

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 94

Wednesday 3rd March 2021

'Virtually Church but with some way to go...'

Welcome

Welcome to this midweek edition of Cutting Edge Camelot.

Scripture Passages

Matthew 18: 21-35

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?"

²² Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

²³ "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵ and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made.

²⁶ "So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.

²⁸ "But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.'

²⁹ “Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’

³⁰ “But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place.

³² “Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt.

³⁵ “So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Luke 18: 9-14

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: ¹⁰ “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’

¹³ “But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’

¹⁴ “I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Reflection

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy

At first glance, this seems fairly straightforward. *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.* I could stop there, and you could go and make coffee. Or as it's Lent, hot water. But you know I won't. Is being merciful the same as forgiving? I'll grant they are closely linked, but there is a distinction. When we say our Lord's Prayer, we say, "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." Does that mean we only expect God to forgive us to the same extent we forgive other people? Or are we saying, "Look Lord – I'm a forgiving person – so will you forgive me?"

My mind goes back eleven years, to when I was interviewed for my present post in Blackford Reading Room. I was asked "What is the Gospel you want to share?" and quick as a flash I said "Your sins are forgiven". Our sins are forgiven because Jesus took the rap for the whole lot. Yours, mine, everybody's – no exceptions. So our being forgiven isn't dependent on anything we do or don't do. But whether we accept it or share it or not is a different matter. (See the story of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18: 21-35.)

Forgiving other people isn't easy. Personally, I find it hard to think of anyone who has sinned against me. Aren't I lucky? I've just read the autobiography of Chris Hillman – bass player with the Byrds, and a committed Christian. He admits he found it impossible to forgive his father for committing suicide – he saw it as abandoning his wife and young family, who then went through hard times. And whereas we can forgive people, and tell them so, and show our forgiveness, forgiving someone who is dead must be difficult. One of our friends who died a couple of years ago always used to say in the Lord's Prayer, "...as we *try* to forgive those who trespass against us" and I could sympathise with her.

So, a bit confused, I asked a Friendly Theologian. Is *merciful* the same as *forgiving*? No, she insisted. She said: Think of a judge, who could sentence a criminal to death, but sends him to prison instead. He's showing mercy. He hasn't forgiven the criminal – that's not his job. Some might think justice isn't served by mercy, but the judge has the last word. It might be a bit like all those scenes in TV soaps where there is a fight, someone is about to get a (possibly well deserved) thrashing, until a girl pulls the attacker off, shouting "Leave 'im, Grant, 'ee ain't worf it!" So Grant, reluctantly, shows mercy, but you can tell he hasn't forgiven.

Being merciful is holding back from dealing justice, or not taking vengeance – not getting our own back. Forgiving isn't always easy – in fact quite a lot of the time we find it impossible. But sometimes, maybe against our better judgement, we decide to let it go. I think I'm coming round to saying, *if you can't forgive, show mercy.*

When Jesus gave his great Sermon on the Mount (and there is evidence he gave it more than once) the idea of simple forgiveness had no great traction in Jewish thought. There was the process of sacrifice, by which a priest could absolve you from your sin, rather like the Roman Catholic rite of confession, followed by absolution and a penance. And there was the idea of Restitution – giving back what you stole, making good any damage, compensating the victim of your misdeeds. But actual, plain-and-simple forgiveness? Until Jesus' sacrificial death, and the forgiveness of all sin, the best one could hope for was mercy – just punishment withheld. So the publican in Jesus' story (Luke 18: 9-14) who crept into the Temple and prayed, "God be merciful to me, a sinner" was justified – Jesus' word – because of his sorrow, repentance, and humility. God showed him mercy. The Pharisee in the same parable didn't receive mercy, because he didn't ask for it.

But like forgiveness, mercy has to be shared around. If we receive mercy, we must be merciful. So if I ever meet the chap who keeps ringing me up

pretending he's from Amazon, I may not forgive him, but I definitely won't kick him.

Ron

Vimeo

A recording of last Sunday's service is available to watch on Vimeo at:-

<https://vimeo.com/517568745>

Big Church Read

The Big Church Read is a great opportunity to bring Christians together across the country to read books together. It contains online videos, reading plans and discussion questions to enhance the reading experience. The current book chosen for reading and discussion is Singing in Babylon: Finding purpose in life's second choices by Jeff Lucas. For more information please see:- <https://thebigchurchread.co.uk/>

Giving in Lent

The Kisumu Children Trust is a charity for children in Kenya. The Camelot Group has supported this charity in previous Lents and we would like to do so once again in this Lent.

Our parishioners in Galhampton, Mike and Katherine Dare, have been trustees and actively involved with Kisumu for a number of years. They write as follows:-

'2020 has been a challenging year for Kisumu Children, as with all charities, and of course for our churches across Camelot, though thankfully Kenya has thus far been saved from the extreme ravages caused by Covid-19. In

addition, an initiative sponsored by UNICEF and the Kenyan Government is requiring us to redirect the Christian love, care and witness we provide in our children's home towards continuing to support the children in this way but in their own rural homes or with extended families rather than in our home. This will be a real challenge for our ministry over the coming years and may well see us working more closely with local churches in Kisumu and the local school. We hope too to be able to facilitate a link between the local school there and the North Cadbury school here, which we know Lisa would like to achieve, once Covid pressures have reduced.'

If you wish to give an online donation the BACS details are: The Kisumu Children Trust; Sort Code 40-52-40; Account no. 00011583. The charity banks with CAF Bank. Could you please include the reference "Camelot" on donations made by BACS. Gift Aid authorisations can also be provided for completion if requested.

Please make cheques payable to Kisumu Children and send them to:-
Kisumu Children Trust, The Old Post Office, 1, Thorpe Avenue, Tonbridge,
TN10 4PW.

Points for Prayers

- To grow in our practice of mercy
- The restrictions of the third lockdown and sustaining our common life in this time
- Clear planning for future church life in the light of the government's timetable for the easing of restrictions
- Give thanks for progress in the roll out of the different vaccines in combating coronavirus and for the falling rates of infection
- 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
- For North Cadbury Church Primary School and other local schools as they prepare for reopening
- For the work of Kisumu Children Trust
- Prayers for those who are lonely or housebound and for those who may be doing all right but who are really missing everyday social interaction in shops, the street or over the garden fence
- 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.

Suspension of services

Services across the Camelot Group have now been suspended as sadly we concluded that it was not possible to hold them safely in the current circumstances. The suspension of services will be kept under review as circumstances change.

Excalibur

The March edition of Excalibur is now online at camelotparishes.co.uk

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.

An inclusive Communion celebrated on behalf of the benefice

During the third lockdown as in the others 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.

Update on Bishop Peter

We have no further news to report on Bishop Peter since we heard that the stem cell transplant had been completed. We will keep you further updated as and when we have any more news. In the meantime please do continue to keep him and his family in your prayers. This is much appreciated.

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)