

## HELPING TRUMP

I was driving to a conference at Gartmore House near Aberfoyle, on Wednesday evening. In the car the radio presenters were trying to make sense of the news that Donald Trump had won the American Election. And I imagined when I joined the gathering of 90 people from all over Scotland that the talk would be of little else.

In fact over the next couple of days there was not much mention of what had happened. I think that was not because it wasn't important – it was more like people were so stunned they didn't know what to say or where to start.

The Election run up was dominated once again by polls. And once again the polls got it totally wrong.

A memory of these weeks for me will be the sheer amount of pictures of the map of the USA.

There were lots of different predictions about voting intentions.

What would happen if only women voted?

What would happen if only black people voted?

What if it were only young people?

Or only old?

And so on.

One thing stuck out for me.

One of the biggest groups to vote for Trump were white evangelical Christians.

Statistics published by the New York Times show that in the swing state Florida (and in the US as a whole), 85% of evangelical Christians voted for Trump.

Now given that this preference seemed to hold steady throughout the campaign as we were given more and more revelations about Trump, its pretty interesting and not a little disturbing.

Leave aside the policies for a minute, and (lets be honest) there wasn't much actual policy talked by either Trump or Clinton.

What is astonishing is that as more and more revelations came out about Donald Trump and as he said more and more offensive and outrageous things, it didn't seem to dent his support.

So he calls Mexicans rapists, and says he will build a wall to keep them out and get Mexico to pay for it.

He asks Russia to hack into emails.

He's not going to accept refugees.

He considers Muslims to be terrorists and wants them all banned.

He makes fun of a disabled reporter and tries to humiliate the parents of a war hero.

He claims not have said things or believed things that we have all watched him say previously on TV.

He says climate change is made up and invented by China.

He boasts of throwing his weight about with woman and grabbing their genitals and how he can get away with this because of his celebrity status.

You would think that any one of these things would disqualify him - but no!

We're all aware that there are politicians out there who cannot be trusted.

There are politicians out there who are not nice people.

But in a democracy at least they usually *pretend* to be nice. They at least try to say things that would make you want to like them.

But Donald Trump didn't even try to do that. He made no pretence of being a decent person.

So you have millions of people in America who never go near church or claim any religious faith who decide not to vote for him (even though they are not Clinton fans) because of his unsavoury character.

They reckon his moral bankruptcy and his deeply offensive words and actions prove he isn't a decent enough candidate.

But these evangelical Christians don't care about this.

You have non-Christian people saying this man is totally not fit to be standing for president, and Christians saying he's still the one.

What is going on here?

What is going on here is **lust**.

(Bet you didn't think I'd say that!)

It's **Lust for Power**.

The Christians hope if they vote for him, Trump will repay them by doing things they want and he will start putting church back to the centre.

We are living in a different world to the world that some of us older folk grew up in. Since the 1960s society has started to become more and more secular, and that has gathered pace over the years. What it means today is that the church has become more and more marginalised, no longer at the centre, no longer so well attended, no longer so well respected, and its influence is less.

So around the late 1970s a section of the church started to fight back.

These were the evangelicals.

They included people with money and influence, they included TV preachers with their own broadcasting stations and they decided to ally themselves with the Republican Party.

This group known as the religious right, were well organised and influential and they started to grow in number.

One of their leaders (Rev Pat Robertson) actually ran for President, and though he was not successful it shows that they really carried some clout. As a result, the Republican Party realised that they needed to pay attention to them as they represented a lot of votes.

In return the Christians believed that the Party (once in power) would promote what they called Christian values and attack secularism.

But the policies the Christians were promoting were pretty incredible – no to the teaching of evolution, no to health care for all, no to abortion, no to homosexuals, no to policies that might help people out of poverty. And yes to the right to carry guns, yes to lower taxes for the rich, yes to the death penalty.

It's a strange list of priorities for Christians. Personally there is nothing there I would even agree with, and none of it resonates with the teachings of Jesus.

But there we have it. The evangelicals allied themselves in large number with the Republicans and hoped to get rewarded by them when they were elected. Its been going on for years.

The idea of having more power and influence can act as an intoxicating drug.

War is about winning, it's about defeating, its about getting your own way and making sure that what you want to happen will happen.

It's about power – having power and winning power over others. And the scandal is that for this to happen millions of people have to be killed – their lives are sacrificed in order for the King, Queen, President or government to be successful.

This is the problem with war: the cost in human lives.

Its one of the things we reflect on – on this day each year.

