

# CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 112

Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> June 2021

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

## Welcome

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

## Scripture Passages

*Genesis 3: 8-15*

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup> But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"

<sup>10</sup> He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

<sup>11</sup> He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

<sup>12</sup> The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate."

<sup>13</sup> Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

<sup>14</sup> The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. <sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."

### *Mark 3: 20-35*

Then he went home;<sup>20</sup> and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. <sup>21</sup> When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.”

<sup>22</sup> And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.”

<sup>23</sup> And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? <sup>24</sup> If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. <sup>25</sup> And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. <sup>26</sup> And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. <sup>27</sup> But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

<sup>28</sup> “Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; <sup>29</sup> but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin” - <sup>30</sup> for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

<sup>31</sup> Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. <sup>32</sup> A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.”

<sup>33</sup> And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?”

<sup>34</sup> And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>35</sup> Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

### **Reflection**

Spiritual warfare? Imagine saying that to someone in the middle of a conversation. I did that once. It was a mistake. I will never forget the look on the face of the person I was talking to. It was a mixture of complete

bewilderment, lack of understanding, concern for my mental wellbeing and whether I should be seeking psychiatric help.

And although if we mentioned 'spiritual warfare' in some Christian circles people might immediately understand what we were talking about I am not sure others would. And certainly outside the church we would be speaking in and using a very alien language and concepts.

On the other hand, there was a film a few years ago called 'We need to talk about Kevin.' Its plot was about a teenager called Kevin who had been responsible for a school massacre. And difficult and uncomfortable though it may be his mother realises that she needs to talk about Kevin.

We need to talk about Kevin. And we need to talk about spiritual warfare.

Why? Because although this may make us uncomfortable significant parts of the Bible describe a conflict between an almighty God and a fallen angelic being called variously Satan, the devil or in today's gospel passage Beelzebub. So if we are to understand our own Christian faith better or to communicate it to others we need to think about spiritual warfare however far removed this may seem from today's culture and concerns.

In our gospel passage, Jesus' opponents, the scribes, try to undermine His ministry by claiming that Jesus is on the wrong side in a heavenly battle. Jesus has been engaged in casting out demons and they claim that this is only possible because Jesus is in league with Beelzebub the chief of the demons.

Jesus in His turn takes up the challenge of this argument and in a very clear and logical fashion demolishes it. He asks "*How can Satan cast out Satan?*". And He follows that question up with the image of a house that is divided against itself. How can such a house possibly stand up? It cannot. Their argument is nonsense.

So this is challenging. And in passing we may note that there are other challenges in this passage to the picture of a sensible, domesticated Jesus whom we can feel comfortable with.

What light, for instance, does it shed on His relationship with His own family? Alarmingly, His family seem to agree with a commonly held view that Jesus with these exorcisms and other ministry has simply gone out of His mind. However, their attempts to restrain Him and to bring Him to His senses comes to nothing. When the crowd tell Jesus that *“Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.”* His response to this invitation to join them seems unconcerned. *“Who are my mother and brothers?”* He asks.

This hardly seems to be a model for family values. However, we need to place this passage in the context of others such as the concern Jesus shows for His mother Mary at the Cross when He asks the disciple whom He loves to take His place in caring for her. And indeed in this passage Jesus is not in fact rejecting his family. Rather He is asserting that even beyond one’s own family we have a greater and overriding loyalty which is to God. So when He looks at the crowd around Him He says, *“Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”*

And then there is the mention of an unforgivable sin, *‘whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin’*. This has caused much pain and anxiety among those who imagine they may have committed the unforgivable sin. However, it is worth saying that those who think they have committed an unforgivable sin almost certainly have not done so. It is a word addressed to Jesus’ opponents, the scribes, who in their hardened opposition have claimed that Jesus is empowered in His ministry not by the Holy Spirit but by Beelzebub. With such a complete reversal of what is really happening spiritually and such a total opposition it

is indeed very difficult to see how this could be turned round into acceptance and support of Jesus.

On the other hand, this saying comes within the context of God's willingness to forgive, *people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter*. It is the general rule which comes first and the exception only later. And we should also remember that we do not know whether in the case of the unforgivable sin the possibility of subsequent repentance is ruled out. If it is possible then we would expect the general rule of the link between forgiveness and repentance to apply.

But to return to the supernatural, heavenly conflict which has enough challenges of its own to deal with. For in our other reading from the first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis, we find that spiritual conflict is not confined to the New Testament and Jesus' ministry.

Right at the very beginning of the human story a serpent tempts Adam and Eve away from the path of trusting in God to a trust in their own self-sufficiency, wisdom and knowledge. God pronounces judgement on the serpent in these words,

*<sup>14</sup> The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. <sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."*

This speaks of a perpetual conflict between the serpent and human beings. Christians usually see the serpent as another representation of Satan and see the prophecy about the serpent's head being struck as fulfilled in Christ's death on the Cross where He triumphs over all the forces of evil.

So we cannot get away from spiritual warfare in the Bible. But we do need to build some bridges between these passages and our own world.

Perhaps the first bridge that we might build is that of temptation. Surely all of us and indeed many of the people we meet who may have little or no interest in church or the Christian faith nevertheless recognise the strength and reality of the power of temptation. We all know of times when we are drawn even despite ourselves to pursue a path that deep down we know to be wrong.

Temptation, after all, led to the first sin on the part of Adam and Eve. But who or what is behind the power of temptation? Is it entirely fanciful to suggest that there must be something more than purely natural forces involved here?

