

# **CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 40**

**Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2020**

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

## **Welcome**

Welcome to this midweek edition of Cutting Edge Camelot. Ron concludes our series on Biblical characters who have been imprisoned by looking at Peter.

## **Scripture Passage**

*Acts 12: 1-19*

About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread.)

When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him.

The very night before Herod was going to bring him out, Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, “Get up quickly.” And the chains fell off his wrists.

The angel said to him, "Fasten your belt and put on your sandals." He did so. Then he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me."

Peter went out and followed him; he did not realize that what was happening with the angel's help was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. After they had passed the first and the second guard, they came before the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went outside and walked along a lane, when suddenly the angel left him.

Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hands of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

As soon as he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many had gathered and were praying. When he knocked at the outer gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. On recognizing Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the gate, she ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the gate.

They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she insisted that it was so. They said, "It is his angel."

Meanwhile Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the gate, they saw him and were amazed. He motioned to them with his hand to be silent, and described for them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he added, "Tell this to James and to the believers." Then he left and went to another place.

When morning came, there was no small commotion among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. When Herod had searched for him and could not find him, he examined the guards and ordered them to be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there.

## Reflection

We've been looking at people in the Bible who found themselves in prison. You might have noticed that what they all have in common is that none of them had done anything wrong. They'd upset various authorities, certainly, but none of them had done anything we'd call a crime.

Here I have to come clean. I've been in prison. Martyn, my son, wrote in an essay at school (he was six at the time) that his Daddy was in prison. I spent six weeks while I was at college, on a placement working with the chaplain at Pentonville. I never stayed the night, but even so it was unpleasant. Even the air on Caledonian Road smelt good after a day inside. And I learned not to ask the inmates why they were there ...

Me:           And what are you in for?

Convict:     Something I didn't do!

Me:           What was that?

Convict:     Wear gloves!

Actually, Peter in prison got off lightly. James, his friend, was executed by Herod, and those Jews who saw Christians as a threat to their way of life were delighted, and so Herod arrested Peter too, and had him locked up, pending a show trial, which would almost certainly have ended in his death. What was this about? Herod and his court only had power because the Romans let them. What if Jesus' followers raised a rebellion? The Romans would have come down heavily, and King Herod would have been plain mister. Herod wanted to keep in favour with the Romans, and the influential Jewish leadership, too. So Peter would be publicly put on trial, and the outcome was pretty certain to be fatal.

But that night, a very efficient angel appeared, clipboard in hand, and shook Peter awake. "Simon son of Jonas?" he asked. Peter nodded sleepily. His chains just fell off. "Get your shoes on," said the angel, "and do up your belt. And get your coat on." Past one sentry, then another, and the gate

onto the street swung open, and out they went. The angel handed Peter his clipboard and a pen. “Sign here, mate,” he said, and Peter was free.

(One grim little footnote: There was an inquiry, and Herod had the prison guards executed. It didn't do to cross Herod.)

Anyway, if you think I'm going to compare being in prison with staying in through lockdown, I'm not. Nothing like. We can only wonder what went through Peter's mind as he sat in prison, with the near certainty he wouldn't come out alive. If you go to York, visit the Castle Museum. In it is preserved the condemned cell from its time as a prison. The cell has three items of furniture - a chair for the guard, a bed, and a commode. And I remember thinking, “What's the bed for?” And yet Peter, banged up in the condemned cell was *asleep* when the angel arrived. Could it be that he never thought he would actually be put to death? Jesus had hinted to him that Peter would be crucified, when he was old, and Herod wouldn't have done that. Herod would have beheaded him. Perhaps Peter trusted Jesus to the extent of believing that this wasn't his time to die. Or did he have no fear of death, because he had the confidence that when, and however he died, he would be with Jesus again?

It isn't just a story. Part of the symbolism of our baptism is that we are set free from sin - just as the Israelites were free from Egypt when they passed through the waters of the Red Sea. Sin is seen as slavery, imprisonment, and God's forgiveness sets us free.

There are people who find forgiveness difficult to accept, and feel they don't deserve it. So they go on feeling guilty and miserable. But Jesus says, “Your sins are forgiven,” and he means you. The door of the cell is open, and you are free.

But don't take my word for it. Charles Wesley had a real way with words, and I well up every time I sing his cracking hymn, *And can it be*:

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray -  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
my chains fell off, my heart was free!  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.*

Ron

### **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 and research into and development of a vaccine as soon as this can be achieved
- 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.

### **Public worship in the Camelot churches following the easing of lockdown**

The Communion service at 9.30am at St Mary's Compton Pauncefoot on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> July was an enjoyable occasion.

A number of services are now being planned for August. These will include a benefice service, the 11.00am Group Communion on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> August

at St Michael's North Cadbury. Details of further services for August will be available shortly.

### **Reopening churches for private prayer**

Permission was given for the reopening of churches for private prayer. 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, a number of churches across the Group are now open for private prayer as follows:-

#### Sunday morning, 26<sup>th</sup> July

Compton Pauncefoot open from 9.30am to 10.30am.

South Cadbury open from 10.00am to 12 noon

North Cadbury open from 10.30am to 12 noon

#### Monday afternoon

Galhampton open from 4.00pm to 5.00pm

#### Wednesday afternoon

North Cadbury, open from 2.30pm to 4.00pm

#### Friday morning

Galhampton open from 10.00am to 11.00am

*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)