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*In today's **Yorkshire Post**, Archbishop Stephen writes about the importance of turning up and casting our vote at the General Election on Thursday.*

In five days comes an exciting and important day for our nation. A General Election is the moment where, regardless of wealth or status, we have an equal say in what our common future looks like.

As with many things, it's also got a funny history - both comical and absurd.

Until the beginning of the twelfth century, many seats in the country didn't have elections because no one stood, so the family whose 'property' the seat was carried on in it.

There was once a constituency in Wiltshire that was populated only by sheep.

Until 1832, a fee was charged for registering to vote.

In 1918, women were allowed to vote for the first time. But only if they were over 30 years old and the value of their home was high enough.

Universal adult suffrage wasn't achieved until 1928.

The voting age of 18 wasn't established until 1969.

There are still unconventional and wonderful polling stations, including pubs, boxing clubs, lifeboat stations, caravans, and laundrettes.

When we look those historical absurdities, we can see that there are many things that might have stopped us from voting. I doubt many of us would be happy about paying a fee just to register, or hearing that there would be no election in our seat. Certainly, the women's suffrage movement is an inspiring reminder of how gaining the vote was so hard won. Which is one of the main reasons why we shouldn't take voting for granted, and why we should get out and vote next week.

But what might be stopping us?

Perhaps we feel disenfranchised – maybe we don't think voting will make any difference in our or our neighbours' lives. Maybe we feel like politics hasn't had a positive impact on our lives and can't make any change for us.

Perhaps we feel our one vote is too insignificant to make a difference.

Perhaps we have other challenges going on in our lives which make voting the last thing on our minds. Maybe family challenges, caring responsibilities, illness, bereavement, or worries about paying the bills just get in the way.

Perhaps we have other plans on polling day. Maybe having to work long hours, going on holiday, having a birthday, or taking a loved one to the doctors.

Perhaps we are happy to be distracted by this years' Euros.

Or having watched the extensive broadcast programmes, we have deliberately switched off from tuning into the TV debates which are often full of people talking over each other, where difficult questions are avoided, and responses are replayed in soundbites online.

When I am watching and listening to the debates, I am reminded of the Nolan Principles established in 1995 which were named after Lord Nolan, the then Chairperson of the Committee of Standards in Public Life. The principles include selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. I wonder how often we see these principles being played out.

I am praying for all those standing and for all those who make the election process happen, that as a nation we might make our decision having reflected on what sort of society we want to aspire to be. The Church of England has produced resources called [Pray your Part](#), with daily themes. Faced with huge questions, our calling as Christians is first to turn to God for prayer. But secondly to cast our vote not just for what is best for us, but what is best for our neighbour and what is best for the world. We are inviting everyone to think about how we can play our part as voters and citizens.

I wonder then who will turn out to vote on Thursday.

We can't get away from the fact that it's those who turn up who have a say in forming the next government. Our electoral system is certainly not perfect, but it is still true that participation is required to have an impact.

It would be a sad and dysfunctional day for politics if deciding who our next government is, is done only by those whose lives have improved since the last election. Democracy would be undermined if only those who feel their vote is powerful and influential turned out to vote. It would be a failure of our system if only those who are not facing challenges or who aren't busy on polling day turn up.

Indeed, the political system exists to amplify the challenges that we and our neighbours are facing in order that they might be addressed. That means that we need to hear the voices of those who feel disenfranchised. We need the votes of those who have caring responsibilities and who work long hours and who are struggling to make ends meet. We need everyone's voice and we need everyone to vote.

In 2024 there are many elections happening around the world. Taiwan, Pakistan, India, Mexico, the European Union, France, the US and more, have had or will have an election this year. In fact, we find ourselves in an international moment of change.

We hear all too often about the significant global challenges facing us – climate change and its effects, war and famine. We may feel far away from those global challenges at times, but the truth is, how we vote on Thursday impacts the way that the global community of which we are part, responds to these challenges. My best interests and the best interests are one and the same thing. We belong to each other and have responsibilities to each other. This is what Jesus teaches us. It is what loving your neighbour as yourself means.

I remember queuing up for a coffee after the Brexit vote and listening into the conversations on the result and what it might mean. There was a wide range of response, joy and despair, praise and criticism, but what shocked me was that many people in the conversation, especially the young, admitted that they hadn't actually voted at all.

And so, whether we decide to turn up at the Polling Station or not has implications for not just the neighbours in our street, but also our international neighbours. We are blessed and fortunate in the UK to have free and fair elections. They are very precious, and under threat in many parts of the world. They are the cornerstone of a functioning democracy. We, therefore, have a duty to vote.

Decisions are made by those who show up. Democracy requires participation.

So, set your alarm, put a reminder on your phone, tie a knot in your handkerchief and remind your friends and family. But, most of all, turn up.

Have your say. And cast your vote on Thursday.



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