

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 36

Wednesday 8th July 2020

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

Welcome

Welcome to this midweek edition of Cutting Edge Camelot in which we continue our series on Biblical characters who suffered imprisonment. Anna reflects on St Paul's experience of imprisonment as we learn of this from the letters he wrote while in prison and, in particular, the opening passage of Philippians which you will find below.

Scripture Passage

Philippians 1.1-14

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more

with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ; and most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear.

Reflection

Paul wrote this letter to the church community in Philippi and you can tell from the tone of the letter that it was written to people who Paul knew and loved, as he says, 'I thank my God every time I remember you'. Philippians has sometimes been referred to as *The Epistle of Joy*, and even from these opening verses, it is easy to see why; Paul seems to exude joy in all that he says. It is therefore somewhat of a surprise that this letter, so filled with joy, was actually written while Paul was in prison in Rome. I must confess that if I were to send an email or text from prison, I'm not sure it would be so joy-filled, it might more likely be referred to as *The Email of Gloom* or *The Text of Despair*. So what can we learn from Paul's response to his imprisonment?

First, attitude seems to be key. You may know the Dale Carnegie quote:

"Two men looked out from prison bars,
One saw the mud, the other saw stars."

St Paul was indeed in prison, but he did not despondently accept his fate and given up all hope; instead, though he may have been in prison, he decided to continue 'constantly praying with joy'. He remained thankful for

all the faithful Christians of Philippi and he remained thankful that his imprisonment had actually furthered the spread of the Gospel. During this time of lockdown, many have expressed their thankfulness for their neighbours, maybe neighbours who they didn't know that well before lockdown. And across the nation, we have seen many non-churchgoers engage with online forms of church, and that is certainly something to be thankful for. Paul ensured his 'attitude of gratitude' shaped his response, rather than allowing his circumstances to overwhelm him. How might we do the same?

The second thing we might learn from Paul is prayerful perseverance. Paul says, 'I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion'. Many of us will have had our plans changed or postponed or cancelled due to lockdown; we might feel that life has been put on 'Pause' while we wait for 'normal' life to resume – so all our plans can 'Play' again. Paul's words encourage us to trust that if God wills something to happen, if He is at work in our lives, then nothing can ever ultimately prevent it. God's 'good work' continues in our lives, in the life of our community, and in the life of our nation even when lockdown seems to put many of our plans on hold. We need to persevere in praying 'your kingdom come, your will be done'. Paul writes about longing to be with the church community in Philippi, and I imagine many of us can relate to that sense of longing to be with those we love and from whom we may have been separated for many months. What is Paul's response to this? He prays for those he longs to see, and this is something I imagine many of you have been doing over the last few months: praying for those you long to see. And maybe you have developed new patterns of prayer during lockdown which you might like to continue afterwards.

Paul begins his letter, 'To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi'. The word 'saint' comes from the Greek word '*hagios*' which means holy or set apart or different. And while we may not feel it, we too are saints, because we are made holy or set apart or made different by our relationship

with Jesus. In the words of William Barclay, 'What makes the Christian different is that he [or she] is always and everywhere conscious of the encircling presence of Jesus Christ'. Whether we are at home due to lockdown, or in the supermarket, or at work, or at church, Jesus is with us, and it is our relationship with him that makes us saints.

So, to all my fellow saints in Christ Jesus who are in the Camelot Parishes, I hope that we might follow Paul's example, and whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, we will find ourselves constantly praying with joy and gratitude, so thankful that we all 'share in God's grace'.

Anna

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 and public worship
- 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 of North Cadbury Church of England Primary School as the school is partially reopened, prayers also for Horsington school
- 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)