

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 54

Wednesday 23rd September 2020

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

Welcome

Welcome to this midweek edition of Cutting Edge Camelot. Ron continues our series on James by reflecting on what James (and Jesus) has to say about wealth.

We also include some information about our curate Anna’s forthcoming ordination as a priest.

Scripture Passage

James 1:26-27, 2:14-17, 5:1-3

If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?

If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?

So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire.

Reflection

In Luke's gospel, Jesus says things like *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*. And each of the blessings is countered by a woe: *Happy are you poor - the kingdom of God is yours. But how terrible for you who are rich now; you have had your easy life!*

We tend to skip over that, really. We try to say it isn't being rich that's the problem. It's how you get it and what you do with it. But then we would say that, wouldn't we? We're none of us poor like people we know about are poor. None of us sleeps out in the open, or begs for food, or goes to sleep hungry.

And now we hear James, Jesus' little brother, saying *You rich people, listen to me! Weep and wail over the miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches have rotted away, and your clothes have been eaten by moths. Your gold and your silver are covered with rust, and this rust will be a witness against you!*

Never mind that gold doesn't rust or tarnish, we're doing symbols here. If James wants rusty gold as a symbol, indulge him for a bit. The money that goes rusty isn't the money that's circulating, it's the buried hoard. Money is for using, for helping with, for spreading about. Just lying there getting rusty, it does none of these things. Maybe I can make this about using your wealth wisely, and for the benefit of other people. I can say there's nothing wrong with being rich as such, just with some of the ways people go about getting it, and being tight-fisted with it.

All I've then got to do is ignore what Jesus said, and James said. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter heaven. Because nobody in heaven has two halfpennies to rub together.

Certainly how you get your wealth comes into it. There is this tremendous social thrust to the gospel. How could Marx - Karl, not Groucho - have called religion the opium of the people? Did he never read the Bible? All he said is in here. All the people Marx despised - the landed rich who exploit the workers, the racketeer landlord, are the people James had no time for either. The Bible comes down heavily on those who get rich by doing others out of their rights. James says if you've fattened yourself on what you should have shared out, people are going to die. And letting people die is the same as if you murdered them.

St Jerome, who translated the Bible out of Hebrew and Greek into Latin, didn't like the letter of James. Because the whole thrust of the New Testament teaching is that we are not saved from our sin by anything that we do, because there is nothing we can do to heal the breach sin causes between us and God. We are saved simply by God's grace - his pleasure in forgiving us. God said to Isaiah *All your good works are just filthy rags in my sight*. St Paul said over and over, because people were slow to get the message, that we are not condemned by anything we do, but by our lack of trust in God's forgiveness. So we are not saved by our deeds or actions, but just by trusting God. And then along comes James, and points out that although that's true, any faith that doesn't show itself in action, is worthless. He writes, *What good is it for someone to say he has faith if his actions don't prove it? Can that faith save him? Suppose there are brothers and sisters who need clothes and don't have enough to eat. What good is there in your saying to them "God bless you! Keep warm and eat well!" if you don't give them the necessities of life? So it is with faith: if it is alone, and includes no actions, it is dead.*

They're both right. St Paul emphasises that our good deeds don't put us right with God. He's already put us right with himself. But our good deeds certainly reflect the fact that we are with Jesus, and share his concerns, and his concerns are for the poor, the cold, the hungry, the downtrodden. We need to be reminded that our salvation through God's grace has to make a difference in our lives.

So in theory we might say that wealth in itself won't stop us being part of God's kingdom. It's how we've come by it that might have been a sin. Last Wednesday there was an executive from British American Tobacco on the radio. He was reassuring the city editor that there's no need to worry about people here giving up smoking. Most of their business is with the Third World these days, and, he promised, that will be much more in future. Come Judgement Day, he might have some explaining to do.

The trouble is, we might agree that our wealth doesn't keep us from God. We can love God, because our own savings don't matter to us that much. But really, we who are rich tend to rely on our wealth. We don't really trust God. The poor can put all their trust in God because he's all they have. And that's how God wants it to be. As long as we have money, doing nothing, we won't really know God's blessing.

