

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 125

Sunday 19th September 2021

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

Welcome

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

Scripture Passages

Jeremiah 11: 18-20

It was the LORD who made it known to me, and I knew; then you showed me their evil deeds. ¹⁹ But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. And I did not know it was against me that they devised schemes, saying,

“Let us destroy the tree with its fruit,
let us cut him off from the land of the living,
so that his name will no longer be remembered!”

²⁰ But you, O LORD of hosts, who judge righteously,
who try the heart and the mind,
let me see your retribution upon them,
for to you I have committed my cause.

Mark 9: 30-37

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; ³¹ for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” ³² But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

³³ Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” ³⁴ But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.

³⁵ He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”

³⁶ Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

Reflection

In last week’s gospel reading Jesus taught His disciples at Caesarea Philippi about the need for His suffering and death.

And now later on in Mark’s gospel just in case the disciples had not got the message Jesus repeats it. He tells His disciples, *“The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.”*

So again the tone is uncompromising. Before resurrection and glory can take place there is the need for suffering and death. At Caesarea Philippi the disciples did not understand or accept this message, particularly Peter who tried to assure Jesus that nothing of the kind would ever happen to Him. Jesus had to rebuke him for this.

So as time has gone has this message been sinking into the disciples and been accepted by them in their hearts? Possibly not.

For again we find the disciples opposing this message although this time in a different way.

Perhaps, however, we might sympathise with the disciples. The message of suffering and death is not an easy one to accept.

In our Old Testament passage from the book of the prophet Jeremiah we find that even people of great faith find it difficult to accept the suffering that their faith brings them.

Jeremiah is often caricatured as a gloomy figure who rather delighted in pronouncing messages of judgement on all and sundry. When we call someone 'a Jeremiah' this is, after all, normally what we mean.

And yet such a caricature is very far from the truth. Jeremiah was a gentle, sensitive and imaginative person who shrank from the hardships that he knew that his prophetic calling would bring him.

Right at the outset of his ministry he tries to dissuade God from choosing him by saying 'I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.' (Jeremiah 1:6).

And in the book of Jeremiah there are a series of highly personal passages known collectively as the Complaints of Jeremiah. These have been described as among the most direct, candid and intimate prayers in the Old Testament. They display a deep honesty. They can be compared to those of the Psalms known as laments in which the psalmist cries out for help to God.

Today's passage is the first of the Complaints of Jeremiah. Speaking out on behalf of God has led Jeremiah into trouble. Indeed he has powerful enemies who wish to silence his voice. Jeremiah's enemies are plotting against him. And yet God made Jeremiah aware of these plots, *It was the LORD who made it known to me, and I knew; then you showed me their evil deeds.*

Such plots were no doubt hidden under the cloak of friendship and reassuring words. And yet through God's insight they became known to Jeremiah.

And the next verse illustrates something of the psychological effects and cost of these plots on the sensitive Jeremiah. He compares himself to '*a gentle lamb led to the slaughter*'. And the covert nature of these plots emerges as he says '*I did not know it was against me that they devised schemes.*' We can only imagine the shock that he must have felt when God showed Jeremiah that the plots which he imagined concerned other people were indeed aimed against him.

But their hidden nature did not mean that they were any less lethal. His enemies wanted to destroy him utterly, not simply through death but by ensuring that his name and reputation would no longer be remembered.

In all of this Jeremiah does not attempt to strike back. Rather he leaves this in the hands of God to whom he commits his cause.

So Jeremiah gives us one response to the suffering of faith. We might call this a response of full awareness. Jeremiah does not pretend that his suffering is not real any more than Jesus does when He struggles to know His Father's will in the Garden of Gethsemane and prays that the cup of suffering will pass from Him.

Nor are we as Christians called to a stoical acceptance of all that life and faith brings to us. The complaints of Jeremiah and of the Psalms give us a model through which we are able to enter into a dialogue with God about the reality of all that we suffer.

Jeremiah's realistic response is no doubt both healthier and more deeply human than that of the apostles. For as Jesus speaks again about His destiny of suffering and death His words seem simply to wash off the

disciples and to have no impact on them. For *'they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.'*

Instead of facing their fear and being prepared to ask Jesus what He meant they engage in what is perhaps a form of comfortable distraction. They focus on their own status. They argue on the road about who is to be the greatest among them.

In doing so, they no doubt know that they are seeking to evade the stark reality of Jesus' message. Such arguments about status have no meaning and do not matter in the context of the life changing truths of Jesus' death and Resurrection. They are spending time on an irrelevant pursuit. And as a consequence when Jesus asks them what they have been arguing about they are silent through shame.

So we find in Jeremiah and the apostles two different forms of response to the inevitability of suffering within the life of faith. One, of honest recognition, seems much healthier than the other, of engaging in distraction and denial.

And yet with that said that it is possible to overstate as well as understate the place of suffering in the Christian life. For as Christians we also experience a deep and lasting joy and contentment in life which others might rightly envy. This too is real. And in our theology we need to hold in balance the place we give to suffering and to joy, to Cross and to Resurrection.

So when Jesus wants to correct the perspective of the disciples He speaks first of all being a servant of all. And He then uses the powerful visual example of a little child which He sets before them. The child is an example of weakness and insignificance. There is no status to be had in such a position.

And yet when we are prepared to let go of our desires for status and to be the greatest, we find that joy awaits us. If we observe a child's play and imagination we discover the reality of great joy and spontaneity.

So Jesus reminds them that as they welcome a child they welcome both Jesus Himself and also God the Father. What is heaven like? Who can answer that? However, we can find clues to guide us in the world around us. And one of the most powerful of these clues lies in the spontaneity and joy that we can find in the world of a child.

The message of the suffering that faith brings with it was a difficult one for the disciples to accept. No doubt it also is for us. Perhaps we like the disciples can find comfort and distraction in the games which status brings. In the news of the cabinet reshuffle this week, for instance, perhaps the analysis of who's up and who's down, who's in and who's out provided a welcome relief from much of the grimmer news that has been preoccupying our attention.

And yet we know that this is a distraction. In the end status does not matter a bit. Not when it is measured up against the realities of the message of Jesus' death and resurrection.

So surely a response which in the end will prove to be much more fruitful is to learn both from the honesty of Jeremiah and from the unselfconscious joy of a child.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- To learn from Jeremiah's honesty in the face of suffering and also from the unselfconscious joy of children
- COVID plans for winter

- 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 and have recently been bereaved
- For weddings and christenings planned for the autumn
- Bishop Ruth and the rest of the Diocesan staff as they take on additional responsibility in this vacancy in See
- For the choice of a new Bishop, someone who shares God's heart for this Diocese
- Thanksgiving for the return of North Cadbury Church School and other local schools 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

The hymns at Compton Pauncefoot this morning were all written by missionaries who suffered for their faith. One of these is 'Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!'

Services for September

Sunday 19 th September	9.30 am Communion, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 19 th September	11.00 am Sunday Worship, North Cadbury

Sunday 19 th September	11.00 am Harvest Service, Maperton
Sunday 19 th September	6.30 pm Harvest Evensong, Yarlington
Sunday 26 th September	9.30 am Communion, South Cadbury
Sunday 26 th September	9.30 am Harvest Matins, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 26 th September	9.30 am Harvest Matins, Blackford
Sunday 26 th September	9.30 am Morning Worship, North Cheriton
Sunday 26 th September	11.00 am Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 26 th September	11.00 am Communion, Holton
Sunday 26 th September	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Yarlington
Sunday 26 th 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 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) 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)