

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 23

Sunday 24th May 2020

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

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot on this Sunday between Ascension and Pentecost. Below I reflect on how periods of delay in our lives can be both fruitful and significant.

Scripture Passages

Acts 1: 6-14

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and

James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

John 17: 1-11

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

"I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

"I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

Reflection

This Sunday is sandwiched between Ascension and Pentecost. As I thought about this, I wondered why we did not celebrate the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost on the first available Sunday after Ascension. Why the delay?

I wonder how you typically respond to a period of delay. When I have been through such times in my life for instance a recovery from illness I see when I look back that this period of delay has been immensely significant. Nevertheless, my feelings at the time may have been ones of frustration or of disappointment. However, in retrospect I realise that the delay was necessary to prepare me properly for the next stage of my life. God's timing is indeed perfect.

The disciples too experienced a delay between Jesus' Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. However, they also needed a time of preparation so that they would be ready for the mission and tasks that the Holy Spirit would bring them. When before His Ascension they ask Jesus the question, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" they show that they are not yet ready. The focus of this question is on a national renewal, the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. But God's purposes are much bigger than this. God wants all nations and all peoples to know God for themselves.

As Jesus puts it in our reading from John's gospel, 'this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent'. Jesus' great gift is not a political one which can be described in terms of this world. Rather it is the gift of eternal life, a quality of life more powerful than death through which people come into a relationship with God in Jesus Christ.

And so the disciples were not ready. They needed to grow in their understanding of God's purposes.

And they were impatient, they want to know when Jesus is going to restore the kingdom to Israel. This is more than a polite request for clarification of a very hypothetical 'roadmap'. It is a demand for cast iron guaranteed dates and schedules. Rather than being willing to wait on and trust God, they want to know exact dates. But in response Jesus tells them very simply, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority'. So they did not even have a 'roadmap'. They were challenged to trust God and God's timing simply and unequivocally.

Of course not all of us are impatient at this time. Many would like the easing of the lockdown to go slower rather than faster. So we see in the proposal to partially reopen schools a variety of responses. Some eagerly await this day. But others believe that this timing is too soon, that it will put them at risk. Is there anything here that we can learn from Jesus?

At the end of the passage which we have read from John's gospel Jesus prays for His disciples 'protect them...so that they may be one, as we are one.' There are two requests here, one for protection and the other for unity. Both seem to me to be relevant to our current circumstances.

No doubt, the main substance of Jesus' prayer for protection relates to the spiritual threats that His disciples will face as they seek to live out their faith in the midst of a hostile world. And yet I think that it can also apply to physical threats which we face. We can be over confident in the face of these threats. Can we rely on Jesus' protection even if we don't take steps to protect ourselves? Jesus was tempted by the devil to throw Himself off the Temple and to rely on God's protection to save Him from injury in this reckless act. But Jesus said no to this temptation telling the devil that we need to trust God not test Him. We do need to use our minds to think about the risks of our actions.

But at the same time there is the opposite extreme of becoming paralysed by fear. This too is not the way of faith. We think, for instance, of the man who

refused to use his talent out of fear. His master was not pleased with him (see Matthew 25: 24-27). Sometimes trusting in God's protection means acknowledging our fears and then asking God to show us the right way forward.

For there is a right way forward in faith between these two extremes. What exactly that way is will be different for each of us. For our circumstances are different, some are more vulnerable than others. And this brings us to the second part of Jesus' prayer, the need for unity. We need to be able to love and respect those whose response differs from our own.

We may feel that we are in a period of delay. Times of delay in our lives can be ones of frustrated barrenness. On the other hand they can be times of immensely fruitful change and growth. What makes the difference? One key element is that of prayer. The disciples were not yet ready to receive the Holy Spirit. They needed to prepare themselves through prayer. And so we find that in the days after Jesus' Ascension and leading up to Pentecost that they all constantly devoted themselves to prayer.

Recently, the church has been recapturing the sense of this season being specially set aside for prayer. 'Thy Kingdom Come' was launched by the Church of England in 2016 and has become an international call to prayer across all Christian groups and denominations. Their website contains many excellent suggestions and resources for prayer. Alternatively you can simply ask God about what you might do at this time. We each need to find something that captures our own imagination and energy.

I thought I might pray specifically for a different member of my immediate neighbourhood and family on each day between Ascension and Pentecost. I am still at the beginning of this process but already I have been interested in what 'constant' prayer means. As I name or think about a particular person at the start of the day I find that as the day goes on God brings that person

back into my mind spontaneously at different times of the day as an invitation to continue in prayer.

How do we use the time between a promise and its fulfilment well? We need to be honest about our need to be prepared for what is to come. We need to ask for God's protection as we take the necessary steps towards our future. We need to maintain unity with and love for one another. And finally we need to pray constantly.

Tristram

Hymn Suggestion

One very simple hymn which encourages us to trust in and wait for God is 'Be still and know that I am God.' Available on YouTube.

Points for Prayers

- Joining in the season of prayer between Ascension and Pentecost (see further details below)
- 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 parents, teachers, governors and children in implementing the process of partial reopening of schools
- Funerals needing to take place under new restrictions with only family mourners
- 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.

Why not try ?

- Going to www.thykingdomcome.global and looking at some of the resources there. Are there any that you might use to help your prayer life in this period between Ascension and Pentecost? Are there any other ways in which God might be prompting you to mark out this time as a special season of prayer?

Churches and the Roadmap on easing the lockdown

Please see the note distributed with CEC No 21 on Sunday 17th May.

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

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

Sunday morning of sacred music, songs and teaching etc, 7.00am - 12.00 noon including 'Hearts and Hymns' by Pam Rhodes, 8.00am to 10.00 am 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)