

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 98

Sunday 21st March 2021

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

Welcome

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

Scripture Passages

Jeremiah 31: 31-34

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³² It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt-- a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD.

³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

John 12: 20-33

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²² Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

²³ Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

²⁷ “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name.”

Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹ The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.”

³⁰ Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out.

³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

³³ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Reflection

As we move on from Mothering Sunday, the shadow of the Cross, of Jesus’ approaching death, becomes longer. In our gospel passage Jesus begins to prepare Himself and His disciples for His death.

And as we reflect on this in a context where we are confronted with so many more deaths than usual, we are reminded of the preciousness of life.

Perhaps we think that, unlike so many others, Jesus had a choice in whether to live or die. Did He really have to die? Could He not have adopted a softer, less confrontational approach to His opponents so that He could have gone on to live into a good old age and continuing to exercise an

immensely fruitful ministry? Do we ever ask ourselves whether Jesus was throwing His life away by choosing a path that would inevitably lead to His early death? Perhaps not because we know the story of the Cross and Resurrection so well that we simply don't question it any longer.

But this was a question for Jesus' earliest disciples. When Jesus predicted His suffering and death Peter took him aside and tried to tell Him that these things would never happen, that this was not the destiny that God had for His Son, the Messiah Jesus.

So why did Jesus die? If He was not simply throwing His life away, why did He have to continue on a course that was bound to end in His death? What might strike us first in this gospel reading is the sense of purpose with which Jesus approaches His death.

He speaks about His hour having come, *'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified'*. In John's gospel, this particular phrase 'the hour' is very important. When Jesus is about to turn water into wine at the beginning of His ministry He says to His mother, my hour has not yet come. Later on when people try to arrest Him they cannot because Jesus' hour had not come. And now for the first time Jesus says that the hour has come.

What does this mean? Perhaps most obviously 'the hour' speaks of the importance of timing. Previously there was a need for Jesus and other people to hold back because the time for certain events had not yet arrived. But now it has, now the story of Jesus' life can proceed to its goal and its fulfilment.

But the phrase 'the hour' does not simply speak of the importance of timing, it also speaks of a sense of purpose and of fulfilment. Sometimes we use this phrase about other people when they step up into an important position which long seems to have been prepared for them. His or her hour has

come, we say, now is the time for them to fulfil the promise which we have seen for so long in their lives.

And we also recognise the importance of 'the hour' in our own lives. We recognise that there are some opportunities in life which will not come again and which we need to seize as and when we can.

The importance of recognising and living in 'the hour' has of course been very important to me recently at a personal level with the birth of my daughter Tahlia and the first few weeks of her life. We recognise as a family how precious these moments are and how important it is to value and appreciate these moments because they will not come again.

So for Jesus this is the 'hour', the opportunity which needs to be taken. But what is the meaning of the hour? Jesus points us to seeing this in terms of what it truly means to live a fruitful life. Surely this is the kind of life we would all like to live.

And Jesus tells us that there is a paradox at the heart of any truly fruitful life. If we try to cling to life above everything else then in the truest and deepest spiritual sense its fruitfulness will be lost *'Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.'*

And He also expresses this truth in terms of a graphic image, the contrast between the grain of wheat which clings fiercely to its own intact identity. This remains just a single seed. And then there is the grain which has the trust to fall into the ground and die. It is this grain which produces much fruit.

But even though Jesus has this deep sense of purpose and promise of fruitfulness which leads Him on towards His death this does not mean that He is unaffected by the terrible ordeal which is about to take place.

Jesus' suffering and pain is real and it affects Him deeply just like suffering and pain affects all of us. Who wishes to suffer if it could possibly be avoided? And even when we know that our suffering is serving some greater good it still does not take away the reality of our pain and our desire to be spared this if possible.

So Jesus says *Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – 'Father, save me from this hour'?* He acknowledges that his soul is indeed troubled and that a choice lies before Him. Should He ask God His Father to save Him from what is to come? The temptation to do this must have been strong.

So there is a struggle. And yet Jesus, having acknowledged this struggle is also given the strength to keep on going. He understands what His hour means and why He has come to it. No, He goes on to say, *it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.*

This is a struggle and internal questioning which bears witness to the very real and difficult human cost that Jesus accepted in remaining faithful to God's purposes. We find the same form of struggle and eventual acceptance at the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus deeply grieved asks that the cup of suffering and death might pass from Him. But once again Jesus says to God, not my will but yours be done and after that an angel strengthens Him so that He can face the ordeal that is to come.

