

# CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 123

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> September 2021

‘Virtually Church but with some way to go...’

## Welcome

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

## Scripture Passages

*James 2: 1-10, 14-17*

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? <sup>2</sup> For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, <sup>3</sup> and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, “Have a seat here, please,” while to the one who is poor you say, “Stand there,” or, “Sit at my feet,” <sup>4</sup> have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

<sup>5</sup> Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? <sup>6</sup> But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? <sup>7</sup> Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

<sup>8</sup> You do well if you really fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” <sup>9</sup> But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. <sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is naked and

lacks daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? <sup>17</sup> So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

*Mark 7: 24-37*

From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, <sup>25</sup> but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. <sup>26</sup> Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

<sup>27</sup> He said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”

<sup>28</sup> But she answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

<sup>29</sup> Then he said to her, “For saying that, you may go - the demon has left your daughter.”

<sup>30</sup> So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

<sup>31</sup> Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. <sup>32</sup> They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him.

<sup>33</sup> He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. <sup>34</sup> Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.”

<sup>35</sup> And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

<sup>36</sup> Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. <sup>37</sup> They were astounded beyond

measure, saying, “He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

## **Reflection**

Do you have favourites? What is your reply? Of course not you probably say. But privately you may know very well that this is not the truth and deep inside you know that you do have favourites.

When I was expecting my second daughter the concept of ‘my favourite daughter’ came to be introduced to me at a very early stage. It was one which I thought it wisest not to pursue. And what is my favourite church of the Camelot Parishes? Ah well, I will pass on that one...

So we know that we should not have favourites and we should treat everyone just the same. Our reading from James’ epistle reminds us why this is so.

The congregation to whom James writes is told that they are guilty of acts of favouritism. James tells them that this is not compatible with their Christian faith.

Worse still this favouritism is based on social and economic status. James gives the example of two people walking into their meetings. One is poor and the other is rich. Their clothing easily gives them away. One is dressed in fine clothes and the other in dirty clothes.

But while the rich man is immediately greeted with the offer of a good seat, the poor man has to make do with standing or sitting on the floor. We can only imagine the psychological effects of such discrimination. No doubt the poor man felt unwanted and unvalued, an awkward inconvenience.

I wonder how we might respond if two such newcomers walked into one of our services. Can we honestly say that both would be equally welcome? Or might we secretly think that we would love one of them to join our church but feel quite relieved if the other decided not to come back?

However, James tells us that this kind of discrimination must not be allowed. On the contrary, he tells us that God's preferential choice lies on the poor. For their poverty leads them more easily to be able to depend on God, a place of trust and faith.

And James goes on to remind us of a central principle of scripture. Love your neighbour as yourself. We will remember that in the parable of the Good Samaritan that in answer to the question 'Who is my neighbour?' Jesus in effect tells us that my neighbour can be anyone. My neighbour can even be someone whom I might naturally regard as my enemy.

So James bluntly concludes that favouritism is simply sin. This seems very black and white.

From this we might conclude that God certainly does not have favourites. Or is it as simple as that?

When we read through the book of Genesis and the history of those early people of faith known as the patriarchs it seems as if God is constantly favouring one son (often the younger) at the expense of the other.

So Abel's sacrifice is accepted by God but not Cain's. This results in resentment and jealousy on Cain's part and eventually in his murdering Abel.

And then Isaac is chosen but not Ishmael, Jacob but not Esau, Joseph but not his older brothers...

And Jacob is renamed Israel. This name is given to a whole nation which is chosen by and special to God in a way that other nations are not. The book of Deuteronomy speaks of God setting his heart in love on this nation and choosing them out of all the other nations to be his people, his treasured possession (see Deuteronomy 10:15, 14:2).

As we read about Jesus' encounter with a Gentile woman we need to understand and keep this background in mind. For, we may find ourselves troubled by the way this encounter develops.

This woman is yet another person in need pressing her claims on Jesus. She is desperately concerned about her daughter who has an unclean spirit. She bows at his feet as a sign of great respect. Other accounts of Jesus' healing ministry have shown Him responding instantly and with great compassion to those in need.

But in this case this woman's race and background clearly matter. She is a Gentile not a Jew.

And when she asks Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter, Jesus responds in what seems a very harsh manner,  
*He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."*

We don't know what tone of voice Jesus used. Was it teasing, ironic, inviting a question, or simply insulting? Was Jesus playing devil's advocate and inviting the woman to mount a successful counter argument? Was He testing the depth of the woman's faith? We cannot say for sure.

