

Trinity 5 June 26th Luke 9 'Tough decisions'

A divided nation, a difficult choice, falsehood dubious leadership, idolatry – the year is 848 BC. Elijah is fed up and exhausted. He'd kept choosing to obey and do God's bidding and it was time to hand it on – Elisha made a momentous decision to drop everything and train to replace Elijah with apparent ease – but how?

Friday morning, I awoke quietly confident of a vote 'Remain' in the EU referendum. So imagine my disbelief and then frustration and afterwards anxiety. I have found it very difficult to decide how to vote since each argument appeared to carry some weight. Then it dawned on me that any issue I alighted upon wasn't clearly resolved by either claims from the Leave or Remains campaigners.

The campaign it transpires was rooted in false claims and run by dubious leadership that played on fear of strangers, potential loss of material prosperity and a threat to the healthcare system. Usually we like to give a nuanced response to questions but here we faced as a nation a clear Leave or Remain, a binary choice, yes or no.

The mood has been so overwhelming that I had to address it in this talk. It's strangely perhaps uniquely drawing everyone into a common topic more so than the weather and has highlighted deep divisions across region age and sociodemographic.

If it's prosperity that was at stake, I have as much sympathy with the plight of the middle-aged unskilled former miner in the North East as I do the plight of a highly-skilled young migrant displaced from their homeland.

Confidence is required to look at God's word for some insights and answers. The passage from 1 Kings threw up some initial questions which were as follows: 'Then' is how one translation begins, so what preceded it; Why were verses omitted by the lectionary? Why was Elisha called and how did Elisha respond so readily?

Starting with the missing verses, God is just and will judge with equity, psalm 96 tells us He will judge with equity. God's reputation does not need a makeover not enhancing and all scripture is useful for teaching rebuking correcting and training in righteousness.

Preceding this reading and prior to the word 'Then', Elijah's journey sets out why god was needing to judge. Elijah was tired and exhausted from running away from the corrupt Jezebel who'd persuaded King Ahab her husband to listen to her false prophets and worship the false god of Baal – idolatry was rampant in Elijah's time. These false prophets were killed by Elijah after the great bonfire show down on Mt Carmel. Elijah was the one true prophet and not in the pay of the king. He could afford to speak truth and was despised by Jezebel for it.

Why was Elisha called, because Elijah was ready to retire. V20 however suggests that Elijah didn't quite think Elisha would come back from saying goodbye to the family.

How is it that Elisha is able to respond to easily? He doesn't dwell or look back at the life he's leaving. Perhaps he saw God's provision to Elijah of food and strength and enabling him to perform miracles.

When I'm tempted to look back at my past life I had weekends to myself, low responsibility at work and a good salary. Yet it was never so satisfying as my current life. I will admit that when I notice a Maclaren sports car as I did in Bedminster the other day I'd quite like to be driving it. Then I realised that the tyres are worth more than my 107 Peugeot. But hey I wouldn't go back to my former life

The call of God very often makes no sense financially, socially, logically but God blesses abundantly those who obey; but it is often scary doing so. What examples of God's provision could you cite? We should share and rehearse these in times of uncertainty and complex decision-making.

And so applying these principles from scripture to my vote, I ended up ignoring economics, politics even login. It came down to systematic principles from scripture which can be necessary when prayer doesn't make God's

small whisper audible to us. I wanted to model hope not fear, inclusivity not exclusivity.

The DCC faces a complex and critical decision on July 13th – do pray for them to make the right decision

What complex and critical decision are you facing? Remember you are primarily a citizen of heaven and everything belongs to God

Now that a decision to leave the European Union has been made let's not look back but pray hopefully for the future of our nation, confident that God's will often makes sense only in retrospect and that He is our provider and sustainer and that all things work for the good of those who love Him.

Amen