

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 73

Advent Sunday 29th November 2020

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

Welcome

Welcome to this Sunday’s edition of Cutting Edge Camelot. It arrives slightly later than usual as we have been livestreaming an Advent Sunday service from St Michael’s North Cadbury.

The livestreaming has been recorded and the recording will be available on Twitch using the link:-

<https://www.twitch.tv/loudaudiolive>

People do not have to have a Twitch account in order to view the recording and they can view via the Twitch app on a phone/tablet, or simply via their internet browser on a computer, phone/tablet or modern smart TV.

The scripture passages used in the service and a text of the talk (not an exact transcript) are given below.

Our thanks are due to all those who made this livestreaming possible and, in particular, to Dan Gruner and his colleagues of Loud Audio for his professional services and expertise offered to the church on a voluntary basis, to our organist Malcolm Gregory and our soloist Clare Leavold, to Caroline Joneleit-Hope the churchwarden of St Michael’s North Cadbury, to my clergy colleagues Ron and Alison and to those who read the lessons, Mike Martin, Gill Pay and Nicky Wilson.

Tristram

Scripture Passages

Isaiah 40: 1-5

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.

² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

³ A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

⁵ Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Ephesians 5: 8-14

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light - ⁹ for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰ Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; ¹³ but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴ for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

"Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Mark 13: 24-37

²⁴ "But in those days, after that suffering,

the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,

²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven,

and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶ Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. ²⁷ Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

²⁸ “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³² “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.

³⁵ Therefore, keep awake-- for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶ or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Talk given at livestreamed service

In a recent sermon Ron asked how have we spent lockdown. Have we perhaps discovered any new gifts or hobbies? Does learning how to upload videos count?

For many of us, however, this most recent lockdown has provided us with some additional time. Time is a gift which we need to use well. And yet we can also find extra space in our diaries challenging.

What happens when we have fewer appointments? There is a space in our lives. Sometimes memories of hurt and failure can emerge to fill this space. These may be memories which we have pushed to one side when life has been busier. But now they call for our attention. Did I really treat that difficult family member well? Perhaps I could have had more sympathy for his or her circumstances. Perhaps I could have listened harder.

And faced with such memories there is a choice to make. It is possible to push these memories away again. Perhaps we do this by creating a distraction such as a job that we don't really need to do but which takes our minds off a painful subject.

And yet there is another way, one which requires courage.

We are reminded in our gospel reading of the need to be alert and awake for God's coming. Jesus speaks of a master who has gone away on a journey. We do not know when our master will return. It may be at the beginning of the day or right at the end or perhaps somewhere in the middle. But whatever time God comes we need to be ready.

So for the church Advent is a time of preparation for the coming of God into this world. We will of course celebrate the birth of Christ at Christmas but in the meantime we need to get ready spiritually.

Advent is not a season which is always easily understood in the wider world. Yes, there are Advent calendars for children to teach them the importance of waiting. And yet how many times this year have you heard people say 'Whatever happens we mustn't cancel Advent'? Not many I would guess. And by the way whatever happens it is not possible to cancel Christmas. Christ has been born into our world and that is that.

But the prophecy from Isaiah which has been read and sung to us reminds us that part of becoming spiritually prepared is to make the rough places a plain or smooth.

What are these rough places in our lives? Perhaps those difficult memories. On the other hand, rough places may not represent purely our own personal hurt, failure or sin. They may stand for the failures and sins of the various communities and institutions to which we belong, including the church. In the Lord's Prayer we pray 'Forgive **us our** sins'.

So, how are the rough places in our lives to be made smooth? The first and most important step is admitting that the rough places are there in the first place. We call this confession. And then we need to turn away from destructive patterns of behaviour in our lives and steer a new and better way forward in the future. We call this repentance.

Confession and repentance are part of the process. And yet we need more. We need the help both of God and of other people. We need forgiveness, healing and transformation. Ultimately this all comes from God but very often the channel God uses is a human one, the people around us.

Our passage from Ephesians describes such transformation in terms of the difference between darkness and light. We were once darkness but are now light in the Lord. Christ's gift to us is to be light. And yet this gift needs to be made real and apparent in our lives. We do so by living as children of light and radiating the goodness and truth of Christ to others. And for this to happen the dark and shadowy places in our lives need to come into the light of Christ. This brings healing and transformation. As Ephesians puts it 'everything that becomes visible is light'.

