

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 128

Sunday 10th October 2021

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

Welcome

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

Scripture Passages

Amos 5: 6-7, 10-15

Seek the LORD and live,

or he will break out against the house of Joseph like fire,
and it will devour Bethel, with no one to quench it.

⁷ Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood,
and bring righteousness to the ground!

¹⁰ They hate the one who reproves in the gate,
and they abhor the one who speaks the truth.

¹¹ Therefore because you trample on the poor
and take from them levies of grain,
you have built houses of hewn stone,
but you shall not live in them;
you have planted pleasant vineyards,
but you shall not drink their wine.

¹² For I know how many are your transgressions,
and how great are your sins –
you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe,
and push aside the needy in the gate.

¹³ Therefore the prudent will keep silent in such a time;
for it is an evil time.

¹⁴ Seek good and not evil,
that you may live;
and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you,
just as you have said.

¹⁵ Hate evil and love good,
and establish justice in the gate;
it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts,
will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

Mark 10: 17-31

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

¹⁸ Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother.’”

²⁰ He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.”

²¹ Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”

²² When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

²³ Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”

²⁴ And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

²⁶ They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?”

²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

²⁸ Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.”

²⁹ Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age - houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions - and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

Reflection

Sometimes warnings about character traits or forms of behaviour seem to ‘wash off’ us because we believe that these apply to other people but not ourselves. In other words, we do not recognise ourselves in the picture that is being painted.

In our gospel passage a rich young man approaches Jesus. He is clearly a person of moral seriousness who knows the commandments of the Old Testament well and has sought to apply them. No doubt he would also have been familiar with our first reading from the prophet Amos and with other similar passages in the Old Testament.

Amos warns us about the dangers of wealth. He connects wealth, injustice and oppression. The worshippers whom Amos addressed were certainly very punctilious in their religious observances. They came to the right festivals and sang the right songs but when they went away again their lives were essentially the same as they had been before.

So they refuse to listen to the person who speaks to them about their lack of justice and indeed respond to that person with hatred,

They hate the one who reproveth in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks the truth.

And the wealth which they enjoyed was based on the suffering of others.

They took levies of grain from the poor which they did not need in order to live in their own fine houses and to plant beautiful vineyards. This unjust and oppressive behaviour Amos describes in frank and outspoken terms as trampling on the poor.

This lack of concern for justice spilled over into influencing the decisions of the law courts. So bribes were offered and the needy were pushed aside '*in the gate*'. In the cities of the time the gates and gatehouse provided a shady place where the elders of the city could decide the cases of those who came to them for justice. So this phrase means that the justice was decided not on the basis of right and wrong but on the basis of who could pay the most for it.

It is a grim portrayal of a lifestyle where the poor and weak can be mistreated without the restraining force of legal sanctions. It is a lifestyle in which the value of money has greater force and power than moral values.

These are strong words but I wonder whether the rich young man would have recognised himself in Amos' portrayal? Maybe not.

For he was indeed a person of uprightness and moral integrity, at least according to his own estimation. When reminded by Jesus of the Commandments he had no difficulty in responding, '*Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.*' Not many of us could say the same. And no doubt the disciples who witnessed his encounter with Jesus were impressed by this.

However the rich young man recognises that there is something missing from his life, eternal life or a living relationship with God. As he is someone of moral integrity and also of social standing and influence it is perhaps not unnatural that he thinks he is able to do something specific about this lack in his life. And so his question to Jesus is simple and direct, “*Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*”

Very probably at this stage the young man would never have guessed that his wealth might have something to do with the answer to this question.

After all, his life had, in his estimation been irreproachable. He had kept the Ten Commandments ever since he was a boy. And he might have thought that other people should hear Amos’ prophetic rebuke of the wealthy who oppressed the poor and denied them justice but surely not him. He no doubt had always tried to use his wealth wisely and to treat everyone else with kindness and respect.

And we might give a similar answer if we were challenged on this. However, we can only really know where we stand when we need to make a painful and difficult decision. For there are times when we have to choose between doing what we know is the right thing and what is of most immediate financial advantage.

For instance, we might be renting out a property and have a tenant whom we know is struggling in their personal circumstances. Maybe he or she has a young family or is widowed and without any external means of support. We know that we would be perfectly entitled legally to ask for an increased rent. But although this is legal should we do this morally? We might be tempted to say something in those circumstances like ‘Well, I know that I should not really ask so and so for anything more. They have been very loyal after all. But I am entitled to this. And I do have my own needs to think about. Yes, I do this with a heavy heart and I know it goes against the

grain but on this occasion I feel that I have just no option...' Except we do have an option and a different choice that we could make.

The rich young man may or may not have had occasions in his life when he made such choices. But certainly when Jesus looked at him he knew what was holding him back from following Him.

