

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 116

Sunday 4th July 2021

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

Welcome

Welcome to this Sunday's edition of Cutting Edge Camelot. Below I reflect on what it means to have God's strength and also to be able to admit our own weakness.

Scripture Passages

2 Corinthians 12: 2-10

I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven - whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. ³ And I know that such a person - whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows - ⁴ was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. ⁵ On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. ⁶ But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, ⁷ even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. ⁸ Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, ⁹ but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

Mark 6: 1-13

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him.
² On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded.

They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! ³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

⁴ Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honour, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." ⁵ And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶ And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. ⁷ He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹ but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰ He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹ If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them."

¹² So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³ They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Reflection

How easy is it to admit weakness? Probably never easy and it is not made any easier by the culture in which we live.

The assumption is that we should be trained to be strong and independent. Even fathers of three-year-olds are told that they should not carry their daughter's coat for them but that their daughters must learn to carry their coats for themselves.

Traditionally, of course, it has been men who have been supposed to be strong and not to admit weakness. However, often this now applies to women as well as increasingly they have been expected to juggle all kinds of different tasks.

And in such a context, admonitions such as today's passages contain can be difficult to take on board.

They deal in particular with the question of how our weakness relates to God's strength or power.

The apostles, first of all, were given immense spiritual power. Jesus *'called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.'*

And then as they go out under Jesus' authority, they experience immediate and spectacular results from their ministry, *'They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.'*

But although the ministry of the apostles was powerful and effective in a way that might cause us to envy them, with this power there also came some spiritual dangers and temptations.

For if we are not grounded and humble then we can become proud. There can be a temptation that when we minister with God's power we claim the credit for ourselves and we use what God is doing for the purpose of building up our own reputation.

Maybe this was one of the reasons why Jesus instructed the apostles when they went out *'to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics.'*

They were put in other words in a position of material weakness where they had to rely entirely on God's power and strength. Bread, a bag and some money are the basic resources of life which we need for our continuing existence. In the absence of these essentials the apostles were entirely reliant on the hospitality and welcome which they received in the towns and villages to which they went.

And this hospitality was by no means guaranteed. A welcome and a hearing might be refused. And in those circumstances all that the apostles could do was to leave and to shake the dust off their feet.

I wonder whether we ever have been in a position in life when all the externals of life on which we have relied have been stripped away from us. How have we felt in those circumstances? We doubtless have not chosen to be in such a position and it is not a comfortable one to be in. On the other hand such experiences can be strangely liberating and bring us closer to God.

And then our reading from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians also has at its heart this same theme of God's power contrasted with our weakness and the dangers of spiritual pride.

Paul talks of someone who has had an intense and overwhelming spiritual experience, who in Christ *'was caught up to the third heaven'*. Although Paul describes this experience in the third person it becomes clear that he is in fact referring to himself. For later on he speaks of his refusal to boast about such experiences. To do so might be to build up his own reputation although it would be no more than speaking the truth. However, Paul is

well aware of the dangers of spiritual pride if he based his ministry on *'the exceptional character of the revelations'*.

And so is God. In order to keep Paul grounded and humble, Paul is given the proverbial thorn in the flesh which keeps him from *'being too elated'*. We don't know exactly what the thorn in the flesh was. It could well have been an illness or an infirmity which Paul was unable to shake off. At any rate it was a persistent and painful difficulty which served the purpose of keeping Paul humbly and completely dependent on God.

This reminds me of a pattern which I have often noticed in my own life where supposed moments of triumph have been followed by some chastening and often trivial experience which has very swiftly brought me down to earth. Maybe you also have noticed this same pattern in your own lives. If so, then Paul's words can encourage you to recognise God's working in this process.

And so despite Paul's persistent appeals to God the thorn in the flesh was not taken away. However, what God did grant Paul in prayer was a very direct insight into the reason for his suffering. God said, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."*

It is God's grace, the fact that He loves us simply because He loves us, that is central to the message of the gospel. An emphasis on our own spiritual powers, achievements and abilities can obscure that message. Rather it is God's power that needs to be displayed and this happens when in a human sense we feel at our weakest and most inadequate.

And so if Paul is to boast then he will boast not of his strengths and accomplishments but of his weaknesses so that, as he puts it, *'the power of Christ may dwell in me.'* And he can say with sincerity that he is *'content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the*

sake of Christ' because this illustrates the principle that when he is weak at a natural level paradoxically he is strong at a spiritual and Christian level.

So there is a very deep and direct challenge in these passages both at a personal and a cultural level. We love to feel that we are in charge of all our circumstances and it makes us feel secure and safe. And our culture also encourages us to be strong and independent. None of this makes it easy for us to admit weakness.

And yet the disciples as they were sent out in their mission did so from a position of weakness without material possessions and needing to rely on the hospitality of strangers which might or might not be forthcoming.

And Paul was sent his thorn in the flesh which was not taken away from him despite all his appeals to God. He knew that his own weakness was the means of displaying God's strength and grace. Can we say with sincerity that we have reached this place in our own spiritual journey?

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- To be able to know God's grace and strength and not to be afraid to admit our own weakness
- Continued thanksgiving for care, skill and courage of NHS workers and those in care homes demonstrated throughout the course of this pandemic
- For our forthcoming weddings at St Michael's North Cadbury on 7th and 10th July
- 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 and plan for the future
- For North Cadbury Church Primary School and other local schools as they continue the 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.

Hymn

A hymn based on Psalm 46 which celebrates God's strength is 'A mighty fortress is our God'. A more modern song which we will be singing at North Cadbury this morning is 'Rejoice, rejoice Christ is in you'. This speaks of how when we are weak God's strength is everything we need and how God turns our weaknesses into His opportunities.

Congratulations

Congratulations to Revd Ron Wood on this the 40th anniversary of his ordination as a priest. Marking this occasion Ron will be presiding at the Group Communion this Sunday at North Cadbury.

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 July

Sunday 4 th July	9.00 am Communion, Yarlington
Sunday 4 th July	9.30 am Camelot Matins, North Cheriton
Sunday 4 th July	11.00 am Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 11 th July	9.30 am Communion, Galhampton
Sunday 11 th July	9.30 am Communion, North Cheriton
Sunday 11 th July	9.30 am Matins, Blackford
Sunday 11 th July	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Holton
Sunday 18 th July	9.30 am Communion, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 18 th July	11.00 am Sunday Worship, North Cadbury
Sunday 18 th July	6.30 pm Evensong, Yarlington
Sunday 25 th July	8.00 am Communion, Blackford
Sunday 25 th July	9.30 am Communion, South Cadbury
Sunday 25 th July	9.30 am Matins, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 25 th July	9.30 am Morning Worship, North Cheriton
Sunday 25 th July	11.00 am Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 25 th July	11.00 am Communion, Holton
Sunday 25 th July	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Yarlington
Sunday 25 th July	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. The July edition of Excalibur has also been published online at 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) 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)