

Dear Friends,

Since Keith has a few days off this week I thought I would write a pastoral letter in his absence.

The shocking events of last Wednesday at the US Capitol have already garnered much coverage and commentary. We ought to take counsel together about how we reflect and speak Christianly on these matters. Given the distressing presence of 'Jesus Saves' placards among some of the mob, we really need to stand up.

Let me say at the outset that I do not write this as another church leader trying to be an amateur politician. While I have Christian friends involved in all the major political parties and I support their commitment, I describe myself as 'politically homeless', because in my estimation not one of the major political creeds aligns with the Gospel in a superior way to the others. I find good and bad in them all.

I take as my starting point some pertinent observations made on Sunday by Martin Turner, a former Superintendent Minister of Westminster Central Hall. He talked about the importance of truth, character, and of avoiding idolatry.

It's fair to say that one reason the mob marched on the Capitol was because truth had become a casualty. Whipped into a frenzy by a President with a track record of lying, the Christians emboldened by manifestly false messages from so-called prophets, this was a serious diversion from the Gospel for those who believe that Jesus is the way, the *truth*, and the life. Add into the mix the discredited conspiracy theories emanating from the amorphous group QAnon and others, and you had a volatile cocktail.

We ought to reflect on why people swallow conspiracy theories and false prophecies. I think there is a desire to think we are in on something dramatic and historic. But these things always need to be tested against Scripture and against the available evidence, and Christians need to remember the admonition of the prophet Zechariah not to despise the day of small things.

As for character, well I take it you hardly need me to spell it out about Trump here. When he was elected in 2016, some leading American Christians openly said they were going to hold their nose and vote for him. Yes, in their view they had an awful choice, given how abhorrent to them Hillary Clinton's views on abortion were, but now we see the character issues coming home to roost.

They've been evident for four years, of course, but the scenes last Wednesday were the logical consequence of putting in the White House a self-absorbed power-hungry man.

We don't have it easier in the UK: bluntly, our last General Election gave us a choice for Prime Minister between a known lying philanderer and a man who had presided over vicious anti-Semitism in his party.

Here is where Christians need to be a public voice for the importance of character in leadership. We'll never know what church leaders like the Archbishop of Canterbury say privately to our politicians, but if we genuinely want to bring a prophetic word to our politics, this might be it.

When it comes to idolatry, we need to beware the danger of putting either politicians or political creeds on a pedestal and expecting them to save us. Politics and politicians are indeed important for the welfare of society and so Christians need to take a strong interest, but we should neither claim for them nor expect of them more than they can deliver. Trump was raised to near-messianic levels of expectation and he went along with it (no surprise with the size of his ego). We're not immune, either, when we claim that only certain politics and policies will 'save' our nation. When we act like this, we effectively deny that Jesus is Lord.

Finally, I found it interesting and significant that Martin Turner framed his observations in the context of the biblical narrative where the mob seeks the crucifixion of Jesus and the release of – ahem – an insurrectionist. Just as the mob was whipped up by religious leaders who appeared not to be physically present, so too was the rabble in Washington DC. President Trump stayed comfortably at a distance, failing to fulfil his promise to march with them.

But also, we have that uncomfortable feeling that can hit us at Holy Week. Would I have been one of that rabble demanding the execution of Jesus? I might have been. Yes, we need to speak out, but let's also make sure of our own allegiances and our own humility first.

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