To win a war you have to be prepared to let ordinary people die.

And not just military fighters. In recent wars 90% of casualties are civilians.

To win power in politics you may have to sacrifice morals and identity and values and ideals in order to do so.

That's what these evangelical Christians have just done in the USA.

And there are two things wrong with it.

Firstly, **the job of the church is not to wield power** and be part of the establishment. The job of the church is to follow Jesus, and to stand up for the things that mattered to him.

And often you cant do both.

When the church was at its most effective it hadn't have any power.

But after around 500 years a Roman Emperor decided to adopt Christianity and make it the official state religion.

And the church suddenly became respectable.  
 It was at the centre of government. To be a Christian was now the 'done thing'.  
 It was the official religion. Christianity now had clout, power, influence and respect.  
 And, arguably, that was the **worst** thing that ever happened to the church.

Because it lost its edge, its devotion to Jesus and the ability to speak up for the poor and dispossessed.  
 Because it was now in with the monarchs and the rich and establishment and the powerful.

The job of the church is not to wield power.  
 The job of the church is to follow Jesus.

The second thing wrong with what those evangelicals are doing is this:  
**They are damaging the cause of Christ.**  
 They are hypocritical in endorsing someone whose values they would decry in one of their own number just in order to have the hope of getting favourable and preferential treatment in return.

One person illustrates this perfectly for me.

Jerry Falwell Jr is the son of the founding member of the so-called 'Moral Majority.'. his father is dead now but Jerry Jr now has taken over as principal of his dad's college.  
 He spent the whole election period endorsing Trump.

Liberty Christian College has over 80,000 students.  
 They have a totally strict policy on morals. As a student you can get into trouble for going to a dance – seriously!

Yet when Trump came out boasting about his infidelities, and adulteries and groping women, and doing other things I'll not mention here, and continued support for him was starting to be called into question, Falwell took the chance to speak up once more in order to reiterate his devotion!

While decent people were scandalised by this man's lack of morals, Falwell said that this man was still the 'right choice for Christians' because his stance on the political issues that mattered most was the right one.  
 And the political issue that mattered most – the *right to have guns and making sure there are no gun controls!* This is what Falwell says was the number one most important issue for Christians in the election.  
 In fact, a couple of weeks before he shouted to an assembled (and cheering) crowd of 'christian' students that they should all have guns so they can take out Muslims first when they arrive in the country.

These are the words of an influential "christian" leader!  
 The sky is falling, folks.

It illustrates this disconnect between Christians and the teachings of Jesus.

This disconnect between Christians and the teachings of Jesus is what is damaging the cause of Christ.

What's wrong with Jesus? Nothing.

So why aren't people wanting to be part of church?

Because they look at Christians and they don't see the connection.

The values of Christians don't seem to match the values of Christ.

Here's the bind for Christians in our time.

On the one hand - go back to the past and demand more power and influence and respect. And we're willing to compromise our message and morals and ideals just for that wee chance to be bigger players again.

On the other hand, just chuck it - and admit our day is over, as the new atheists keep telling us.

It's not much of a choice, but there is an alternative choice and that is that we keep going with doing what has always been our calling.

We will not chuck it and we will not demand power and influence as if that is our right.

Instead we will follow Jesus and we will stand up for the things that mattered to him.

We will continue to work at creating communities of people that are willing to walk the path of Christ -

people that show respect and compassion towards others instead of rejection,

people who work for peace and not war,

people who are tolerant and not bigoted,

people who care for the poor and the excluded and those most in need,

people who carry a message of love and not hate

This is our calling.

Decent people around the world have been shocked by the election of Donald Trump. And then they note that his success has been greatly helped by the votes of evangelical Christians.

It doesn't help the cause of Christ.

We cannot change the election result.

We may not be able to change those in the evangelical right.

But we can decide who **we** are and what we are going to do.

The world desperately needs another picture - an alternative model to aspire to.

So the daunting (and **exciting** task) for Christians in our time is to be part of the Christianity that takes Jesus seriously.

The world doesn't need a wealthy, respectable, compromised, establishment church.

The world needs a church that stands for Jesus and is prepared to follow him. The world needs Jesus. And so do we.

On this day of dedication, where we commit ourselves to the cause of peace, let us also dedicate ourselves once more (or for the first time) to becoming the people and the community that God is calling us to be.

People will take *us* seriously when they see us taking *Jesus* seriously.

Isaiah 2:2-5

November 13 2016 (Remembrance)