

# **CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 48**

**Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> August 2020**

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

## **Welcome**

Welcome to this midweek edition of Cutting Edge Camelot.

## **Scripture Passage**

*Acts 16: 11-15, 35-40*

We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days.

On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there.

A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

*(end of verse 15, the selected passage resumes at verse 35)*

When morning came, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go."

And the jailer reported the message to Paul, saying, “The magistrates sent word to let you go; therefore come out now and go in peace.”

But Paul replied, “They have beaten us in public, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they going to discharge us in secret? Certainly not! Let them come and take us out themselves.”

The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens; so they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city.

After leaving the prison they went to Lydia’s home; and when they had seen and encouraged the brothers and sisters there, they departed.

## **Reflection**

### *Lydia’s church*

As we started returning to church earlier this summer everything felt very fragile and provisional. It made me think of Paul’s missionary journeys where he and his companions would arrive in a new place and ask themselves ‘How do we start a church here?’

And sometimes the place they chose to start was surprising. In Philippi it was down by the riverside rather as we might in this fine weather and world of indoor restrictions think of holding church out of doors.

And yet although the place may have been somewhat unusual this was no mere stab in the dark on their part as they wondered where to begin. Rather a calculation lay behind it, they guessed that there would be a place of prayer beside the river. And where there is a place of prayer, they

thought, there will also be an interest in God and the possibility of being open to the message of Jesus Christ.

And this calculation proved to be correct. At the river they met a woman called Lydia. And Lydia proved to be immediately receptive to their message. We are told 'The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul'.

And then Lydia and the place of prayer by the river drop out of the story for the moment. You will notice that there is a gap of some twenty verses in the two passages from Acts ch.16 which have been chosen for this reflection. What happens in this gap?

It is a dramatic story of missionary adventure. First, Paul delivers a slave girl from a spirit of divination. But this does not please her owners who are making a lot of money from her fortune telling. So Paul and Silas are brought before the authorities who punish them while the crowds set upon them.

Paul and Silas are then put in prison but further drama occurs. In the night there is a violent earthquake which results in the chains of the prisoners being snapped and the doors of the prison being opened. Paul comforts the panic-stricken jailer who thinks that all the prisoners have escaped. And in response to Paul's compassion the jailer asks how he may be saved. The jailer then puts his trust in Christ and he and his household are baptised. In the morning Paul and Silas are allowed to go.

So that is the headline story. But behind the headlines there is often in scripture a 'backstory' which we can make out but which is not made explicit. This 'backstory' is important but we have to piece it together using such clues as we are able to find.

The question is what has been happening to this infant church in Philippi while Paul and Silas have been off on their missionary adventures? Who has been looking after it? How has it been held together?

For the church certainly has been held together in Paul and Silas' absence and indeed it seems to have developed. It is no longer a casual group of people meeting for prayer by a river but a band of brothers and sisters who meet in a home. Whose home? Lydia's home. It is to Lydia's home that Paul and Silas come to meet the church before leaving the city as they have been asked to do.

So it is clear from this that Lydia is one of the key people who has been holding the church together in the absence of Paul and Silas. She has offered hospitality to the church through opening up her home. And this has provided the stability and security for the church not simply to survive but to develop.

Might Lydia also have been a teacher in the church? We do not know although it is a reasonable suggestion to make. For her own conversion did not come out of the blue. Before she ever met Paul she was already a worshipper of God and a woman of prayer. Perhaps when Paul talked about Jesus it was as if a missing piece of the jigsaw was filled in for her and she was able to say 'Ah, now it all makes sense'.

And the accounts that we have of her character are positive ones. She is sincere in her response to the gospel, generous in the gift of her home and loyal to Paul and Silas even when they find themselves in trouble with the crowds and the authorities.

So with this background it would not be surprising if Lydia had reached Christian maturity quickly and so was able to help and guide others towards this same goal with the gift of teaching, whether formal or informal.

Whatever the case, it is clear at the end of this passage that Paul and Silas are leaving Philippi while the church in Lydia's home are staying. In other places Paul appoints a local leadership to carry on the work of growing the church when his own work in a particular area was done. We can reasonably assume both that this happened in Philippi and that Lydia was part of this local leadership.

I wonder what this says to us in these times when we are still feeling our way forward with the re-establishment of public worship and everything still feels rather provisional. Lydia was someone who recognised and was prepared to use the gifts which she had, principally the gift of a home and hospitality. And this gift was extremely significant in holding the church together and helping it to grow in the absence of its more established leaders. What gifts might we have which could be used by God to help our church move forward in these uncertain times?

*Tristram*

### **Points for Prayers**

- For our spiritual growth and discipleship as we respond to the good news of Jesus Christ
- For further services in the Group planned in August
- 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
- Our Bishops (please see notice below)
- 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.

### **Services of public worship in August**

Please see the following schedule of services of public worship planned for the rest of August. This does not include all of the monthly services across the Group held pre-lockdown. So if a service in the Group which you regularly attended is not included in the schedule you are of course most welcome to attend any other service within the Group. However, because of the limitations on capacity in the various churches through the need for social distancing it would be appreciated if you could in these circumstances let the relevant churchwarden know in advance of your intention to do this.

Please note that the 8.00 am Communion service at St Michael's Blackford on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> August is an addition to the previously published schedule of services and is their first service back since lockdown. Any further additions to this schedule will be notified as and when they arise.

#### Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> August

9.30 am, Communion, St Thomas a Becket, South Cadbury

9.30 am, Communion, St John the Baptist, North Cheriton

11.00 am, Communion, St Michael's North Cadbury

11.00 am, Sunday Worship, St Mary's Yarlington

#### Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> August

8.00 am, Communion, St Michael's Blackford

6.30 pm, Evening Service (Common Worship), Galhampton

## **Reopening churches for private prayer**

The commencement of a number of services across the Group means that the arrangements for private prayer will now change. The arrangements for August are as follows :-

### Sunday morning openings

#### Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> August

North Cheriton open from 9.30 am to 10.30 am

Compton Pauncefoot open from 9.30 am to 10.30 am.

### Midweek openings

#### Wednesday afternoons, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>

North Cadbury, open from 2.30 pm to 4.00 pm.

### Galhampton

Wednesday afternoons, 4.00 pm to 5.00 pm followed by Celtic Worship led by Alison at 7.00 pm.

## **Our Bishops**

Bishop Peter is stepping back from his duties for the moment in order to undergo treatment for leukaemia. Please pray for him and his family in this challenging time. Please pray also for Bishop Ruth and the rest of the Bishop's Staff as they take on the oversight of the diocese in his absence.

*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)