I leave the last word to the Two Ronnies. They were being tramps, and Ronnie Barker was wearing his balaclava with the holes for his ears. A funeral was going into the cemetery, a whole line of huge limousines.

"He must have been loaded", says Ronnie. "How much do you reckon he left?" The other Ronnie says, "All of it - you have to!"

Ron

Points for Prayers

- For our spiritual growth and discipleship as we respond to the good news of Jesus Christ and our attitudes towards wealth and possessions
- For further services in the Group and particularly for Harvest services
- For Anna's ordination as priest (please see below)
- 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
- Preparations to avert or minimise a second wave of coronavirus
- Wedding of Henry and Catriona today at St Michael's North Cadbury
- Our Bishops (please see notice below)
- For North Cadbury Church Primary School and Marchant Holliday school in our benefice remembering also Horsington school as they proceed with their new school year
- 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.

The rule of six

Some of us may be concerned that the new restriction on social gatherings to six people ('the rule of six') will impact on or even prevent services of public worship from taking place. Although the detailed Church of England guidance on this subject has yet to be updated it is our understanding that

the new rule does not affect services of public worship. Accordingly our plans for forthcoming services remain unaltered and if they do need to change we will of course let you know as soon as possible.

Forthcoming services of public worship

Please see the following schedule of forthcoming services of public worship. 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.

Any further additions to this schedule will be notified as and when they arise.

Sunday 27th September

9.30 am, St Thomas a Becket South Cadbury, Communion

9.30 am, St Mary's Compton Pauncefoot, Harvest Service

9.30 am, St Michael's Blackford, Harvest Service

9.30 am, St John the Baptist North Cheriton, Harvest Service

11.00 am, St Michael's North Cadbury, Communion

11.00 am, St Mary's Yarlinton, Sunday Worship

6.30 pm, Galhampton, Harvest Service

Sunday 4th October

9.00 am, St Mary's Yarlinton, Communion

10.30 am, St John the Baptist, North Cheriton, Morning Worship

11.00 am, St Michael's North Cadbury, Group Communion

(Anna will preside)

Reopening churches for private prayer

North Cadbury and Galhampton churches are normally open for private prayer on Wednesday afternoons. North Cadbury is open from 2.30 pm to 4.00 pm and Galhampton from 4.00 pm to 5.00 pm followed by Celtic Worship led by Alison at 7.00 pm. Please note that North Cadbury will not be open on Wednesday 23rd September as there is a wedding on that day.

Update on Bishop Peter

Bishop Peter thanks everyone for all the cards and other expressions of support which he has received. A card was sent to him on behalf of the Camelot Parishes as a whole. He says that he has been lifted on 'eagle's wings' through the love and prayers of others and he thinks that the treatment for leukaemia is going well. He is grateful that potential donors for a bone marrow transplant have been identified and he is preparing for such a transplant later this year. Please continue to 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.

Anna's ordination as priest

Please remember in your prayers our curate Anna's ordination as priest on Tuesday 29th September at St Cuthbert's, Wells. The ordination will be taken by Bishop Ruth. The service is, owing to the current restrictions, a very small one and by invitation only.

Anna will preside at Communion for the first time at 11.00 am on Sunday 4th October at St Michael's North Cadbury. We hope that those who usually attend this service will do so. We know that there will be others of you who will wish to support Anna in her new role. So, the rota will enable Anna to preside at Communions in as many of the Camelot churches as possible in the month following her priesting.

If you do not normally attend the First Sunday Communion at North Cadbury but would like to do so please do contact our churchwarden Caroline Joneleit-Hope (carolinejoneleithope@gmail.com) so that we can check on the socially distanced capacity of the church. Otherwise, please do come to one of the other Communion services around the benefice at which Anna will be presiding subsequently. The list of services in Cutting Edge Camelot will indicate which these services are.

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)