



Praying for Donald Trump

There was a tiny, but fascinating, hesitation during our Sunday service last week. Each Sunday, a different member of the congregation leads our prayers: typically, we pray for some concerns from the wider world as well as those close to us in Surbiton and to the congregation.

The prayer leader moved to the change of president. Her prayers went something like this: "We remember the office of President of the United States; we pray for those who will support the new President as he takes office."

It wasn't that there was anything wrong here: but rather, what I noticed was the absence: the absence of direct prayers for Donald Trump. It was as if she couldn't quite bring herself to pray for him. And I know how she feels.

Yes, many of us pray for Donald Trump but only in the sense that he will see the error of his ways, and suddenly become an advocate of green energy and the like; we pray that he will no longer grope women; we pray that he will learn not to shut down any media criticism.

The things we pray for probably wouldn't be welcomed by Donald Trump himself.

I think the last politician to be so divisive in the UK was Margaret Thatcher, though arguably even she wasn't in the same league: at any rate, I didn't go to

church while she was Prime Minister, so I don't know what issues came up then.

Otherwise, there's been a different feeling. For example, whether they were Conservative, Labour, Green, UKIP or Liberal Democrat, I think everyone in the congregation prayed for Theresa May when she became Prime Minister. She may not have been everyone's cup of tea, but there was a sufficient well of respect for her, and an appreciation of difference, that praying for her still felt appropriate for everyone. With Trump, that's not the case.

Obviously, he's in the USA rather than in the UK, but our countries share such a common history and culture that it is hard not to feel unaffected. People may quibble about vote counts, but nevertheless Trump won the election. Half of America voted for him. Half of that country voted for this person who seems so abhorrent to me.

Praying for him purely in the sense that he will change his ways is arguably rather patronising not just to him, but also to the tens of millions who voted for him.

It's not quite the same, but there is a vaguely parallel division about Brexit. I suppose if I lived in Scotland, there would be something similar with regard to independence. These are colossally divisive issues that unsettle the community in which we live: I guess we have to adapt: it's just I am not sure how.

January 2017. Thought for the Train is a short column written by the Reverend Robert Stanier, the vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train, or elsewhere. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at www.surbitonchurch.org.uk.