

# CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 122

**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> August 2021**

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

## **Welcome**

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

## **Scripture Passages**

*James 1: 17-27*

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. <sup>18</sup> In fulfilment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

<sup>19</sup> You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; <sup>20</sup> for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. <sup>21</sup> Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

<sup>22</sup> But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.

<sup>23</sup> For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; <sup>24</sup> for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. <sup>25</sup> But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act - they will be blessed in their doing.

<sup>26</sup> If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup> Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

*Mark 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23*

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, <sup>2</sup> they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. <sup>3</sup> (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; <sup>4</sup> and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.)

<sup>5</sup> So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?”

<sup>6</sup> He said to them, “Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; <sup>7</sup> in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.’ <sup>8</sup> You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.”

<sup>14</sup> Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand: <sup>15</sup> there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.”

<sup>21</sup> “For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, <sup>22</sup> adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. <sup>23</sup> All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

## **Reflection**

A great theologian of the twentieth century Karl Barth had a saying that we need to read with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other and to let the Bible interpret the newspaper.

This is indeed wise advice and yet there are times when the exchange between the Bible and the newspaper can lead us down a blind alley.

So at the moment when we hear about washing hands before meals our immediate thought may be about the importance of washing our hands which has been drummed into us so much over the course of the last year or so.

However, when we read about the issue of washing hands before meals in the context of the dispute between Jesus and the scribes and the Pharisees in today's gospel reading this thought is likely to distract us from the real issues that are at stake.

First of all, the scribes and Pharisees were likely to be looking for some issue with which they could criticise Jesus and His disciples. And in this respect the failure to wash hands provided them with a convenient point of entry.

However, their concern is not so much about hygiene as the importance of their own traditions. For laws relating to how someone might eat were at that time a key marker of the sense of Jewish identity. It was an outward way in which they could differentiate themselves from the Gentile nations that surrounded them.

That is why, for instance, the apostle Peter came in for so much criticism from some of his fellow believers when he shared a meal with a Roman centurion called Cornelius (see Acts 11: 2-3).

And a number of the restrictions which the Pharisees insisted on such as the washing of hands and cutlery did not come from the Old Testament itself but had been added on as a so called 'fence around the law'.

Although this religious concern may not seem relevant to us today, Jesus responds to the challenge that is presented to Him by making two important

distinctions. These distinctions and their underlying principles remain crucially important to the choices we need to make.

And the first choice is whether we trust in God's authority or in human authority.

When the scribes and Pharisees question Jesus they call on the authority of 'the tradition of the elders.' Jesus, however, draws on the authority of the Old Testament in the form of the prophet Isaiah who makes the clear distinction between what is the command of God and what is simply human tradition. These latter 'human precepts' are not to be taught as truth which cannot be challenged.

We as Christians find our authority from Jesus Himself who is the living Word of God (see John 1:14). And yet it is not always easy to trust and follow Him especially when we need to grapple with all kinds of human opinions. We should not of course simply dismiss such opinions without thinking about them carefully. However, our overriding loyalty needs to be with Christ. So we may at times have to choose which way we follow, the way of Christ or what seems to be the dominant opinion of our age.

This leads us on to another distinction and set of choices which we need to make. Are we more concerned with the externals of someone's appearance and behaviour or with their heart? When God asks Samuel in the Old Testament to choose a new king for Israel, Samuel is puzzled that God chooses none of David's elder and taller brothers as king but David who is the youngest. However, Samuel is reminded that God looks not at the outward appearance but at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

*<sup>14</sup> Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: <sup>15</sup> there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile."*

And so in our gospel passage we find Jesus making a very clear distinction between external behaviour and what is in the heart. So Jesus tells us that it is not what or how we eat that makes us holy or unclean. What makes us unclean is what lies within our heart. We need a new heart and a new spirit within us, a living faith in Jesus by which He cleanses and purifies us.

*<sup>21</sup> For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, <sup>22</sup> adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. <sup>23</sup> All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."*

For it is in our hearts that evil lies. And what is in our heart then expresses itself outwardly in actions that are obviously immoral such as murder or adultery. Such actions, however, are only the expression of our inner desires. And it is those inner desires which make us unclean not the superficialities of our outward behaviour.

Our passage from the epistle of James in the New Testament also focusses our attention on the need for a right heart attitude towards other people.

*<sup>18</sup> In fulfilment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.*

James points us to the need for a fundamental change in our lives, a new birth. In Jesus, we become radically different people, the first signs of a new creation. It is not a question of trying to change ourselves by positive thinking or through 'trying harder'. And yet when our heart is changed in this very deep way then outward changes in our behaviour do follow.

*<sup>19</sup> You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger;*

Such changes, for instance, mean that we listen to other people before we start speaking to them. If we speak before listening, anger can often get the

better of us because we have never taken the time to understand the other person. So the more we listen the slower we will be to become angry.

And James reminds us that we need to put God's word into action not simply listen to it. James gives us a graphic analogy for those who hear God's word and then do not put it into action. It is ridiculous. It is like someone who looks at themselves in the mirror and then immediately forgets what they look like. A practical example of this is once more those who have no control over their tongues, who do not listen and think before they speak. On the other hand, we can demonstrate that our faith results in practical action through the way in which we care for the most vulnerable in our society, those who have no outward means of support, the proverbial widows and orphans.

As we reflect on these two passages what is it that we hear? Perhaps we think about occasions when we have had to choose between the popular human opinion of our day and what we believe to be Christ's way. We may have found it difficult to swim against the tide, we may not even have succeeded in this. For it is only on these occasions that we discover how strong the current of our tide actually is. When we are happily swimming along with the current we do not notice this.

And then how is it that we approach other people? What do we notice about them? Is our attention and judgement fixated on the superficialities of someone's behaviour rather than their heart?

It is, after all, easier to look at the externals. To do deeper and to appreciate someone's heart means that we need to spend more time listening and less time speaking. And how easy do we find that?

*Tristram*

## **Points for Prayers**

- For strength to go God's way even when this is costly
- For grace to listen to others and to seek to understand their heart
- Continued thanksgiving for the care, skill and courage of NHS workers and all others who work to contain the spread of this pandemic and to be agents of healing
- 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
- All those caught up in the violence and terror of events in Afghanistan and especially for the evacuation from Kabul
- For weddings and christenings planned for the autumn
- 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 School and other local schools as they prepare to return after the summer holidays
- 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.

## **Elliscombe House**

Elliscombe House in Higher Holton remains closed at the moment. However there are plans for a reopening in the near future. We will keep you informed of progress on this and in the meantime please keep this project in your prayers.

## **Hymn**

'Brother, sister, let me serve you' emphasises the importance of having the right heart attitude of service towards other people.

## **Services for this week and next**

Sunday 29 <sup>th</sup> August	8.00 am Communion, Blackford
Sunday 29 <sup>th</sup> August	9.30 am Family Service, North Cheriton
Sunday 29 <sup>th</sup> August	11.00 am Communion, Maperton
Sunday 29 <sup>th</sup> August	6.30 pm Evensong, Galhampton
Sunday 5 <sup>th</sup> September	9.00 am Communion, Yarlinton
Sunday 5 <sup>th</sup> September	9.30 am Camelot Matins, North Cheriton
Sunday 5 <sup>th</sup> September	11.00 am Group Communion, North Cadbury

## **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 August edition of Excalibur has now been published online at [camelotparishes.co.uk](http://camelotparishes.co.uk) and on each parish's A Church Near You webpage.

## **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)