

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity, 19th June 2016

Galatians 3:23-29: There is neither Jew nor Greek

Luke 8:26-39: What is thy name? And he said, Legion.

'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.' This week there are two things that I want to talk about. The first is, that this is Refugee Week.

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

Part of Emma Lazarus' poem, 'The New Colossus', which is inscribed on the Statue of Liberty in New York. There's no ambiguity about the open door to refugees in the United States. The theme of Refugee Week, which is promoted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, is 'Welcome'.

I was beginning to write this on Thursday as I was coming home from meetings in London. I opened my 'Evening Standard', and I found two disturbing things.

The first was an article by Sophie Dahl, Roald Dahl's daughter; and I'll quote you a bit of it.

"Rebecca is 10. Her brother Daniel is five, her little sister Lily is two-and-a-half. Their mother Sasha is a nurse. She is pregnant. Their dad is an architect. They live an hour-and-a-half away from London in a small, Seventies caravan, one room, no toilet. There are no hot water facilities where they live, and the queue for a cold shower can take up to two hours. The nearest toilet is a five-minute walk away. They share it with 500 people. Five minutes can feel very long in the dark if you're two-and-a-half, five or 10, and with rats to encounter. The children don't go to school. Rebecca misses it. There isn't one where they live. There is cholera, scarlet fever, dysentery and impetigo.

Richard is a civil engineer. He loves to bake. He speaks three languages fluently. He hasn't seen his wife and children for a year-and-a-half and he winces when he speaks their names. He does not know when he will see

them next. His parents and brother are in Canada. He, like Sasha and her family, is living in limbo, waiting.

That limbo is the largest refugee camp in Calais. The names above are actually Syrian, Ethiopian or Afghan but the people and their stories are real."

And I went on reading in some dismay. We have been making a collection of clothes and bedding for the refugees in Calais, but we have not so far been able to take our Foodbank van with a load to Calais, although we have so far put what we have collected into larger consignments. We are standing by to be allocated a crossing date by Guildford People to People, the charity with whom we are working. It still doesn't make me feel any better that we are not any nearer to fixing the problem for these sad refugees.

And then I turned over the page in my Evening Standard, and I found a full-page advert placed by UKIP, with a picture of a huge queue of mainly non-white people with a sub-heading, "We must break free of the EU and take



back control of our borders". The picture was, I subsequently learned, of refugees crossing the border between Croatia and Slovenia last year: it is very like pictures which were previously used in Nazi propaganda in the 1930s. The second thing that's going to happen this week, of course, is the EU referendum on Thursday.

And then on Thursday I started to hear about the tragic murder of Jo Cox MP in her constituency on the outskirts of Leeds. Jo Cox was killed by someone who is reported to have shouted out, as he shot and stabbed her, 'Britain

first!' - or 'Put Britain first!' - words which have been associated with extremists who are opposed to the EU, opposed to immigration, racists.

I'm sure you do not need me, or want me, to give you any advice about the referendum. Some of you might even argue that it is not right for anyone in the pulpit to do so: although you might note that both our Archbishops and our bishop in Guildford, and various other bishops, have already gone on record saying which way they will vote, and explaining why. They obviously feel that it is appropriate that our church leaders should lead, and should say clearly which way they think it is appropriate to decide.

I won't do that; but I do think that it might be helpful for us to pause, in the light of the way in which the campaign has turned very nasty. It is never right for there to be racist or fascist propaganda, and there is no room in a democratic and humane society for MPs to be murdered for their beliefs.

At the beginning of Refugee Week, I want to mention immigration and refugees specifically today. How many? Perhaps they are indeed 'legion', as some of the campaigners say. Some of the campaigners think that it is terribly important that numbers should be restricted, massively reduced from current levels. 'Legion' is too many. Like the devils driven into the poor Gadarene swine, these immigrants are 'legion'.