So there is a sense of purpose in Jesus' death but also a struggle. But what is the reward? What makes it all worthwhile? Why is Jesus' death so fruitful? When the grain of wheat does fall into the ground and die what is the harvest?

The harvest is of our own souls, yours and mine. Jesus says that when He is lifted up from the earth He *'will draw all people to myself.'*

Our Old Testament reading from the book of Jeremiah contrasts two different ways of knowing God's commands.

The first was in the form of an external set of rules, the Ten Commandments given on Mount Sinai. These rules were written on tablets of stone but God's people found themselves unable to live up to these commands. They constantly had to remind each other of them and try to encourage each other to keep them but in the end it was impossible however hard they tried.

And then there was another way, a 'new covenant'. This was different. This was not an external set of rules but a covenant and a law written within people's hearts. This was a living relationship between God and His people. In this covenant we come to know God not in the form of an external set of rules but from the inside as a friend and companion in all that we face in life and in death.

Perhaps this coronavirus crisis has reminded us among other things of how limited any external set of rules can be. The rules that are issued can be quite baffling in their complexity and in the little quirks that they contain and how often they change. And yet it is also very difficult to see how this could be done any better. Can any set of rules be adequate to meet the complexities and variety of actual human experience and circumstances?

On the other hand, knowing God from the inside satisfies a very simple and deep spiritual hunger within each of us. Again as I think of the very early days of our daughter Tahlia's life I am reminded of how important our simple presence as parents is. And in this vast universe in which we live how important it is also that we can experience the nearness of God's presence as our heavenly Father.

Jeremiah was a prophet. The new covenant in which God's law would be written within people's hearts and in which there would be a simple friendship between God and His people lay in the future. But it is through

Jesus and particularly Jesus' death and resurrection that this future promise has been fulfilled.

So this is why Jesus' death is so fruitful. This was why He was prepared to suffer so much. It was to draw us to Himself so that through Him we might know our hunger for God's immediate presence in our lives fully satisfied. This is an incomparable gift. Jesus recognised that the Cross and Resurrection was his hour, the opportunity that would not come again.

Perhaps we too have an hour and an opportunity which we need to seize. For Jesus' sacrifice requires a response from us, a response of trust and faith. And now is our hour, our time to say 'Yes' to all that Jesus has done for us. Are we willing and ready to do this?

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- That we might recognise our 'hour' in responding to what Jesus has done for us with faith and trust
- Our plans for Easter and the different ways in which we can share our faith over the Easter period
- For peace, wisdom and harmony in decisions relating to the distribution of vaccines and other medicines, that they may reach those most in need of them
- 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
- Bishop Peter in his decision to take early retirement and Bishop Ruth as she continues to shoulder additional responsibilities in the diocese

- For North Cadbury Church Primary School and other local schools as they prepare to celebrate Easter in a way that conveys its message to all under their care
- 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.
- Those facing illnesses of all kinds and those whom we know who have recently been bereaved.

Vimeo Recording

This week's service is available on Vimeo. The link is:-

<https://vimeo.com/526766020>

Hymns

The hymns in the service are 'Forgive our sins as we forgive', 'It is a thing most wonderful' and 'There is a green hill far away'.

Easter Services

We are anticipating that the rule on outdoor gatherings will be relaxed as from 29th March in order once more to allow groups of up to six people to meet outside.

This makes it much more feasible to hold services again although we need to remember that (a) the rule on not socialising inside church buildings will

remain unchanged and (b) so far as we know at the moment congregational singing will not be permitted. We understand that there is some discussion between church leaders and the government on this latter point and we will of course let you know if this brings any relaxation of this measure prohibiting congregational singing.

In the meantime, however, it has been possible to plan for some Easter services across the Camelot Group as follows:-

9.30 am St John the Baptist North Cheriton, Easter Celebration

9.30 am St Mary's Compton Pauncefoot, Communion

9.30 am St Michael's Blackford, Morning Service

9.30 am St Thomas a Becket South Cadbury, Communion

11.00 am St Michael's North Cadbury, Communion

11.00 am St Nicholas Holton, Morning Service

pm St Mary's Yarlington, Easter Service

If there is not a service in your own parish you are welcome to attend services in other parishes across the Group but please do let the churchwardens know so that they can preserve the appropriate social distancing.

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.

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. We are reviewing this suspension of services in the light of preparations for Easter and the government timetable for easing restrictions.

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.

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)