However, Jesus' position is consistent with the perspective of the Old Testament which speaks of Israel being chosen by and special to God. And it is also consistent with the earliest missionary adventures of Jesus'

disciples in which they are told to go 'only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (see Matthew 10: 5-6).

So if we left the matter at this point, we might well conclude that God does indeed have favourites in a way that we could well find troubling.

However, this is not the end of the matter. God's choice of Israel is part of a larger overall plan. This people is chosen not for its own sake but for the sake of others. Israel is intended to be a channel through which the blessings of God can be shared with everyone.

Israel is to be both 'a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.' (Exodus 19:6). What does this mean? A priest is someone who prays for other people and brings them to the knowledge of God. A holy person is someone who reflects God's light and standards and becomes a witness by which others may come to know the reality of God's love.

And in the New Testament we find that this description originally given to Israel is now applied to the church. In his letter the apostle Peter speaks of the church in this way,

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. (1 Peter 2:9)*

This echoes and builds on the words of Exodus. As Christians we are to take on the role of priests and to show other people God's character through the holiness of our lifestyle. And through proclamation and praise we are to witness to God's action in calling us from darkness into light.

As we reflect on this the surprising twist in the tale of Jesus' encounter with the Gentile woman can begin to make more sense.

*But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."*

Whatever the tone in which Jesus spoke to the woman, His words do indeed provoke a response of great faith. Sometimes when our prayers are not immediately answered our resolve and faith can be strengthened and developed. Would we have answered in such a determined way as this woman if our initial answer from God had been so unpromising?

And the surprises keep on coming. Jesus recognises the woman's faith. There is no need for her to plead with Him anymore. The woman's request is simply granted on the spot.

So has Jesus simply performed a 'U turn'? Maybe not if we remember the scriptural background. For what Jesus said to begin with is in line with God's choice of Israel as his treasured possession. And His acceptance of the woman's counterargument equally is based on the reasons which underly this choice. For Israel is chosen not for its own sake but to be a priesthood for all the other nations. Or, as the woman puts it, others are to pick up and feed on the crumbs which fall from the feast set out on God's table.

The image of eating the crumbs from under the table is a striking one. It points us first of all to the richness of the feast itself. We as a church are the New Testament people of God. And this feast of God's love, healing and blessing is placed before us to enjoy.

But has this become real to us? Have we truly experienced the richness of God's love?

And then there are the crumbs which fall from the table and are picked up by others. God's love is not simply to be enjoyed by us for our own benefit but is to overflow and be shared by others. Crumbs may fall from our table in many different ways, perhaps in the form of a comforting presence offered to others, a wise and timely word of encouragement, a sacrificial act of service.

As we feast on God's love what are the crumbs which fall from our table and which feed and nourish other people?

*Tristram*

### **Points for Prayers**

- To enjoy the feast of God's love and to be willing to let this overflow to and be shared by others
- 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
- 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 return after the summer holidays
- For Elliscombe House in Higher Holton as it prepares for reopening in the near future
- 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 at North Cadbury this morning is 'O for a thousand tongues to sing'.

## Services for September

Sunday 5 <sup>th</sup> September	9.00 am Communion, Yarlington
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
Sunday 12 <sup>th</sup> September	9.30 am Communion, Galhampton
Sunday 12 <sup>th</sup> September	9.30 am Communion, North Cheriton
Sunday 12 <sup>th</sup> September	9.30 am Matins, Blackford
Sunday 12 <sup>th</sup> September	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Holton
Sunday 19 <sup>th</sup> September	9.30 am Communion, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 19 <sup>th</sup> September	11.00 am Sunday Worship, North Cadbury
Sunday 19 <sup>th</sup> September	11.00 am Harvest Service, Maperton
Sunday 19 <sup>th</sup> September	6.30 pm Harvest Evensong, Yarlington
Sunday 26 <sup>th</sup> September	9.30 am Communion, South Cadbury
Sunday 26 <sup>th</sup> September	9.30 am Harvest Matins, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 26 <sup>th</sup> September	9.30 am Harvest Matins, Blackford
Sunday 26 <sup>th</sup> September	9.30 am Morning Worship, North Cheriton
Sunday 26 <sup>th</sup> September	11.00 am Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 26 <sup>th</sup> September	11.00 am Communion, Holton
Sunday 26 <sup>th</sup> September	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Yarlington
Sunday 26 <sup>th</sup> September	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 September 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)