

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 75

Sunday 13th December 2020

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

Welcome

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

Scripture Passage

Mark 1: 1-13

¹ The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

² As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; ³ the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’”

⁴ John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁶ Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹

And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Reflection

“*The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*” That might seem a rather artless way of beginning St Mark’s Gospel. But St Mark has put a lot of thought into it.

He is writing for two readerships. One is those, both Gentiles and Jews, who want to find out about this strange Jewish sect that is spreading like wildfire all round the eastern Mediterranean and has even reached Rome. The other is the membership of that sect, i.e. Christians who want to know more about Jesus. Mark is not one of the Twelve; but if we are right in thinking that he is the John Mark mentioned in Acts, he has at times been close to both Peter and Paul. He can write with authority.

His first 13 verses are an Introduction, in which he sets the scene before he starts his account of some of the things that Jesus said and did. Matthew and Luke introduce Jesus through their accounts of the Nativity. John introduces him through his Prologue (John 1, 1-18), setting him in the context of eternity. Mark says nothing about Jesus beyond that fact that he is the Messiah (the anointed one) and the Son of God. He alone of the four calls his work a Gospel. It is a Greek word that literally means “good news”. It tells the reader that what follows is both good news and important news - so important that it will change mankind’s understanding of life.

He wants to emphasise that the events he is recording are the latest in a history of salvation that can be traced back through the Jewish scriptures.

Perhaps he hopes the word “beginning” will remind Jewish readers of the first verse of Genesis (St John does this more obviously when he starts his Gospel with “In the beginning was the Word ...”). He also brings in two of the great Old Testament prophets, Isaiah and Elijah. Isaiah prophesies that a messenger will come announcing the arrival of the Messiah (Isaiah 40. 3). It was believed that Elijah had never died in the ordinary way, but had been swept up into heaven (2 Kings 2, 11-12) and would one day return as that messenger (Malachi 3. 1). Mark, who sees John the Baptist as Elijah, describes him dressed in the way Elijah was dressed (2 Kings 1, 7-8).

He sketches in very briefly how the crowds go out to receive John the Baptist’s baptism of repentance, the baptism of Jesus in solidarity with them, and the temptations in the wilderness. Some people still thought that John himself was the Messiah. Mark emphasises that John was only the messenger. The Gospel is not about him. It is about Jesus. Having set the scene, he starts the good news at verse 14 with Jesus proclaiming that the Kingdom of God - God's reign - is at hand.

Two words may particularly strike us in this Introduction. One is “Gospel”. That word was already in use among Christians as jargon for the story of Jesus. For anyone who was not a Christian, it was jargon for a bulletin issued by the Emperor: good news of some event (the birth of an heir, the winning of a battle) that everyone in the Empire could be glad about and after which life would be a bit different.

It might seem that in using that word Mark was living dangerously. What if his Gospel came to the attention of someone in government who was not a Christian? The current Emperor was Nero, who considered himself to be divine. Here was Mark, using the word Gospel and describing Jesus as the Son of God. Was this “anointed” Jesus (whoever he might be) a rebel who had challenged the Emperor’s rule and started a movement that was evidently flourishing?

We know, and anyone who reads the Gospel through would discover, that Jesus was no rebel. He had not come to challenge Roman rule. He had come to transform human lives and so, eventually, to transform human institutions, including the Roman Empire. There was no immediate challenge to Nero.

But the word Gospel, with its two meanings, does raise a question of loyalty. We have many loyalties: to our country, our family, our employer, and so on. Our loyalty to God overarches and qualifies them all. Archbishop Oscar Romero in San Salvador (gunned down at the altar while celebrating Mass), Archbishop Janani Luwum of Uganda (murdered on the orders of Idi Amin), and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (executed by the Nazis) are but three 20th Century examples of Christians whose overarching loyalty to God led to their death. That may not happen to us, but our loyalty to God may lead us to join in protests, will affect how we vote, and will influence all our decisions.

The other word is “repentance”. It translates a Greek word meaning a change of mind. As used in the Gospels, it means a bit more than that. Mark wrote in Greek, but John the Baptist would have spoken in Aramaic, where the corresponding word carried the meaning of turning back, i.e. to God.

When we repent, our change of mind leads to our turning back to God. We acknowledge, and are sorry for, the things we have done (or have failed to do) in breach of our loyalty to God. Then, like the Prodigal Son, we find that we are already forgiven, and that our repentance has released that forgiveness upon us. But God is not mocked. Our repentance has to be the real thing. We have to acknowledge our sin for what it is, be truly sorry, and be determined not to sin again.

Nobody likes having to admit that they are at fault, to say sorry and to ask to be forgiven. So perhaps it is not surprising that repentance should be

seen as an unhappy word. Proverbs such as “Marry in haste, repent at leisure” may be wise but hardly make the sun shine.

Part of that unhappiness is the result of how the Gospels were translated from Greek into Latin. The Greek word for repentance (a change of mind, leading to a turning back to God) was translated into a Latin word for penance (a punishment). “Repent” became “Do penance.” That translation was carried into the Vulgate, which was the Bible in general use throughout Western Christendom for nearly a thousand years. The use of penance has greatly changed, but the translation has coloured our understanding of repentance and our attitude towards it.

The true source of unhappiness is not repentance, but the failures in our love of God and our neighbour for which repentance is needed. Repentance is our friend. Our neighbour may or may not forgive us. We may find it hard to forgive ourselves. God, who knows us better than we know ourselves, loves us with an unconditional love, and knows the truth of what happened, has already forgiven us. Repentance releases that forgiveness, and it is God’s forgiveness that ultimately matters. Being allowed to repent, and start again, is a gift, a blessing, a source of reassurance and joy.

George

Hymn Suggestion

One hymn which celebrates the joy of God’s coming in Christ is ‘Hail to the Lord’s anointed.’

Points for Prayers

- For our spiritual growth and discipleship, repentance and receiving forgiveness

- 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 approval of first vaccine for use in combating coronavirus
- The arrangements for Christmas bubbles and minimising any resulting increase in coronavirus infections
- A fresh and imaginative approach to services and communications in the Camelot Group over the Christmas period
- Wedding of Harry and Georgia, St Michael's North Cadbury, Saturday 12th December
- 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.

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.

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 Carols

11.00 am, St Michael's North Cadbury, Communion

11.00 am, St Thomas a Becket South Cadbury, Communion with Carols

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

Arrangements for Christmas

Various pieces of guidance have now been produced by both the government and the church. A draft programme for the Christmas period has now been drawn up and details of this are being considered by the churchwardens and Ministry Team. Following this we will be able to publish the programme for the Christmas period.

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)