

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 28

Wednesday 10th June 2020

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

Introduction

Following Trinity Sunday we enter into a new season of the church’s year, one in which the emphasis is on spiritual growth and discipleship. This year as we wait for the time when we are able to meet together again as a church this seems particularly relevant. Times of delay in our lives can be ones either of frustration or of immensely significant blessing. A focus on our own spiritual growth and discipleship can help to make this difference.

One theme over the next period will be that of our prayer lives. In this edition I share with you my own adventure in prayer over the season of ‘Thy Kingdom Come’ from Ascension to Pentecost. Maybe this will be a stimulus for you to find new and different ways to pray.

Next Sunday we will look at the need for persistence in prayer and on future Sundays we will be looking in detail at different parts of the Lord’s Prayer.

Meanwhile in midweek there will be a series on Biblical characters who were imprisoned. Did you realise there were quite so many of them? Joseph, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Peter and Paul...the list could go on. How did they use their time of imprisonment? We of course are not imprisoned and yet significant restrictions on many dimensions of our lives remain. What can we learn from how these Biblical characters responded to their imprisonment?

Update

You will probably have picked up the government announcement over the weekend that the plan is for church buildings to be opened up again for private prayer on Monday 15th June.

Although this is of course welcome news from the pastoral and community point of view it also raises the question of how any such reopening is to be combined with taking appropriate care in relation to health issues, particularly those relating to hygiene and cleaning.

I together with the churchwardens, PCCs and Ministry Team are actively considering these issues with a view to producing a careful and thorough plan which appropriately addresses any possible risks. The timing and decision on the question of opening for private prayer is one to be taken locally i.e. by each of the constituent parishes of the Camelot Group. As different factors affect different churches this may result in a range of different outcomes across the Group.

I will keep you further updated with developments on this and in the meantime please do cover this with prayer.

Tristram

Scripture Passage

Romans 8: 26-27

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Reflection

An adventure in prayer

The Church encouraged us to keep a special season of prayer between Ascension and Pentecost. This initiative is known as 'Thy kingdom come'. At Ascension I mentioned that I intended to respond to the challenge of 'Thy kingdom come' by spending a special time each day praying for one household of my immediate neighbours and family? So how did this project work out?

The first thing I realised when I came to the end of the ten day period was that I had in fact exactly ten households as my immediate neighbours. In this way allocating one day to each of them made a perfect fit with the period of prayer of 'Thy Kingdom Come'.

The 'hidden' people around us

Of course I could have chosen to select people I already knew well as my focus in prayer rather than choosing this comprehensive but in some ways rather random group of immediate neighbours. And yet I learnt much from this choice. There was a sense as the period of prayer went on of an increasing momentum, of the neighbourhood being soaked in prayer. And I began to realise that I knew some of my neighbours and their needs better than others. In any group of people there are the unobtrusive ones, those whom we tend unconsciously to overlook. Or perhaps it is simply that, for whatever reason, we have never really got to know them. Setting aside a specific day for each person in a group helps to bring these 'hidden' people to the forefront of our attention.

When you run out of words

But even with the people whom I knew relatively well I found that I fairly quickly ran out of specific prayer requests. In his reflection for Pentecost

Sunday Ron mentioned the gift of tongues. Sometimes people ask ‘What’s the point of such a strange gift? Why not just pray in a straightforward way that can be easily understood?’ And yet the gift of tongues can be of immense help when we have no idea what to pray for or when our normal words for prayer have simply been exhausted. And so in this time I found the gift of praying in tongues to be of great help.

Sighs too deep for words

But there are many different ways of praying for people. I also found that the Holy Spirit would spontaneously bring these people back into my mind at various points of the day. And then I would take some time in silence sitting before God with these people on my heart and finding the Spirit leading me into an imaginative identification with them and their needs. This helped me to understand the reality of what St Paul speaks about in our Bible passage above that ‘we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words’. So even though we may not know exactly what God wants to do in someone’s life we can trust that as the Spirit prays in our hearts with sighs too deep for words we do indeed pray for what God wants.

The breadth and depth of the kingdom

But what does it mean to pray ‘Thy kingdom come?’ Yes, it is about individuals coming to faith and then growing in maturity as disciples of Christ but this prayer is even wider and deeper than this. It involves God’s rule becoming real in every area of life. This leads to the transformation of communities, indeed the whole of creation, as well as individuals. And so as the days went on I found the sphere of my prayers widening to include a concern for the different communities which make up the Camelot Parishes. As this happened I began to pray that any fragmentation within or between them might be overcome and that through God’s power they would experience wholeness, healing and peace.

Unexpected blessings

As Pentecost approached I found myself focussing more on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And though I was praying for the Holy Spirit on behalf of others, individuals as well as communities, I also found great blessing at a personal level. It was as if boulders and obstacles to progress in my own life were being removed. I was given a renewed sense of purpose and a deeper knowledge of God's peace. Prayer changes us as well as other people.

The end of the pilgrimage

And so to Pentecost itself. In the Easter season in other years I have on occasions been on Diocesan pilgrimage walks across Exmoor. This year's pilgrimage has been an inner rather than an outer one. For me it ended with listening to the online Thy Kingdom Come service led by the Archbishop of Canterbury and including a wide variety of other contributors. As with our final gatherings in one of the Exmoor churches this felt to be a fitting way to round off this special season of prayer.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- For the spiritual growth and discipleship of ourselves and others as we respond to the good news of Jesus Christ
- Wisdom on the decisions to be made by the different Camelot churches on the reopening of churches for private prayer (see update above)
- 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

- Response to death of George Floyd
- Prayers for parents, teachers, governors and children of North Cadbury Church of England Primary School as the school is partially reopened, for the school to be a place of both joy and safety
- 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.

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.

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)