

SERMON - Revd Eileen Harrop 10th July 2016 (WINSTON HC)

Reflecting on this morning's Psalm 82 a saying attributed to Voltaire in a translation from French came to mind:

"With great power comes great responsibility"

I have also heard that this thought gave form to the super-hero 'Spider-man'.

There is a subliminal suggestion in that saying that in power there is greatness. But our Psalmist observes what happens when people think of power and greatness as being synonymous. He opines:

"I said, "You are 'gods' ... but you will die like mere mortals; you will fall like every other ruler".

Even as power and greatness are regarded synonymously so also knowledge and power. Yet our Psalmist says: "The gods' know nothing; they understand nothing. They walk about in darkness; all foundations of the earth are shaken."

A few nights ago, the BBC World Service broke the news of a fatal shooting in the US, this time 5 police officers were killed in Dallas. This sort of news has become quite an unsurprising occurrence in the most powerful country in the world.

The long awaited findings from the Chilcot enquiry concluded a few days ago with sadly unsurprising revelations. Whether in a terrible show of power to coincide with the timing of the enquiry or simply the realities of life after the Iraq war, almost 300 persons have died from a suicide bombing in Bagdad last Sunday.

In 1995, Nick Leeson exercised the power he had as a derivatives broker. His actions, even if inadvertently performed, resulted in the collapse of Britain's oldest merchant bank. He was just one among the thousands of bankers and traders who were systemically encouraged to exercise power in such ways. In 2008, the collapse of another powerful finance company was followed by a string of potential bankruptcies. The Royal Bank of Scotland among others had to be rescued with Government support.

In this country the EU referendum and its result has dominated our news in recent weeks. The process of identifying our next Prime Minister will dominate the news in weeks to come.

I am aware that to touch on anything political from the pulpit can be regarded as a taboo. But there is no scriptural basis for this avoidance; there is no biblical basis for it. Indeed, our Psalm countenances the opposite. We have read together:

"How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked?" "Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed." "Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."

The Psalmist speaks directly against the allure of worldly power, the attractions of status and material wealth, and the allusion of altruistic gain. None of these belong to those who know God. All of these belong to "the gods" who have not lived as children of the Most High God. They have enjoyed power without responsibility for their world.

In a speech delivered by one leadership candidate, she said our country "needs a Government that is capable of... serious social reform"; that "...the evidence of this need has been known to us for a long time"; but that "not everybody in Westminster understands what it's like" for households to struggle despite their best efforts. The exercise of power in Government is "a serious business that has real consequences for people's lives."

We are tremendously blessed. We are here today in this church because of the reality of God whose power is vested in us through His Son and His Spirit. St Paul (from our New

Testament reading today) told us what he had done, and what we as Christian people can do and need to do:

“...we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.”

Each of us has power we are called to exercise. The power of prayer may be belittled by the world but it is ours from God’s glorious power. We are blessed in this Christian country. We can, but will we pray without ceasing for whoever is to lead in Government? Will we ask that our leader be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding?

Will we choose to pray without ceasing that we will have leaders who would lead their lives worthy of the Lord, bearing fruit in every good work?

Amen