

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT

Sunday 29th March 2020

‘Virtually Church but with some way to go...’

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday. You will notice that the reflection ends with a question ‘What is God doing in our lives right here and now?’ Maybe you have your own response to this question. If you do, then please do share this with me or another member of the Ministry Team. We will preserve anonymity but I would like to share the substance of any answers received in a future edition of Cutting Edge Camelot.

Scripture Passage

John 11:1-6, 17-37

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.”

But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.

Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see."
Jesus began to weep.

So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Reflection

I was looking at this passage in preparing a dramatized version for use at Maperton this Sunday. And as I did so I asked myself 'What tone of voice did these people use?'

Because the tone which someone uses affects the meaning of what they say. In this passage, the two sisters Martha and Mary address Jesus with exactly the same words, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' But did they speak in the same tone of voice? For Martha I imagine that there was a note of hidden reproach and perhaps the unformulated question 'What took you so long?'. On the other hand I imagine Mary speaking these same words in a way which expressed love, trust and confidence in Jesus. Her unspoken words could have been 'I know that you are the One who can help. You would have saved my brother.'

And Martha also highlights that God's time and our time are not always the same.

For her it seems that Jesus has simply turned up too late to make a difference. This is echoed at the end by those who say, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

However, for Jesus the time is just right. The delay is deliberate. He stays where He is for two days. Why? It is not through lack of compassion. No, Jesus understands what God will do through Lazarus' illness and death. He knows that this story will not end with Lazarus' death but that Lazarus will be raised from the dead through Jesus. If Jesus had arrived earlier and 'only' healed a dying man this would not have happened. The faith of Jesus' followers needs to be raised to a new level. Jesus is the One who has power and authority over death.

So God's time may be later than ours. On the other hand, God's time can also be earlier. Martha is very clear about when Resurrection will happen. We need to wait until the end of time. Martha knows that her brother will rise again on the last day. But although she is partly right her understanding is also incomplete. For with Jesus, Resurrection and the experience of God's power is not simply for the end of time, it can also happen in the here and now. Jesus tells Martha 'I am the Resurrection and the Life' and challenges her (and us) to expect God to work not just in the indefinite future but also in the present moment.

Jesus seems to be marching to the beat of a different drum. His time is not our time. Sometimes it is later and at others it is sooner. But despite this Jesus is not cut off from other people. Far from it. He enters fully into their feelings. When they weep, He weeps. They love, He loves. They feel loss, He feels loss. And anger? Anger too is a response to bereavement. We tell ourselves that this death should not have happened. Is Jesus angry?

We are told that Jesus was 'greatly disturbed in spirit'. The literal meaning of the Greek is 'snorting like a horse' and so metaphorically indignant or moved with anger. Jesus was outraged. Death was not meant to cut short His friend Lazarus' life.

So what does this mean for us in our response to this emergency? Well, if Jesus felt love, loss and anger so can we. But we can also feel impatient. Why did the government not act sooner? When might we see these restrictions lifted? Or perhaps we think that, while public worship is suspended, God's work in our lives is put on hold and postponed until an indefinite future.

But if like Jesus we march to a different beat perhaps the real question to ask is what is God doing in our lives right here and now?

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- Finding new and creative ways to celebrate Easter in the light of the current restrictions
- Those wishing to return to this country from abroad
- Recently bereaved or those with seriously ill loved ones unable to say a proper goodbye because of the emergency
- Those suffering from anxiety as a result of self-isolation
- Wisdom and divine guidance for governments of this country and all across the world.

Why not try?

- Asking yourself how you have seen God at work in your spiritual life since the emergency e.g. perhaps greater trust in God?
- On Sundays lighting a candle near dusk and placing it in your window as a symbol of Christ the light of the world.
- Anna's suggestions this midweek of keeping a journal, spending time in silence with God or reading a new or unfamiliar book of the Bible.

Updates

- Churches now closed following Prime Minister's announcement on Monday. No weddings and only emergency baptisms (child's life in danger) at home or in hospital. Funerals restricted to immediate family at graveside or crematoria (subject to local crematoria rules). Further details on Church of England website.
- Current Excalibur gives details of network of community volunteers now in action across the parishes.
- Parishes Office now closed. Please contact Rob via email (office@camelotparishes.org.uk) or on 01749 850934.

Some streamed resources available online

Here are a selection of some streamed resources available online which you may find helpful:-

- The Royal School of Church Music website provides a Hymn of the Day and Sunday Self-Service with music, readings and prayers.
- The Prayer Book Society has details of online streaming of BCP services.
- Spring Harvest is not being held live this year. However, there is full online coverage of this Christian festival available from 13th to 17th April. Simply go to YouTube and enter in 'Spring Harvest Home'.

Growing as a worshipper, a servant and a family

We pray that 'we might live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us' (Ephesians 5:2)