And then again surveys often report that more people believe at some level in the existence of God than believe in the existence of the devil. But does one belief makes sense in the absence of the other?

The pandemic through which we have been living has confronted all of us with the reality of our mortality. And this makes it natural for us to ask, is this life all that there is, surely there must be more than this? And this in turn leads to the question of whether there is a God who is bigger than the whole of creation, a supernatural being.

But if there is such a God then what about our world? I have already mentioned the plot of 'We need to talk about Kevin' which involves a mother wrestling with how to love her son who has been responsible for a terrible massacre at a school. Thankfully this plot is fictional. And hopefully none of us has ever been confronted with anything so directly and terribly evil. And yet we know that such things sadly do happen. We may even ourselves have been caught up with such events or know someone who has.

So how can we explain such evil? Can it all just be put down to wrong choices or unfortunate circumstances? Or might we indeed need to consider the existence of some supernatural force of evil?

These are deep questions. They may be ones with which we ourselves are wrestling. Or they may be ones with which other people whom we know are wrestling and we long to help them find some answers.

But there is a more immediate response which passages such as these dealing with spiritual conflict ask of us.

For if we are persuaded of the reality of this cosmic struggle we can be tempted to look around us for scapegoats, bogeymen whom we can blame for all the evil that is going on around us and whom we can accuse of doing the devil's work. There is of course nothing new in looking for scapegoats in order to sidestep our own responsibility. When Adam was asked by God whether he had eaten from the tree from which he was commanded not to eat he did not answer the question but instead blamed Eve for what he had done.

On the other hand, we might be better off looking closer to home for evidence of the reality of this spiritual battle. The Desert Fathers were an early group of Christians who as their name suggests lived in the desert in order to dedicate themselves more fully to God. They had a saying that those who have a corpse laid out in their own living room don't have time to go to someone else's funeral. In other words we must first recognise our own sins rather than looking around to discover what we consider to be the sins of others.

So how might we do this? If we simply look inside ourselves we may be drawn into all kinds of self-accusation and even think that we have been guilty of the unforgivable sin. But this is not the way that God works. Rather God invites us to open our hearts to Him, to let Him shine a spotlight on our lives and on our inner motives. We could respond to such an invitation by echoing the opening words of Psalm 139 which asks God to search us and know us.

And this is not a way of making us feel bad about ourselves. When God searches us, we might become aware of much that encourages us. We might find that God simply blesses the humdrum reality of much of our lives. But we might also become aware of the power of temptation in our lives. We may even become conscious of occasions in which we have succumbed to such temptation and strayed from God's path. The spiritual struggle for our lives is a real one. But if we do discover this we need not despair. We have not committed the unforgivable sin. Rather we need to trust in Christ's words, *people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter.*

*Tristram*

### **Points for Prayers**

- To allow God to know us and to search our hearts
- Continued thanksgiving for care, skill and courage of NHS workers and those in care homes demonstrated throughout the course of this pandemic
- Wise decisions in relation to the final step in the easing of lockdown restrictions due to take place on 21<sup>st</sup> June
- Those whom we know who are facing illnesses of all kinds, those who have recently been bereaved and those suffering as a result of social isolation and in other ways
- Bishop Ruth and the rest of the Diocesan staff as they take on additional responsibility following Bishop Peter's retirement
- For North Cadbury Church Primary School and other local schools as they prepare to return to school after the half term break
- 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.

## Hymn

One of the hymns to be sung at North Cadbury this morning is 'The church's one foundation.'

## Congregational Singing

Congregational singing is now permitted for those services which are taking place outdoors in the churchyard. However, the position remains unchanged for services inside the church. Here congregational singing is not permitted.

## Services for June

Sunday 6 <sup>th</sup> June	9.00 am Communion, Yarlinton
Sunday 6 <sup>th</sup> June	9.30 am Communion, North Cheriton
Sunday 6 <sup>th</sup> June	11.00 am Group Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 13 <sup>th</sup> June	9.30 am Communion, Galhampton
Sunday 13 <sup>th</sup> June	9.30 am Communion, North Cheriton
Sunday 13 <sup>th</sup> June	9.30 am Matins, Blackford
Sunday 13 <sup>th</sup> June	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Holton
Sunday 20 <sup>th</sup> June	9.30 am Communion, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 20 <sup>th</sup> June	11.00 am Communion, Maperton
Sunday 20 <sup>th</sup> June	11.00 am Sunday Worship, North Cadbury
Sunday 20 <sup>th</sup> June	6.30 pm Evensong, Yarlinton
Sunday 27 <sup>th</sup> June	8.00 am Communion, Blackford
Sunday 27 <sup>th</sup> June	9.30 am Communion, South Cadbury

Sunday 27 <sup>th</sup> June	9.30 am Matins, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 27 <sup>th</sup> June	9.30 am Morning Worship, North Cheriton
Sunday 27 <sup>th</sup> June	11.00 am Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 27 <sup>th</sup> June	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Yarlinton
Sunday 27 <sup>th</sup> June	6.30 pm Evening Service, Galhampton

## **Excalibur**

Excalibur is back in paper form. It contains details of Camelot people, a record of baptisms, weddings and funerals undertaken through the church in the Camelot Parishes. Previous editions of Excalibur can be found online at [camelotparishes.co.uk](http://camelotparishes.co.uk)

## **The Parish Office**

If Rob is not in the Office during normal office hours please contact him via email ([office@camelotparishes.org.uk](mailto: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)