Jesus Christ. She has put her cross in, her vote in the cross of Christ. She has declared her allegiance to Jesus, claimed his love for her and his promises for her life. In a moment we will hear three of our members accept the position of being leaders in this church. The church meeting has decided under the discernment of the Holy Spirit to elect them as elders, authorising them, ordaining them, to bring leadership to our community.

When Jesus walked this earth he didn’t go round saying it doesn’t matter what you believe so long as you are sincere. He didn’t go around saying all beliefs are the same; we should tolerate everyone and everything. He called people to trust him. He asked people to decide for him. He challenged people to follow him.

So in john’s gospel we read how Jesus on the night before he was crucified spoke to his disciples and said ‘set your troubled hearts at rest. Trust in God, trust also in me.

You have troubled heart? You ae worried about things, fearful of what may happen. Jesus calls you to trust in him.

Sociologists suggest that in times of stress and fear people resort to their deepest and most precious beliefs – what really matters to them. When your foundations are shaken it’s a time to re-examine those foundations.

Jesus calls us in troubling times to trust in him. OK you may go to the doctor, see a friend, and read a book - but the call of Christ is first and foremost – trust in him. Why should you do that? He tells you in verse 6. ‘I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me’.

Jesus saying ‘I am the way the truth and the life’ has become one of the most controversial sayings of Jesus within the western world of the last two centuries. How dare he, people have asked. How dare John, or the church, or anyone else put these words into his mouth. Isn’t this the height of arrogance, to imagine that Jesus or anyone else was the only way? Don’t we know that this attitude has done untold damage around the world, as Jesus followers have insisted that everyone else should give up their own ways of life and follow him instead? Doesn’t this lead to religions persecuting others that don’t follow their way?

Some Christians have made it a central article of faith to reject the idea of the uniqueness of Jesus partly because of their concerns about how the church has behaved in the past, and partly out of a desire to be sensitive and accommodating to those who hold different beliefs.

The trouble with this is that it doesn’t work. If you dethrone Jesus, you enthrone something or someone else instead. The belief that ‘all religions are really the same’ sounds nice and democratic – though the study of religions quickly shows it isn’t true. What you are really saying if you claim that they’re all the same and that none of them are more than distant echo or distorted image of reality.

The Christian faith from the outset made this great claim that Jesus who had been crucified was raised from the dead and was who he said he was – the Son of God who reveals to us what God is like. This god we call Father, not to express that god is male, but that God loves us like a good parent would.

When I was younger if I was sacred it was always comforting to know that mum or ad was close by. They were with me. I soon came to know that their presence didn’t always mean that the worst wouldn’t happen. But I knew that even if the worst did happen – they were still with me. .

Jesus speaks of preparing a place for us. A house where there are many rooms – in other words there is space for everyone – this is an inclusive offer – there is no immigration control to God’s kingdom – the door is open – you just have to walk in and make yourself at home.

There is a story told of a dying man who asked his Christian doctor to tell him something about the place to which he was going. As the doctor fumbled for a reply, he heard a scratching at the door, and he had his answer.

"Do you hear that?" he asked his patient. "It's my dog. I left him downstairs, but he has grown impatient, and has come up and hears my voice. He has no notion what is inside this door, but he knows that I am here. Isn't it the same with you? You don't know what lies beyond the Door, but you know that your Master is there."

Faith in Jesus Christ makes a difference in the really troubling moments of life. Despite all the pain and trouble and worry and strife- we know the way. We know ultimately we go to life. We have a deep reassurance that we have a heavenly Father. That is the gift of faith.

But the miracle of faith is that some find it easy to believe and others don’t.

Think about the apostle **Thomas**, popularly referred to as a doubter. More accurately, his role is a probing one: he asks questions or says things that others are reluctant to say and in so doing provokes a couple of the most profound moments in the gospel story. One is recorded in John 20:25 (where Thomas doubts that Jesus has been raised from the dead. He says until he sees the hand and feet of Jesus he won’t believe. Seeing is believing in other words. So Jesus turns up and shows him. And then Jesus says blessed are those who do not see but who believe.

The other is the question in John 14:5. ‘Lord we do not now the way you are taking so how can we know the way?’ It prompts this great saying of Jesus ‘I am the way the truth and the life’. So one of the last of Jesus’ important ‘I am’ sayings (John 14:6) depends on Thomas asking the question. His questions and doubts – prompt greater faith. Thomas hung in there and sought faith. He was courageous enough to ask the questions and had an enquiring and seeking mind and heart open to encounter God and the truth through Jesus Christ.

But he too came to a decision. Although he had his questions and even doubts – he had enough to act on and build his faith and find the way.

After Jesus has responded to Thomas’ question, there’s a further challenge, this time from **Philip**, ‘Lord, show us the Father’ (John 14:8). Jesus replies with a question of his own: ‘Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?’ (14:10).

And this leads into a striking prediction: ‘The one who believes in me will… do greater works than these’ (14:12). Faith leads to **action**, and those future actions are going to outstrip even Jesus’ own actions during his earthly ministry.

Conversely we may ask the question that leads to action. Thomas and Philip asked questions that led to new disclosures and new understandings of faith. In the case of Thomas, legend has it that he took the Christian gospel to India. And that was down to the response to the question he asked.

Rachel came to our Christianity Explored Course, she came asking questions – and here she is, testifying to faith. Where will this lead?

Where does our faith lead us?

Many of us will be out on the streets this week collecting for Christian Aid. In these times of austerity and cut backs we will have to wait and see whether people have been less generous in giving to Christian Aid’s work than in previous years. It is a challenging question in a time of economic uncertainty to ask people to still play their part and work for a better fairer world – a world more in line with God’s will. We put faith into action by believing that we are not just looking after ourselves in this relatively wealthy and comfortable nation but we must also love our neighbour. When we see devastation in Nepal, Ebola wreck communities, starvation and war in other countries or persecution of other ethnic and religious groups we respond with compassion and faith. We make a decision not be self-centred but to be open to God’s call on our lives for the sake of others.

Jesus says follow me and you will do even greater things than I have done. Think of the life of Jesus and what he did. Forgave sins, healed and made whole many people, opposed injustice, helped people find hope in God and discover new lives, breaking free form their past burdens and addictions. Following Jesus, walking in that way, that truth and that life is the most exciting challenge we can have.

It calls us every day to make a decision. To decide to follow Christ. If we are not sure then be like Thomas and Philip : ask the questions. But don’t use the questions as a delaying tactic from making a decision. Ultimately make a decision – know the one who is the way, the truth and the life.

**Questions:**

1. **Is being decisive always a good thing?**
2. **Any other marks of a good leader? (why do you think the electorate chose David Cameron not Ed Miliband? (political question that you don’t need to ask!)**
3. **Was Jesus always asking people to choose alternatives? Can you think of any times he was more open ended?**
4. **Do you think Christians are embarrassed at this saying ‘I am the Way, the truth and the life?’ because it isn’t very politically correct?**
5. **The advice given by the Christian doctor to the dying man – is it good advice?**
6. **Is it healthy and helpful to doubt and ask questions? When is it not healthy or helpful?**
7. **What about friends and family you know – what would it take for them to make a decision to follow Jesus? Can you believe that may happen? Can you pray for that?**