

Dear Friends,

A week or two ago a friend of mine, a United Methodist minister in the USA, posted this quote on Facebook:

No one will really understand politics until they understand that politicians are not trying to solve our problems.

They are trying to solve their own problems – of which getting elected and re-elected are number one and number two.

Whatever is number three is far behind.

Two days later, the Sue Gray report into Downing Street parties was published, and these words quickly came back into my mind as I witnessed our Prime Minister put on his best Uriah Heep impersonation ('Very 'umble') in order to cling onto office.

Combine that with the vile and ugly stories emanating from Westminster in recent months about MPs and sexual offences and we have a troubling picture of our political leadership being infested with a personal lust for power.

At the same time, I know politicians of varying party persuasions who are genuinely in that arena to make a difference for the better in the lives of ordinary people. I cannot tar everyone with that same brush.

So I thought it would be worth reflecting briefly on one or two key Christian values that we bring to the world of politics and government. And let me say that I do so as someone who describes himself as 'politically homeless.' I do not believe you can identify the Christian faith exclusively with any single political creed. Whether you claim that socialism describes the kingdom of God, or you are an American who says that Christians can only vote Republican, you make an idol of that political creed and you blaspheme Jesus Christ by making him less than that creed, thus denying his place as Lord.

Romans 13:1-7 is a central New Testament passage on the subject. We often avoid it, due to its unqualified emphasis on submitting to the authorities. What about unjust authorities? All I will say at this point is that it's good to hold that passage in tension with another one, Revelation 13, which speaks in vivid ways about the evil of the Roman Empire.

I want to concentrate on a couple of verses from Romans 13. Verse 4 begins, 'For the one in authority is God's servant for your good.' That's a good

plumblines for a politician. Is this MP, councillor, or political candidate someone who seeks to serve the ordinary people for the sake of their good? Politics may deal with power, but fundamentally it is a call to service.

I like to remind people around the time of a General Election that 'Prime Minister' means 'first servant', and so at such a time I look at our party leaders and ask myself the question, which one looks most like one who would give him or herself to service?

Secondly, verse 6 says that 'the authorities are God's servants [there's that word again!], who give their full time to governing.' Going back to that opening quote, are they trying to solve our problems or their problems? Are they devoted to making the country work well, or our county or our town or village? Do their policies contribute towards the welfare and prosperity of our community and is that their vision, or are they more concerned with feathering their own nests?

It is [only?] in the light of politicians who bring the heart of servanthood with a commitment to the well-being of our society that we submit to them (verse 5), pay taxes (verses 6-7), and show respect and honour (verse 7).

Now you might think this is all coming at the wrong time. There is no General Election looming, and the local elections were a month ago. True.

But since Jesus is Lord of all, we need to remain engaged with every part of life including politics. There will always be the need to pray for our politicians and to hold them accountable.

I hope these simple guidelines from Scripture will help us to play our part without falling prey to the toxic narratives that the political strategists and many in the media tell.

Every blessing,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave Faulkner". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Dave Faulkner