

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 130

Sunday 24th October 2021

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

Welcome

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

Scripture Passages

Jeremiah 31: 7-9

For thus says the LORD:

Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,

and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;

proclaim, give praise, and say,

“Save, O LORD, your people, the remnant of Israel.”

⁸ See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,

and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,

among them the blind and the lame,

those with child and those in labour, together;

a great company, they shall return here.

⁹ With weeping they shall come,

and with consolations I will lead them back,

I will let them walk by brooks of water,

in a straight path in which they shall not stumble;

for I have become a father to Israel,

and Ephraim is my firstborn.

Mark 10: 46-52

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁸ Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁹ Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.”

And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” ⁵⁰ So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.

⁵¹ Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?”

The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.”

⁵² Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Reflection

We all have areas of weakness however strong we may be in other ways. For instance, we may be very good at passing exams but on a driving test we may blithely drive pass a ‘No Entry’ sign. The reason? Too much listening to what you are being told to do. In another area of life this might be a strength but when it comes to a driving test you are supposed to spot that the examiner is telling you to do something illegal.

And our areas of weakness can be ones where our greatest learning and development takes place. God can test us by leading us into a place where

we simply do not have the answers. If we respond by coming to rely more deeply on God then such times can be ones of spiritual growth and development.

But are our weaknesses viewed by other people in the same way? The world tends to favour those who are strong. An admission or a past record of weakness can cause us to be passed over for jobs or to be seen critically by other people. Doors may be closed to us which may never open again.

But the perspectives of God and of the world are different. Indeed they can be diametrically opposed to one another. Jesus tells us that it is a fundamental principle of the Kingdom of God that the first shall be last and the last shall be first. Or to put it in another way those whom we perceive to be strong are in fact weak and those whom we perceive to be weak are in fact strong.

We see this principle operating in the way that Jesus calls and chooses His disciples. A couple of weeks ago we looked at a meeting between Jesus and a rich young man who was very scrupulous in following God's commandments. Surely he would be a most valuable recruit, a person whose money and influence would be very helpful in furthering the cause of the Kingdom?

And this week another meeting is recorded, this time with a blind beggar sitting by the roadside called Bartimaeus. What could this person have to offer? We might be tempted to agree with the verdict of the surrounding crowd that Bartimaeus should simply keep quiet and let Jesus get on with more important business.

And yet in fact it is Bartimaeus who ends up as a new disciple while the rich young man is sent away shocked and grieving. The first shall be last and the last shall be first.

And this principle of the first being last and the last first can also be found running through the Old Testament.

In our passage from Jeremiah we find the faithful 'remnant' of God's people who have been taken into exile in Babylon being encouraged in their difficult circumstances. God promises them that they will return to their own land. And prominent among this remnant who will return are the blind and the lame. People like Bartimaeus.

In Babylon the prevailing values were those of military and political power and strength. Such values would not have highlighted or given prominence to the weak and disabled such as the blind and the lame. Rather than being given a place of prominence in their communities, it is more likely that these people would be hidden from sight and marginalised.

However, God's standards are different. The blind and the lame are not simply included in the community of the faithful, they are given an honoured place. Those whose worth might not be recognised in conventional terms are nevertheless highly valued by God.

The care that God has for the weakest and most vulnerable members of this community of faith is supported by two well known descriptions of God's character.

The first is that of God as our shepherd. Most famously this image occurs in Psalm 23, The Lord is my Shepherd, and also in Jesus' description of Himself as the Good Shepherd.

Shepherds lead, guide and protect. And so in this passage from Jeremiah we learn how God leads His people '*by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble*'.

And the second is that of God as our father. Jesus of course addressed God as his Father and encourages us as Christians to do the same. And Jeremiah too sees the relationship between God and Israel as that of a father to a first born child. This again is a reminder of the special care and protection which God gives to His children.

Turning to the encounter between Jesus and Bartimaeus we can see how different His priorities are from those of the crowd and what it means in practical terms for the first to be last and the last first.

