Conclusion

“Who is My Neighbour?” encourages us as citizens, to fulfil our religious-political duty to engage with our changing society, and the importance of casting our votes wisely. The bishops are careful to avoid telling us which party to support, but; - *That we should use our votes thoughtfully, prayerfully, and with the good of others in mind;* seeking benefits for the whole Nation; rather than “lollypops” for particular groups of voters. So, what are we to do? - We are to, - “do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God”; and with our neighbour. We should aim to support a government that cares for all, - as equal members of *The Big Society.* But, whilst *Big Government* is a long way from us; we can do our bit by making personal *I contact,* that is *me* contact, and visual *eye contact* with all those we meet; - to demonstrate that we really do love our neighbours as ourselves.

*Amen*

**Notes:**

1. 17th February 2015.
3. Temple Tax: one half silver shekel per year, from every adult Jewish male. Judas was paid “thirty pieces of silver”!
5. Jeremiah 7, 11.

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**THE BIG SOCIETY**

Eucharist, 8th March 2015

By Norman Allen

**Texts:** Exodus 20, 1 – 7; 1 Corinthians 1, 18 – 25; John 2, 13 – 22.

**Invocation**

O Lord open our eyes to reveal your guidance; - may we always be ready to hear your word and to change our attitudes. Amen

**Introduction**

A Rabbi asked his disciple, “Tell me my Son, when does the light dawn?” The disciple replied, - “When the stars no longer shine!” The Rabbi said, - “Not then!” The disciple said, - “Perhaps it is when one can distinguish between a dog and a fox on the road!” “But no!” said the Rabbi, - “It is when you look into the eyes of a stranger, and recognise your brother!”

**Change**

The Bishops’ Pastoral Letter¹ is a vision for change, for refreshing adversarial politics, - towards the flourishing of a fairer, more democratic society. “Who is My Neighbour?” evokes a society inspired by mutual concern, for everyone here and in the fragile environment of the whole Planet. However, some see it as a Leftist riposte to the present Government; yet the fast- fading Coalition came to power to establish “The Big Society”, – but the “common bond” envisioned by the “Big Society” has been largely dissipated.

**Community**

In the Wilderness, Moses was concerned to change the attitudes of the Israelites, as they struggled to find their identity and to live in community, - a community based upon the Golden Rule to: *Love God and your neighbour as yourself.* And Paul was teaching the new Christians in Corinth the wisdom of God and the Gospel of love, - a
novel concept for those concerned to protect their lifestyles, regardless of their poorer neighbours; - rather like the City bankers!

**Temple**

Jesus came to make changes, - dramatic changes that continue to this day. He harried the money changers and merchants in the Temple, - to cleanse his Father’s House. However, Roman denarii were the common currency, - forbidden as payment of the Temple Tax; - there had to be a ready means of exchange. And, given the Mosaic Law, - that remission of sins demanded constant animal sacrifices, then the Temple courts must have been very noisy and smelly.

John wrote his Gospel with the benefit of hindsight; after the Jewish Revolt and destruction of the Temple in AD 70. The dispersal of the Jews marked the end of Orthodox animal sacrifices, except for the Samaritans, who still sacrifice sheep on Mount Ebal.

**Micah**

Jesus echoed the Prophet Micah, who said; - "What shall I bring to the Lord, the God of Heaven when I come to worship Him? Shall I bring the best calves to burn as offerings to him? Will the Lord be pleased if I bring him thousands of sheep, or endless streams of olive oil? Shall I offer Him my first-born child to pay for my sins? No, the Lord has told us what is good. What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God."

And, Jeremiah writing of God’s judgement, asked: “Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight?”

Jesus was demanding changes, - a revolution in worship and theological democracy, - of humble access to God in prayer; challenging the doctrine of sins cancelled by shedding innocent blood; even the doctrine of atonement by penal substitution, - that culminated with His own death on the Cross!

**Who is my Neighbour?**

The Bishops’ Letter seeks to balance the roles of the State, markets, communities and individuals; it reflects Christ’s mission to change the divided society of C1st Palestine and beyond. And here, our society has become more deeply divided and insecure since the War; a time when mutual suffering engendered mutual support and respect.

Then it was a much less polarised society; a society which built the post-war Welfare State, envisioned by Lord Beveridge and Archbishop William Temple, before he died in 1944.

**On Rock or Sand?**

Heinz has recommended “Who is my Neighbour” for our Lenten reflection, I also suggest “On Rock or Sand?” - a collection of essays edited by Archbishop John Sentamu. These essays, offer visions of building firm foundations for Britain’s future: a future motivated by mutual care, rather than greed. For, if we are to bequeath a thriving society to those who follow us, we should now be engaged in the decision-making process.

**Humane Economy**

When the financial crisis broke in 2008, the General Synod debated the likely impacts; setting down three criteria, questions by which austerity measures ought to be judged:

- Is it fair, does it give priority to the vulnerable?
- Does it oblige us to share our resources, - promoting fair trade and global aid?
- And, is it sustainable into the medium and long term?

And, in July last year the General Synod debated how the Church should contribute to the Common Good, looking to political policies that:

- Acknowledged the depth of insecurity and anxiety in society.
- Recognised the need for supportive local communities, and informal voluntary action.
- Recognised that people need a sense of place and belonging.
- Addressed the negative outcomes of regulation and litigation.
- And, reflected the obligation to secure the Common Good for future generations.

Such questions may arise, when the visions of the Parliamentary candidates are tested here, at the hustings.