Jesus looks at him with love. There are other occasions such as when Jesus has to make a decision about the woman caught in adultery when it seems that Jesus consciously pauses the action. Why does He do this? One explanation might be that, on such occasions, He is asking His Father for some word of wisdom or knowledge which will strike right to the heart of what seems a complex problem and bring resolution and clarity.

So when Jesus looks at the rich young man He sees into his heart and discovers exactly what is holding him back. His words which follow are very specific and challenging, *"You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."*

It is his wealth which is more important to him than God. Yes, maybe as a general rule he is generous but in a crisis what would he choose? The claims of money or of justice? Where does his heart lie? The power of wealth over his life needs to be broken so that true discipleship can take the central place in his life.

The rich young man was held back by the power and claims of wealth. That may be our issue as well. But there are other issues which may hold us back from wholehearted discipleship.

What, for instance, about a concern with our own reputation? That seemed to be the central issue for Nicodemus, a respectable member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling religious body of the day. First of all, he visits Jesus

by night so that he is not seen by anyone else. Later on he seems to become a bit more courageous as he challenges the opinion of the Pharisees. And still later he helps to take Jesus' dead body away for burial. This is perhaps a sign that he has become a true disciple although he still seems wary about being too open about this.

Concern for our own reputation and the desire for respectability may play a part in our lives of which we are unaware until, as is the case with money, we are brought to a place where we need to choose between preserving our own reputation and doing what we believe God is calling us to do.

Or again what holds us back may be intellectual pride. Can the answers to life's deepest questions really be as simple as, to paraphrase the words of the famous hymn, just to trust and obey Jesus. Surely there must be more to it than this? Surely I must do something to inherit eternal life, something of which I or other people can be proud? What would other people make of such a simple answer?

Whatever the specific issue may be for us this portrayal of the encounter between Jesus and the rich young man rightly challenges us at a personal level. It causes us to question what for us might have a higher priority than serving God and following Jesus?

Certainly what happened made a great impression on the disciples. If this very upright, seemingly irreproachable person would find it harder to enter the kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle because of his wealth then what would happen to everyone else? These standards seem impossible.

And indeed they are. When the disciples ask '*who can be saved?*', Jesus responds with the simple and unequivocal message that salvation is not possible for anyone but is only possible through the work of God.

Eternal life, salvation, a relationship with God all come as a gift. There is nothing that we can do to earn them. Perhaps we have had the experience of enquiring about the Christian faith only to go away like the rich young man shocked and grieving because we think that it is not possible for us.

But it is possible for God. And we may also have had the experience of being 'recalled', a moment in which previously insuperable obstacles (such as an intellectual scepticism) simply melted away in the presence of a moment of pure encounter with God's goodness and grace.

Such an encounter may, of course, have taken place at a very specific moment which changed our life suddenly and for ever. But for others of us (perhaps like Nicodemus) this may have been a very gradual process which we cannot even put a specific date on. We simply know now that we do believe. And that is enough. It is a work of God.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- To be able to put God first in our lives and to ask God's help with any issue that holds us back from this
- Thanksgiving for Harvest
- COVID plans for winter and our own planning for the Christmas period
- Continued thanksgiving for the care, skill and courage of NHS workers and that they will not be overwhelmed by the demands on them in the winter period
- Those whom we know who are facing illnesses of all kinds and have recently been bereaved
- 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
- North Cadbury Church School and other local schools
- For Elliscombe House in Higher Holton as it prepares for reopening in the near future
- Prayers and thanksgiving for contributions to the foodbanks and for those helping to take these to the foodbanks.

Hymn

One of the hymns set for this Sunday is ‘Take my life and let it be.’

Services in October

Sunday 10 th October	9.30 am Communion, North Cheriton
Sunday 10 th October	9.30 am Matins, Blackford
Sunday 10 th October	11.00 am Harvest Service, Galhampton
Sunday 10 th October	11.00 am Harvest Service, Holton
Sunday 10 th October	4.00 pm Harvest Service, Bratton Seymour
Sunday 17 th October	9.30 am Communion, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 17 th October	11.00 am Communion, Maperton
Sunday 17 th October	11.00 am Sunday Worship, North Cadbury
Sunday 17 th October	6.30 pm Evensong, Yarlinton
Sunday 24 th October	8.00 am Communion, Blackford
Sunday 24 th October	9.30 am Communion, South Cadbury
Sunday 24 th October	9.30 am Matins, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 24 th October	9.30 am Sunday Worship, North Cheriton
Sunday 24 th October	11.00 am Communion, North Cadbury

Sunday 24 th October	11.00 am Communion, Holton
Sunday 24 th October	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Yarlington
Sunday 24 th October	6.30 pm Evening Service, Galhampton
Sunday 31 st October	8.00 am Communion, Blackford
Sunday 31 st October	9.30 am Family Service, North Cheriton
Sunday 31 st October	11.00 am Family Service, Maperton
Sunday 31 st October	4.00 pm Evensong, 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 October 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)