Jesus and His disciples are on the road to Jerusalem. They reach the nearby town of Jericho, another important staging post on the approach to Jerusalem. A seemingly insignificant blind beggar is sitting by the roadside. But we are alerted to the fact that this person may be more important than might appear at first sight.

For he is not just another anonymous beggar. He has a name and a family, Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus. Names highlight the fact that as human beings we each have a unique and valuable identity. The recording of the name and the fact that Bartimaeus became a disciple may well be an indication that, in time, Bartimaeus became a well known member of the early church.

And as Bartimaeus learns that it is Jesus who is approaching, he cries out with a pure and direct cry for help, "*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*". He knows that he has nothing, no area of strength, which he can offer to Jesus. All that he has is a very pure and undiluted acknowledgement of his own need for help. Bartimaeus' cry for help might be compared to many of the cries of faith which can be found in the Psalms.

In contrast to such a direct expression of faith the crowd around Bartimaeus take the view that it is a distraction for Jesus' time to be taken up in helping

such an insignificant person. Surely Jesus has better things to do! And so they sternly order Bartimaeus to be quiet.

However far from being put off by this Bartimaeus simply redoubles his efforts to gain Jesus' attention by crying out even more loudly.

And as so often Jesus' response to the weak and vulnerable is very different from those guardians of the status quo who tell such people not to make a fuss or to interfere with what they see as Jesus' priorities for the day. Instead Jesus simply asks that Bartimaeus be called to Him. At this the crowd change their tune and encourage Bartimaeus to go to Jesus.

The spiritual need and faith of Bartimaeus is once more demonstrated by his eagerness to come to Jesus as he throws off his cloak. Such eagerness might remind us of the father in the Prodigal Son as he too forgets his dignity and runs down the road to greet his lost son. Bartimaeus' desire for healing is all consuming.

But for all that and despite the visible nature of Bartimaeus' need Jesus asks Bartimaeus "*What do you want me to do for you?*". Why should Jesus ask a question to which the answer seems so obvious?

But it is important that Bartimaeus does not simply passively receive healing but is able to be open with Jesus in articulating and acknowledging his need. We also need to be able to own our areas of need and weakness.

As a person of faith, Bartimaeus' reply is open and straightforward. He just wants to see. This is a model for us in our prayers reminding us that we too need to be simple and direct and indeed to speak the obvious to God.

Jesus also responds directly and immediately. Bartimaeus has been open in acknowledging his need for healing. And his faith results not simply in his healing but in his being made well. Other translations speak of being made whole. The underlying Greek word means to save. So Bartimaeus has

received more from God than simply the healing of his physical blindness. His relationship with God has been restored so that in spiritual terms he is now a whole person. And he works out this wholeness by becoming a follower of Jesus.

As we reflect on these two passages and on the Kingdom principle that the first shall be last and the last shall be first we might ask ourselves how far we attend and give value to those who are weakest and most insignificant? Would we follow the crowd in thinking of their needs as an unwelcome distraction from the 'real' business of church? Or would we be willing, like Jesus, to stop what we are doing and to listen and learn from such people?

And then again as Jesus asks Bartimaeus what he wants, we might ask ourselves what we might say if Jesus was to stand before us and ask us what we want Him to do for us. Would we be as open and direct as Bartimaeus in admitting our true needs and areas of weakness? Or might we be tempted to think that these are not worth God's attention or even perhaps that there is nothing that God can do about them?

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- To be open and direct in admitting our needs before God and to notice and take care of those who are weak and vulnerable
- 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

A well known hymn set for this Sunday which celebrates our complete dependence on God’s grace is ‘Amazing grace.’

Notice about forthcoming service at Maperton

Please note that the service at Maperton on Sunday 31st October previously advertised as a Family Service has now been changed to a Matins service accompanied by the organ.

Services in October

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 Matins, 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)