

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 77

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

Matthew 3: 1-12

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”

Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

"I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Reflection

The trouble with being the Queen is that, for all your privilege, prestige, authority and wealth, you're no more free than a criminal with a tag. It has been mentioned that if you're the Queen, everything smells of fresh paint.

Even in the present circumstances, we can go for walks, go shopping, stick our heads in the pub, but Her Majesty can't go anywhere without equerries, detectives and ladies in waiting. If the Queen was coming here, and we had notice, we wouldn't say, like we might of anyone else, *she must take us as she finds us*. We'd lay on the best we could.

Here's a royal visit being announced, and the people are told to make urgent preparations, not just to put on a show. Renewal from the inside is what's called for. The gap between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New is about four hundred years, and there was a deafening silence from heaven. People were saying God had lost interest in his people, and he'd said his last word on every subject. But then the voice of prophesy was heard again - and remember, prophesy isn't necessarily telling the future, but just telling what God says - and it's from a man in the desert. John. He dresses like a beggar, and eats the absolute minimum to keep alive. By the Jordan, where the people once crossed over into the Promised Land, and new life, John reveals the climax of God's plan. The Jordan was hugely symbolic. We know the Israelites passed on dry land through the waters when they left Egypt, but they also passed dry-shod through the river Jordan when they reached the end of their forty years' wandering, to finally get to the country God had given them. So that was what made you a

citizen of the new country, that passage through the river. So John challenged people, not to count on their history, their heritage, their ancestry, but to make the individual commitment to God and his kingdom, and passing through the Jordan was a symbol of that.

Maybe for the same reason, John doesn't proclaim Jesus' coming in Jerusalem, but out in the countryside. (In his time, anywhere that wasn't built on or actively farmed was called wilderness.) People who want to hear God's word have to go to the trouble of going out into the dry wilderness to hear it. And many of them do.

But going out into the desert is just the start of a much longer journey. As John speaks of God's rule to come, their curiosity has to become commitment. They need to recognise that being Jewish on the backs of their ancestors isn't enough. They have to go back into the river on their own account. But even that isn't the end of it. Being washed clean of the past is to be accompanied by repentance, a determination to put aside the attitudes and ways of behaving that aren't appropriate to the kingdom of heaven. In the ministry and teaching and person of Jesus, the kingdom of heaven is drawing near.

The cost of changing can be demanding. If you want to lose weight, you've got to eat less, or exercise more. For the Pharisees and Sadducees, it means admitting that they aren't the righteous people they thought they were, and really humbling themselves before God. These are people who thought they had a pass into heaven just for being Jewish. No dice, says John. Only a genuinely holy and renewed life is evidence of a heart fit for heaven.

Hearing God's word carries a challenge, and John's appeal to the crowd is urgent. This is a special offer, limited time only. And John tells them that their choices will have consequences- failure to show the results of godly living is opting out of the kingdom. The time of repentance is a time of

reckoning. Those who turn away from Jesus the Saviour will face him one day as Jesus the Judge.

If we were to welcome our Queen here, we'd spare no effort to get things right. When we sense that God is speaking something new into our lives, isn't it worth making the time to listen, even if it means putting other things aside?

As we welcome Jesus into our lives, we receive his forgiveness, but also the responsibility of demonstrating the difference that forgiveness makes in us. The Christian life involves the Holy Spirit's refining fire, as well as the cleansing water of baptism. We might be tempted to rest on the laurels of our Christian background, or our church membership. But the kingdom of God doesn't carry passengers.

Don't put off putting right the things you know God is urging you to put right. Time is precious, and it's limited. Make the most of every opportunity to prepare for Jesus when he comes. If you knew he was coming this afternoon, what would you have to do to be ready to meet him?

Ron

Hymn Suggestion

A traditional Advent hymn focussing on John the Baptist's role in preparing for the coming of Christ is 'In Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry'.

Points for Prayers

- For our spiritual growth and discipleship, putting right what God is urging us to put right
- 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
- Wedding of Matthew and Joanna at Blackford on Saturday 19th December, give thanks for wedding of Harry and Georgia married at North Cadbury yesterday
- 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.

Services this Sunday

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 Period (20th to 27th December)

Details of this will be published over the course of next week.

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)