

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 71

Sunday 22nd November 2020

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

Welcome

Welcome to this Sunday’s edition of Cutting Edge Camelot.

Scripture Passage

Matthew 25: 31-46

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

“Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’

“And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’

“Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’

“Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’

“Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’

“And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Sermon

Today is the last Sunday in the Church’s year. And what a year it has been! For months on end our churches were locked and barred. We were unable to celebrate Easter together. For long periods we were unable to receive Communion, although Ron and Pam faithfully celebrated it week by week on our behalf. It has not all been bad news. The pandemic has led to all sorts of new initiatives, some of which will have a long future ahead of them. I hope that when the pandemic is over the Church of England will, at every level, take stock of what we have learned from it. But it is not over yet.

Many of us will remember how today used to be known as ‘Stir up Sunday’, so-called because the collect for the day started ‘Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people ...’ For some years now, we have joined

with the Roman Catholics in celebrating it, with a different collect, as the Feast of Christ the King.

In our creeds, we say that we believe that Christ will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and that his kingdom will have no end. When, in Chapter 24 of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus speaks of this second coming, he does so in terms that echo Daniel's vision of 'one like the Son of Man' who will one day come on the clouds of Heaven to rule for ever, and whose kingship will never end (Daniel 7. 13-14). The Son of Man is also how Jesus repeatedly refers to himself in the Gospels. He would have been speaking in Aramaic, where the expression was commonly used as an alternative to saying 'I' or 'me'. It meant no more than 'a human being'. But Daniel's vision gives it a special significance in the context of the Second Coming.

Jesus doesn't say when the Second Coming will happen. That, he says, is something known only to God his Father. Most people assumed that it would happen very soon, almost 'any day now'. But it still hadn't when Matthew wrote his Gospel, perhaps 50 years later. So Matthew collects together a number of things Jesus said, probably on a variety of occasions, that show how we should get on with life while we wait. We are to 'watch', to be alert to note the signs of the times and what is going on around us. We are to attend conscientiously to whatever duties have been entrusted to us; be prepared for a long wait; get on with life, putting to good use whatever we have been given, living life to the full.

Then we come to today's Gospel reading. Jesus speaks of the Son of Man coming in his glory to judge all the nations of the world. Once again we are reminded of Daniel's vision of 'one like the Son of Man'. Jesus will come as judge, to judge all mankind, and he tells us of the very simple and practical test he will apply in judging us. It will be how we have responded to those in need. For whatever we will have done, or failed to do, for them, we will have done or failed to do for Jesus himself.

The examples he gives of people in need come from the Old Testament (for example Isaiah 58, 6-8), but it is not hard to see how they continue to be relevant in the vastly changed circumstances of life in this country today, and the much less changed circumstances of life in many parts of the Third World. Perhaps we can hear voices saying ‘We were hungry, and you supported the food bank that fed our family. I was housebound, and you did my shopping for me. I was in hospital and you visited me and did all my laundry. We were strangers when we came to live in your village, and you welcomed us’. And then the scourge of life in 21st Century Britain: ‘I was lonely ... I feel so lonely...’

We may notice two things about what Jesus said.

One is that it never occurred either to those who helped people in need, or those who didn’t, that they would thereby be helping Jesus. Those who helped seem to have done so because they found it the natural thing to do, or perhaps because their conscience prompted them. And those who didn’t help? Perhaps they never noticed that there was someone in need. Perhaps they did, but were too busy, or couldn’t be bothered, or thought it was someone else’s job to help. Perhaps they might have helped, might even have made a big donation, had there been ‘something in it for them’, but there wasn’t.

The other is that these were, and are, all actions, not attitudes or particular theological beliefs. And they are simple actions. No great suffering or heroism or expenditure is required. No special training, or professional qualification, or university degree is needed. They are what Wordsworth called

“That best portion of a good man’s life
His little, nameless, unremembered acts
Of kindness and of love.”

All that we need is to be alert to what is going on around us, and to have a heart in the right place.

Austin Farrer was one of the great preachers of the 20th Century. In one of his sermons he says (I partly quote, partly paraphrase) that when we say that God is love “we establish the substance of him, we say that he is the pure act of inexhaustible self-giving”. If we say he is the God of mercy, we show the face of his love turned upon misery and need. If we call him the God of grace, we show the generosity of his love, a love that cannot be earned or merited, but is freely given.

We believe that God has made us human beings in his image. There is a likeness between God and us - a moral rather than a physical likeness. God has also given us free will. We are free to honour and increase that likeness, or to reject it and let it fade. The test that Christ, as judge, will apply is a test to determine which we have done. Our actions in helping those in need will have honoured that likeness if they have been characterised by love: a God-like love that is self-giving, that acts with kindness where it sees misery and need, and does so freely, whether or not that kindness is deserved, and without there having to be anything in it for us. Such love is what eternal life and the Kingdom of Heaven are about. And so that is the test by which we will be judged, and are judged.

George

Hymn Suggestion

There are many hymns which celebrate the kingship of Christ. One of these is ‘At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow’.

Points for Prayers

- For our spiritual growth and discipleship
- 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

A service for this Sunday including George's sermon has been uploaded on Vimeo. The link is given in the covering email. Please note that the sermon included in this edition of Cutting Edge Camelot is not an exact transcription of the one preached on the video but its essential message is the same.

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)