

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 70

Wednesday 18th November 2020

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

Welcome

Welcome to this midweek edition of Cutting Edge Camelot. I reflect below on what worship means in our current difficult circumstances.

Scripture Passages

Psalm 150

Praise the LORD!

Praise God in his sanctuary;

praise him in his mighty firmament!

² Praise him for his mighty deeds;

praise him according to his surpassing greatness!

³ Praise him with trumpet sound;

praise him with lute and harp!

⁴ Praise him with tambourine and dance;

praise him with strings and pipe!

⁵ Praise him with clanging cymbals;

praise him with loud clashing cymbals!

⁶ Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD!

Revelation ch.4

After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne! And the one seated there looks like jasper and carnelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald. Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads. Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God; and in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal.

Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing,

"Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty,
who was and is and is to come."

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing,

"You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honour and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created."

Reflection

What is worship?

When I originally chose these passages (which are in today's lectionary) I did not envisage that we would be middle in of another lockdown. And yet they seem well suited to speak to such circumstances.

Our contact with other people is at the moment restricted yet further. The book of Revelation was written by John at a time when he had been exiled because of his faith to Patmos, a small island off the coast of modern-day Turkey. So John also knew what it meant to be isolated.

And yet, as Ron reminded us in his sermon on Sunday, it is important to play whatever hand God gives us well. No doubt for John as for ourselves there was the temptation to turn in on himself and become self-absorbed. But rather than doing this, John used his time of isolation to reach out to God in prayer. And God rewarded him with a vision for the church which has been of immense strength and comfort to believers ever since, particularly when the church has gone through tough times.

And then there is Psalm 150, the last psalm in the Psalter. I tried doing a word count of this Psalm and counted a total of 71 words. About 70% of these words consist either of direct exhortations to praise God or directions as to where, why and who is to praise God. And the remaining 30%? Well, these words concern themselves with the role of music and dance in worship. A whole list of different musical instruments are named and one commentator has suggested that this list 'seems intended to include all the instruments that could be used in the performance of worship'.

So it is not difficult to conclude that the overall theme of this Psalm is the praise and worship of God. And within this theme a special place is given to

the role of music. Many of us would also agree that music is very important to our worship.

Psalm 150 envisages a setting where live music is played and also where people meet together in God's 'sanctuary'. And yet at the moment we can neither meet in our church buildings nor can we enjoy live music. And even in recent times when we have been able to listen to music in church we have not been able to join in with singing.

So perhaps we identify with John in his setting in exile on the island of Patmos. Can we still worship God even when we cannot meet in church or enjoy live music? Well, John's spiritual powers did not seem to be diminished through his exile. Indeed the clarity of his spiritual vision seems to have become even greater. This surprising outcome raises for us the question of 'What is worship?'

One helpful way of looking at this question comes through examining the word worship itself. For its older spelling is 'Worth-ship' or in other words, giving and proclaiming worth to a person who matters and is important to you.

What is it that matters and is important to us? You may notice in the passage from Revelation that the elders as they worship God cry out, 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power'. Their worship consists of giving worth to God. But more than that their language reflects the political language of the day. The Roman emperors had begun to demand that they should be greeted by their subjects with the words 'You are worthy' and addressed by them as 'our Lord and God.'

In other words, the emperors were demanding not simply that their subjects obey their laws but also that they give worth to/worship them. And this was impossible for Christians. Rather, as this passage from Revelation reminds us, the worship of Christians has to be solely directed to God and to Christ.

Today we are fortunate enough not to live in a state which demands our worship in this direct kind of way. But nevertheless there are many other goals in life which compete for our attention and allegiance. Such goals may even be good in themselves- work, career, families and hobbies. But we need to be careful that they never become the object of our worship, that is to say what we ultimately give worth to and which in turn makes our own lives worthwhile.

What is the chief end of man asks the Westminster Catechism? The answer given is simple and clear 'Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.' What or who is it that we are living for? Perhaps this is a question which emerges for us with particular strength during difficult times. So even if we cannot meet or sing together at the moment let us be inspired by the example of the elders in this passage from Revelation continually to proclaim the worth of God. Or as Psalm 150 puts it, 'Let everything that breathes praise the LORD.'

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- For our spiritual growth and discipleship especially in our life of 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
- Give thanks for progress on the development of a vaccine
- Minimising the second wave of coronavirus through the new lockdown

- Communications within the Camelot Group and its churches during the new lockdown (please see notices below)
- 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.

Guidance on new lockdown

The basic guidance is contained on the government website which states that places of worship must close during the new lockdown ‘apart from for the purposes of independent prayer, for funerals or funeral commemorative events, to broadcast an act of worship, to provide essential voluntary services or urgent public support services, for registered childcare, and to host permitted gatherings.’

Videos on Vimeo

Thanks to all those who have expressed appreciation for the video of last Sunday’s service. We plan a further video for the coming Sunday.

Would you like to facilitate a small Zoom group?

As I mentioned in my Vimeo presentation I believe that there is a role for Zoom (or a similar programme like Microsoft Teams or Google Meet) to play in enabling small groups of people to connect with one another online.

I would very much like to hear from anyone who would be willing to facilitate such a small group. The simplest way of getting in touch with me is by email, tristramraesmith@gmail.com.

I think that the ideal size of such a group would be say 5 to 6. It can meet as frequently or infrequently as the group decides, maybe once a week to start off with? The free version of Zoom has a time limit of 40 minutes but other than that meetings can be as long or as short as the group decides. Perhaps 20 to 30 minutes might be appropriate as a starting point?

The main role of a facilitator is to enable each person in the small group to contribute to a group discussion if they so wish. Previous experience of using Zoom (or a similar programme like Microsoft Teams or Google Meet) would be useful but not essential.

The main purpose of such a small group is to provide an opportunity for fellowship and to enable participants to catch up with one another.

Material for reflection and discussion can be provided through articles in Cutting Edge Camelot, the content of Vimeo videos or other sources.

Prayer can take place in whatever form (set or free) is most appropriate given the makeup of the participants.

It may be that you already run or belong to such a small group in which case I simply wish to encourage you in this venture.

If you would like to facilitate a new small group please let me know. You are free to focus the group in whatever way suits your own facilitating skills and experience. If you are happy for your name and email address to appear in Cutting Edge Camelot we can see whether there are other people who might wish to join your group.

Tristram

An inclusive Communion celebrated on behalf of the benefice

During the second lockdown as in the first Ron and Pam will be celebrating Communion regularly in their home each Sunday at 10.00 am. Please be aware of this because even though no-one can join them they are praying for us all and hope that you will feel included in this act of Communion.

Private prayer

During the lockdown St Michael's North Cadbury will be open for private prayer on Sunday mornings from 10.30 am to 12 noon and on Wednesday afternoons from 2.30 pm to 4.00 pm.

Galhampton church will also be open from 10.00 am to 11.00 am on Sunday mornings.

Everyone is welcome to come in, to pray quietly and to meditate on God's word (please bring your own Bible), or simply to soak in the peace and assurance sitting in the church can offer.

The Parish Office

The Parish Office is closed although Rob does come in regularly. In his absence please contact Rob via email (office@camelotparishes.org.uk) or on 01749 850934.

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.

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)