We have reached 'breaking point', says UKIP. They say, they take our jobs, they overburden our services (particularly the NHS), and they are 'not like us'. In the UKIP advert, there is not a single white face. This 'legion of devils' is uniformly non-white.

St Paul, in his Letter to the Galatians, says some very important things, which do bear on this context, and which are at the heart of the transformation of Christianity from being just a Jewish sect into the biggest worldwide religion. More people are Christians today than belong to any other religion, even 2,000 years after the death and resurrection of Christ.

St Paul began with the purely Jewish heritage of Christianity - 'Before faith came, we were kept under the law, ... Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster... , ' he says.

But it's not the case that St Paul is simply saying that 'That was then, in the bad old days of the Old Testament' - and then, after Jesus had come, everything was sweetness and light. In Deuteronomy already - in that 'second

book of the law' - which is what 'Deuteronomy' means - the second book of the Jewish Law, Moses says this:

'You shall not keep back the wages of a man who is poor and needy, whether a fellow-countryman or an alien living in your country' (Deut. 24:14, NEB); and again, 'You shall not deprive aliens and orphans of justice, nor take a widow's cloak in pledge. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. When you reap the harvest in your field and forget a swathe, do not go back to pick it up; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow ... When you beat your olive trees, do not strip them afterwards; what is left shall be for the alien, the orphan and the widow.' And the same for grapes that are left after the harvest. The alien, the orphan and the widow are people that you have to look after. Yes, the alien, the foreigner, just as much as widows and orphans.

That was in the bad, Old Testament days, the days of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But when faith came, when we became Christians, justified by faith, by our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, in His divinity and in our resurrection - the 'sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life' - then the idea of being an alien really ought to have become unimportant. Now, the guiding principle is that 'We are all one in Christ'. We are all equal, citizens of God's world.

Archbishop Justin has pointed out that, in addition to this idea of the brotherhood of man, which is at the heart of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, there are the specific teachings of Jesus; none more important than the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan was an alien. Not only was he an alien, but he was somebody that Jews were opposed to, that they were taught to despise. But as you remember, the people you'd expect to do the right thing, the priest and the Levite, went by on the other side. But the disreputable guy, the Samaritan, did go to help the man who had been hurt, and he cared for him.

Of course you might say that aliens, foreigners, are not all refugees. Some are just simply migrants or immigrants, and there are too many of them. But even Deuteronomy, even the old Jewish law, doesn't make this distinction. They are all just 'aliens': and we must look after them.

It is good to remember what the tragically murdered MP, Jo Cox, said in her maiden speech in Parliament. Remember that her constituency in Yorkshire, on the outskirts of Leeds, where she was born and brought up, is somewhere

where there are many immigrants: a far higher proportion of the population is an immigrant than we have round here in Surrey.

In her maiden speech to Parliament, Jo Cox embraced immigration and diversity. "Our communities have been deeply enhanced by immigration, be it of Irish Catholics across the constituency or of Muslims from Gujarat in India or from Pakistan, principally from Kashmir," she said. "While we celebrate our diversity, what surprises me time and time again as I travel around the constituency is that we are far more united and have far more in common with each other than things that divide us."