And yet being honest with ourselves and with others is difficult. We need to find a safe space in which such honesty can be received positively. Isaiah invites us into this kind of safe space with his message of comfort and tenderness following God's judgement. He begins in this way, 'Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem'.

Surely if we knew that we would always be met with such unfailing compassion it would encourage us to be open and vulnerable with others.

But sadly, it is not easy to find this kind of safe space in the world in which we live, even within the church. If the world around us is full of criticism and judgement, it will not encourage the honesty that we need and which will lead to healing.

I was saddened recently by the response in the papers to the news that the Archbishop of Canterbury is to have a sabbatical next year. It is in fact perfectly normal for clergy to take a sabbatical and indeed they are encouraged to do so. I know from the sabbatical that I took a few years ago the lasting benefits of such a time away. And yet some are portraying the Archbishop's decision as a desertion and dereliction of duty. Is that fair? Yes, we may disagree with the wisdom and timing of this decision but is it not possible to express such disagreement in a kinder and gentler way?

For without such kindness and gentleness we will not feel safe in opening up to other people. We will remain guarded and cautious. And the problem is that where there is no safe space in which honesty can flourish there will in its place be a culture of cover up and conspiracy. The question becomes not what is the right thing to do, but what can I get away with. And this creates an oppressive and false atmosphere where people know that something is not quite right but they don't know quite what that something might be.

When apartheid in South Africa ended a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established. Its purpose was to create a 'safe space' in which the truth could be spoken about a terrible past so that reconciliation might take place. It may not have been entirely successful in this ambitious objective but is it not preferable to work towards this kind of vision rather than hold a series of ruthless trials in which no quarter is given or received or even worse to look for revenge in the form of blood?

And so Advent reminds us of rough places in our lives and in those of our communities and institutions. And we may also think of the safe spaces which need to be created so that truth can be told and what was hidden may be seen and become light.

What are we to do? As so often, our journey needs to start with prayer. For as Isaiah reminds us God always offers us a safe space, a place of comfort

and tenderness. As we come to God in prayer so we will be shown the steps we need to take so that the rough places may be made smooth and what is hidden in darkness may come into the light.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- For what is hidden in darkness in our own lives and those of our communities and institutions to be brought into the light so that God's transformation and healing may come
- For humility, wisdom and justice on the part of our own leaders and those of all nations as they make difficult decisions in relation to the ongoing coronavirus emergency
- 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
- The new tier system which will apply when we come out of lockdown
- 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.’

Rules following lockdown

The Camelot Group falls within the area of South Somerset. This area (along with many others) has been placed in Tier 2 which is one of High Alert. Full guidance on what this means can be found on the government website:-

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-restriction-tiers-what-you-need-to-know>

As far as places of worship are concerned they are open although there are strict restrictions on socialising there. Weddings and funerals are also permitted with numbers restricted at weddings to 15 and at funerals to 30.

We are awaiting more detailed guidance on these matters from both the government and the church including what the arrangements at Christmas will be. However, based on the information so far available we are anticipating a return to public worship on Sunday 6th December and so the schedule for this Sunday and the following one are set out below.

Forthcoming services of public worship

Please see the following schedule of forthcoming services of public worship:-

Sunday 6th December

9.00 am, St Mary’s Yarlinton, Communion

9.30 am, St John the Baptist North Cheriton, Camelot Morning Worship

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

Sunday 13th December

9.30 am, Galhampton Church, Communion

9.30 am, St John the Baptist North Cheriton, Communion

9.30 am, St Michael's Blackford, Matins with Christmas Carols

11.00 am, St Michael's North Cadbury, Communion

11.00 am, St Nicholas Holton, Patronal Service and Sunday Worship

4.00 pm, St Thomas a Becket South Cadbury, Carol Service

Please note in respect to carol services that we do not anticipate any relaxation of previous rules permitting congregational singing.

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

It is planned that St Nicholas Bratton Seymour will be open for Private Prayer from 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm on Sunday 6th December to mark the occasion of their Patronal Day and in preparation for Christmas.

St Michael's North Cadbury will be open for private prayer on Wednesday afternoons from 2.30 pm to 4.00 pm. Because of the livestreaming, St Michael's North Cadbury will not be open for private prayer today.

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)