

Politics is about what shapes us



BY BISHOP CHRISTOPHER

YOU don't have to read much of the Bible to notice that political turmoil is hardly a feature unique to our times. But one of the bigger differences that you might spot is there are not many elections in scripture, regardless of the situation.

Sometimes a leader is chosen by direct divine command, or by the word of God through a prophet. Sometimes, such as when Matthias is chosen to replace Judas Iscariot as an apostle at the beginning of Acts, God's will is sought through casting lots. And sometimes political power just seems to come to whoever has the most powerful warriors. So it's all there, but there's not much democracy around.

Whatever that says about our current political world, it reminds us that democracy, as we now have it, is not that old, and it's perhaps partly for that reason that it can be so fragile.

Even though our political institutions can at times seem to some a little traditional, in the grand scheme of things they are not. And that might be at least one reason why the question of what counts as democratic is still up for debate.

While voting in elections, as we shall soon see, remains deeply important, the great risk with a democratic system like ours is

that we can end up thinking that elections are the only thing we do that is political. It can sometimes feel like we have no power or influence between elections, and that our vote is the only political instrument we have.

But politics goes far beyond that, and it's beyond voting itself that our faith becomes most political, and most significant for our politics.

Politics is about the affairs of the *polis*, the greek word referring to the life of the city. So politics is about anything that shapes and makes up the life of our communities. It involves voting, but it also includes the everyday choices and activities that define our relations with our neighbours.

So churches are deeply political, whether we like it or not, because every time we run something for local people, and equally every time we shut someone out, we shape the life of our community.

The gospel is and will always be political, because it proclaims the coming of life in Jesus, a life that shapes our existence and reaches out to our neighbour. When we proclaim that Jesus is Lord, we are making a statement about whose vision of creation and community really matters. And if we take that seriously, then it changes everything from how we vote to what we buy in the shops.

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