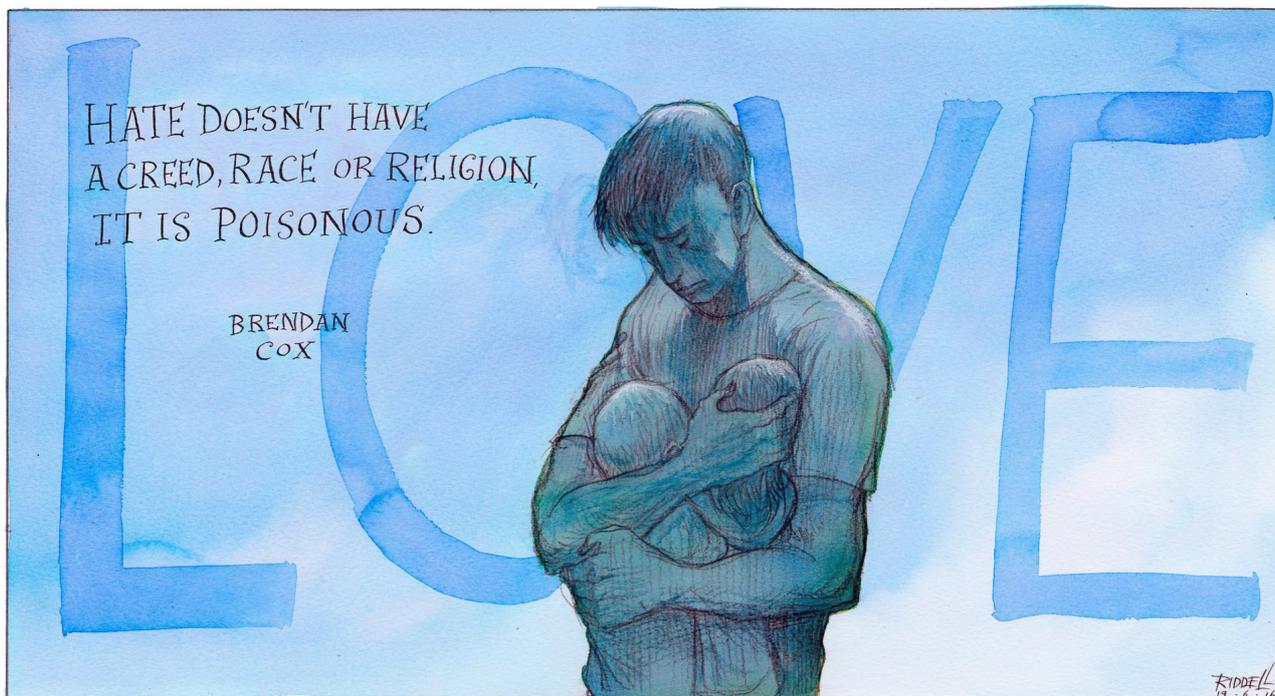
When we vote on Thursday, there are lots of things that could sway us, lots of possible factors that we have to weigh up. We have to decide what is important. You may not be impressed by the fact that nearly all the economic experts suggest that to leave the EU will cause harm to our economy. You may, on the other hand, decide to prefer the argument that it will give us new opportunities economically not to be linked, and so they say, limited, in what we can do, by our membership of the EU.

You may have seen the chief executive of the NHS, Simon Stevens, pointing out how much the NHS relies on immigrants, as doctors, nurses, and support staff. You may have seen him on Andrew Marr's programme pointing out that economic uncertainty, if it results in a fall in the value of the pound, will greatly increase the cost to the NHS of many drugs and equipment, which have to be paid for in Euros or dollars.

But you may say that those things are a price worth paying, and that it is more important in some sense to be independent - the phrase used is to 'take back control'. I'm not going to comment on that, because it isn't relevant to the Christian message which I'm trying to put across this morning about refugees and foreigners, aliens, in relation to our lessons from Galatians and St Luke's gospel.

What I am concerned with here is the theology which we can bring to bear in relation to this question of immigration and refugees. There are even reported to be some evangelical Christians who argue that the British are the chosen race. We are the New Israel, they say, and therefore we should not intermingle with people who are not from among us, who are Gentiles to our Jewishness.

But St Paul has written, 'There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither bond nor free. There is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.' That means, that it doesn't matter where you were born. It doesn't



matter whether you are an Ethiopian eunuch, or Naaman the Syrian, or a Roman centurion like Cornelius. It doesn't matter that you are not one of the chosen race. Like Jo Cox, you should love your neighbours, wherever they come from.

Please do think about these things. When you come to vote on Thursday, please do think, 'What would Jesus have done? What would He have cared about?'

Amen.

Hugh Bryant

I'm grateful to Gail Partridge for suggesting the link between Legion and the refugees.