

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 126

Sunday 26th September 2021

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

Welcome

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

Scripture Passages

James 5: 13-20

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.

¹⁷ Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.

¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

¹⁹ My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, ²⁰ you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Mark 9: 38-50

John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.”

³⁹ But Jesus said, “Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. ⁴⁰ Whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

⁴² “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ where ‘their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched’.

⁴⁹ “For everyone will be salted with fire.

⁵⁰ “Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

Reflection

Last week I wrote of a balance to be found in the Christian life between joy and suffering. In this week’s gospel reading a different form of balance emerges.

This balance is between two different sides of Jesus. We may perhaps feel more comfortable with the first side.

Jesus' disciple John wants to stop someone ministering in the name of Jesus because he is not 'one of us'. His attitude perhaps reminds us of ourselves and other parts of the church when we seek to test out and discover whether a newcomer is really going to fit in neatly with our local church group.

But Jesus reframes this concern. The question is not are they 'one of us' but do they acknowledge Jesus? And here Jesus shows a breadth of tolerance and acceptance which contrasts with John's much narrower approach.

So Jesus tells John not to stop this person ministering. For anyone who acknowledges Jesus cannot change their allegiance just like that. Jesus' love is wider than we conceive it to be, less constrained by manmade formulas. Jesus expresses this in the general rule that '*whoever is not against us is for us.*' And He then tells us that being identified with Christ can hinge on very small, even microscopic acts like giving someone else a cup of water on the basis that the other person is a Christian.

So we may feel comforted by this breadth of acceptance and understanding. However, there is another side to Jesus which we may find much harder to accept.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus speaks of the narrow gate which leads to life. And His admonitions in the next section of our gospel reading are similarly severe and uncompromising. No doubt the language in which they are cast is intentionally strong and designed to shock into action. It is not a question of literally mutilating ourselves by cutting off hands, feet or eyes in order to enter heaven.

However, these parts of the body represent sins that may be committed with them. So a hand might be used to commit murder or theft, a foot might be used to go somewhere where we should not go and an eye might represent covetousness or lust.

The point that Jesus is seeking to drive home relates to the seriousness of sin which leads to hell and separation from God.

So we find two different sides to Jesus, one of broad acceptance and the other of narrow, seemingly impossible demands of the lifestyle which we are to adopt. But are there any bridges which can link these two sides? The first of these bridges might be to examine the context of these very severe admonitions in the second part of our gospel reading.

They are introduced and framed by this verse,

If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.

So the key to the toughness and severity of this verse and the ones which follow can perhaps be found in the vulnerability of the little ones. We should rightly be outraged by those who prey on and take advantage of those who are weak, vulnerable and unable to defend themselves.

But who are the little ones? In our own context, with the terrible history of abuse that has come to light in the church recently, we may think most naturally of children. And certainly children would be included as 'little ones'. But to limit the meaning in this way is probably too narrow. The reference may well include new disciples of Jesus whose faith is still relatively weak and unformed. It may even include any disciple of Jesus.

How is it that we (or someone else) might prove to be a stumbling block to another person's faith? We can of course think of obvious sins but the

meaning of this phrase is likely to be broader than that. The Greek word, skandalizo, from which we derive our English words scandal and scandalise, means that we cause other people to fail in their faith and to stop being disciples. The way that we live becomes a scandal to them causing them to lose their trust in Christ.

When we put it this way we can understand why Jesus's following words are so severe. And we can also ponder what it is in our own lifestyle which might be a scandal to others. We probably have all come across people who say to us in effect 'When I see how Christians I know behave it really puts me off the church and makes it very difficult for me to believe.' We may, of course, accept behaviour such as quarrelling and lack of kindness as just part of church life. But what impact is this having on those around us? Could this be a scandal which is being a stumbling block to someone else's faith?

Jesus' strong words mean that we must take such possibilities with great seriousness and, if necessary, take steps to change our behaviour.

But having said that how do we go about doing this? The second bridge that we might build is to recognise the practical ways in which we can be restored to our relationship with Christ and to wholeness with God even if we have not lived up to Jesus' standards.

In our reading from James' epistle and, in particular, his message about the need for us to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another we learn about the importance of belonging to the church and, this time, of the positive impact it can have on our lives.

For in enabling ourselves or others to change our ways it is the personal, vulnerable, caring touch which is more effective than any blanket messages delivered from afar off. James sets his recipe for spiritual restoration within a pastoral context where vulnerability and openness is possible. It is

assumed that everyone will have something to confess and in this sense everyone is in the same boat. And it is also assumed that prayer is effective in terms of healing and restoration. So this is a message of hope. All is not lost even if we have strayed from Christ.

And so James reminds us that we need each other. We must be on our guard against the dangers of becoming isolated as Christians. As we belong to one another in the church so if any of us wanders from the truth there are others who will, like the shepherd in Jesus' parable who carries the lost sheep back on his shoulders, search for that person and bring them back into the security of the fold. By doing so we '*save the sinner's soul from death*' and '*cover a multitude of sins*'.

We probably all choose from time to time to select one side of Jesus at the expense of the other. Sometimes we can be guilty of the intolerance and judgementalism of John. But at others we can be guilty of not taking seriously enough the ways in which our lifestyle can be a stumbling block to the faith of others.

However, we need to respond to and accept both sides of Jesus. As James reminds us one of the best ways in which we can do this is to foster and be part of a church family which is vulnerable enough for us to confess sins to one another and in which we can restore one another when any of us has strayed.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- To foster a church culture which enables vulnerability and spiritual restoration
- 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 the pandemic and to be agents of healing
- Response to fuel shortages
- 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

A hymn which picks up on the first part of our gospel reading concerning the breadth of Jesus' love is 'There is a wideness in God's mercy'.

Services for the next two weeks

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
Sunday 3 rd October	9.00 am	Communion, Yarlington
Sunday 3 rd October	11.00 am	Harvest Service, North Cadbury
Sunday 3 rd October	11.00 am	Harvest Service, South Cadbury
Sunday 3 rd October	11.00 am	Harvest Service, North Cheriton

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)