

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 19

Sunday 10th May 2020

'Virtually Church but with some way to go...'

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday. Through our Scripture passages and our reflection we look at how Jesus can enable us to find peace both in life and in death as we trust God and forgive other people.

Scripture Passages

From Psalm 31

v.1-5

In you, O LORD, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame;

in your righteousness deliver me.

Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily.

Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.

You are indeed my rock and my fortress;

for your name's sake lead me and guide me,

take me out of the net that is hidden for me,

for you are my refuge.

Into your hand I commit my spirit;

you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.

v.15-16

My times are in your hand;

deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.

Let your face shine upon your servant;

save me in your steadfast love.

John 14: 1-6, 27

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.

In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.”

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

Acts 7: 55- 60

But filled with the Holy Spirit, [Stephen] gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

“Look,” he said, “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”

But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him.

Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.

Reflection

What makes for a peaceful death? No doubt this is the kind of death we would like for other people, for those whom we love and for ourselves.

However, if you have been reading or listening to those who have survived coronavirus and have been, say, in intensive care or on a ventilator their ordeal has been anything but peaceful. And though clearly they have not died we wonder what it must be like to die in those circumstances. Perhaps we have a more immediate experience of this, either personally or in the circle of our family and friends.

Our reading from Acts describes the death of Stephen the first Christian martyr. Did Stephen die a peaceful death? If we look simply at the circumstances of his death, our answer may well be 'No'.

For Stephen died surrounded by hatred, violence and evil. We are reminded of Jesus' own death when Stephen sees the heavens opened and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Then Stephen echoes the words of Jesus at His trial before the high priest (Matthew 26:64). And just as people responded to Jesus' words with irrational rage so too with Stephen. Those who hear his words rush towards him, drag him away and stone him to death. It is a horrible, violent way to die.

So those are the outward circumstances. But what of Stephen himself? Is it still possible that he could have died peacefully? Stephen's death parallels that of Jesus in other ways.

As he dies, Stephen says first of all, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit'. Here he echoes Jesus' words from the Cross which are themselves drawn from Psalm 31, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit'. But where Jesus addresses God His Father, Stephen addresses Jesus. And this shows the faith of Stephen and his fellow believers, that Jesus and the Father are one and the same. So both Jesus and Stephen show a simple, unwavering trust in God as they die.

And Stephen also speaks about those who are at that very moment driving the life out of him 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' Here too we are reminded of another of Jesus' last words, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' As well as a simple trust in God both Jesus and Stephen are able to forgive even the cruellest of human actions.

So, yes, Stephen does indeed die at peace both with God and also with other people. This is despite the extreme and violent circumstances of his death. So where did his peace come from?

We often quote at funerals Jesus' words at the end of our gospel passage, 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you'. It is through Jesus' death and resurrection that our peace comes. Christ, we are told, died for our sins according to the scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3). As we respond to this message of forgiveness so the darkness and brokenness of sin in our lives is replaced by the light and healing of Christ.

Stephen has clearly taken this message to heart for he dies at peace both with God and with other people. And in doing so he enjoys the peace which is given to him by Jesus Christ.

But Jesus speaks to His disciples not simply about dying well but also about living well.

For Stephen's death is the culmination of his lifetime's path of faithful discipleship. Stephen is described as being a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5). No doubt in his lifetime Stephen had reflected deeply on Jesus' death and what it meant. And then when he comes to die Stephen shows the depth of his discipleship as he follows Christ so closely.

In the gospel passage the disciples are puzzled about how they can get to the place in heaven which Jesus is to prepare for them. Thomas says to Jesus 'we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' To which Jesus replies very simply, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life'. It is here and now that we need to follow the way of Jesus.

So these passages remind us of our own mortality as indeed do the times in which we live. And we are encouraged by the example of Stephen to believe that we can die peacefully whatever the circumstances.

But we also need to live well. The words of Jesus on the Cross echoed by Stephen remind us of our need both to place our trust in God and to forgive other people. Perhaps some of us are looking at a new chapter in our lives? Perhaps this time of lockdown has in itself been a new chapter? To be successful in a new chapter of life we need to build on a foundation of trust and forgiveness.

This week has also marked the 75th anniversary of VE Day. Often the Queen has spoken about the inspiration and comfort given to her in wartime by a poem called 'The Gate of the Year'. It speaks about trust in God in terms of going out into the darkness and putting your hand into the 'Hand of God' which 'shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way'. Jesus entrusting Himself to God at the moment of His death drew on the words of Psalm 31, 'Into your hand I commit my spirit'. And in Psalm 31 we find

another well-known phrase 'My times are in your hand'. Whatever we may face in the future let us remember that our times are in God's hands.

Tristram

Hymn Suggestion

A well-known hymn that expresses a child-like trust in God in every season of our lives including the gift of peace at 'the end of the day' is 'Lord of all hopefulness'. And it's also worth looking at a modern chorus 'Father I place into your hands'. Versions of both are available on Youtube if you type in the titles.

Points for Prayers

- Thanksgiving for and celebration of Jesus' resurrection
- Thanksgiving for care, skill and courage of NHS workers and those in care homes
- Those suffering from coronavirus in hospitals, care homes and at home
- Need for further largescale testing
- Prayers for wisdom in government decisions particularly regarding the future of the lockdown
- Funerals needing to take place under new restrictions with only family mourners. Ron is taking a funeral on Monday
- Prayers for those affected economically by the lockdown, for businesses and those who have become unemployed
- Prayers and thanksgiving for contributions to the foodbanks and for those helping to take these to the foodbanks.

The Parish Office

The Parish Office is now closed. Please contact Rob via email (office@camelotparishes.org.uk) or on 01749 850934.

Diocesan weekly livestreamed services and reflections

Bishop Peter and Bishop Ruth will be livestreaming a mid-week Eucharist each week and offering recorded reflections each Sunday.

For further details please see the Diocesan website.

Church of England Daily Hopeline

The Archbishop of Canterbury has launched a new telephone service, 'Daily Hopeline'. If you ring the free number 0800 804 8044 you can hear a recorded message and can also listen to well-known hymns along with prayers and a reflection based on a hymn.

Premier Radio

Available from Premier Radio (DAB radio and channel 725 via Freeview TV).

Sunday morning of sacred music, songs and teaching etc, 7.00am-12.00 noon.

Includes 'Hearts and Hymns' by Pam Rhodes, 8.00am to 10.00am with great variety of hymns and accompanying information.

Bible studies on weekday mornings.

Some other streamed resources

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.

An inclusive Communion celebrated on behalf of the benefice

Ron and Pam will be celebrating Communion regularly in their home each Sunday at 10.00am. Please be aware of this because, even though no-one can join them, they are praying for us all and hope that you will feel included in this act of Communion.

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)*