

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 32

Wednesday 24th June 2020

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

Welcome

Today in the church's calendar we celebrate the birth of John the Baptist. John is both the patron saint of St John the Baptist North Cheriton and also suffered a period of imprisonment. So it felt appropriate to focus today on John in this midweek series.

Our scripture passage is from Matthew ch.11 and begins with John sending messengers to Jesus while he is in prison. It always interests and indeed encourages me that this great person of faith (someone whom Jesus describes as being the greatest among 'those born of women') nevertheless finds himself needing to ask questions about who Jesus really is and whether He really is the Messiah.

One of the aspects of periods of confinement is that they can cause deep questions about life and faith to rise to the surface of our minds. On the other hand, when we are active, unconfined and busy such questions can remain dormant.

But we can also be encouraged that if John the Baptist had questions about his faith, we too should not dismiss the questions that concern us. Rather, just as John sent messengers to Jesus to find out the answers he needed, so we too should feel free to send our own messengers to Jesus with those questions that are most deeply on our hearts. And perhaps a period of confinement provides us with a special opportunity to do this.

The scripture passage is then followed by some further thoughts on John and his relationship with Jesus which have been submitted to me by a parishioner.

Scripture Passage

Matthew 11: 2-19

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”

Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’

“Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John came; and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. Let anyone with ears listen!

“But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’

“For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

Thoughts from a Parishioner

“**Look for what Jesus himself taught** instead of being satisfied with what has been taught about him”, is the concluding advice on the last page of Geza Vermez’s 2003 deeply wise, book, *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus*.

In the spirit of what Ron wrote ten days ago (Sunday 14 May) prayer isn’t only, or predominantly, about asking God for material things, specific people in need and world events to happen or not happen. During our time of “lock-down” - a form of imprisonment - we have been induced to think some very deep thoughts about the human condition, our living and material world, and a future now completely uncertain with so many “bets off”. What can Jesus and his early interpreter say to us in return?

At this time of celebration of the life of St John the Baptist, patron saint of our much loved parish church in the Camelot benefice (shared with next-door Horsington, by the way) we can waive for a moment Vermez’s advice and consider - as part of our contemplating and praying - John and his relationship with his cousin Jesus.

John was, shall we say, a major controversialist and a politico-religious enemy of Herod’s civic rule over the Jewish state, itself wholly under the grip of Roman military power. (What has changed, we sigh, in the Middle East about such a dangerous muddle.) In today’s Gospel passage, John was

imprisoned and executed on the king's orders. Salome, by some accounts, was involved. What do we learn from the narrative, in Jesus's life, sayings and prayers?

Firstly, we know John baptised Jesus "with water" in the river Jordan, amongst numerous others (Matthew 3: 11). It was what he did, while living as an ascetic during a life of earnest desire for his fellow humans, inspired by zeal for religious observance, righteousness and the love and power of God. Risking all for what he thought of as the truth, this made him enemies and landed him in prison.

Secondly, the most memorable words John uttered, following his claim that had found the authentic person of God on earth, the Messiah, and that Jesus,

"...shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire".

But thirdly, this was prefixed (Luke 3: 16) by John's admission, which strikes to the very heart of those who are drawn to Jesus, that

"One mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose".

And finally, in mutual reinforcement (Matthew 11: 11) Jesus acknowledges that before John "no one greater" had been born. This makes Jesus indeed a real person for us, humble but sacred above all persons who have ever lived, suggesting us to stoop if not kneel bravely in subjection at His own feet - willingly.

So, on a happy note, in allowing ourselves to be captured, taking a risk in Jesus as "the way, the truth and the life", such makes us free, free of all human and earthly captivity. Freedom allows us to be truly humble and yet do whatever we can, to live in the love of God and serve our fellow human beings. But humility, with a touch of humour? Is this a race to the bottom of the list? But thank God for our Jesus - and John the Baptist!

Points for Prayers

- For our spiritual growth and discipleship as we respond to the good news of Jesus Christ
- For Camelot churches in responding to the reopening for private prayer
- 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
- Health and wellbeing of Felicity, Arabella and Robert, members of the extended Mileham family
- 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
- 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.

Update on reopening churches for private prayer and public worship

Following the permission given for reopening of churches for private prayer I am able to give you the following update.

This permission was coupled with the need to complete a Risk Assessment and to meet some fairly rigorous standards for instance in relation to cleaning, hygiene and social distancing. Not all of the Camelot churches

have the resources at present to comply with these standards, especially the need for regular and thorough cleaning.

However, I am pleased to be able to announce that following the completion of Risk Assessments the churches at South Cadbury and at Compton Pauncefoot are now open for private prayer for a limited period on a Sunday morning.

South Cadbury is open for prayer from 10.00am to 12 noon and Compton Pauncefoot is open from 9.30am to 10.30am.

The PCC of St Michael's North Cadbury is actively considering proposals by which the churches at North Cadbury and Galhampton could also open for private prayer at specified times.

The government have further announced yesterday that as from Sunday 5th July it will be possible also for public worship to take place. We are awaiting detailed guidance on this and it is anticipated that this will include similar provisions as were issued in relation to opening for private prayer.

Anna's ordination

Before the lockdown Anna's ordination as priest was scheduled to take place this Saturday (27th June) at Wells Cathedral. She would then have presided at her first Communion at a Group service this Sunday (28th June).

Because of the lockdown clearly neither of these services can take place.

Some form of ordination service is scheduled to take place in September but at present details of this are still being worked out and these depend on the extent to which lockdown has been eased by then.

Update on North Cadbury Church of England Primary School

In accordance with government guidelines selected classes have returned to North Cadbury Church of England Primary School from the beginning of this week until the summer holidays in July.

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)