

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 141

Sunday 9th January 2022

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

Welcome

Welcome to this edition of Cutting Edge Camelot.

Scripture Passages

Psalm 29

Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

² Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;
worship the LORD in holy splendour.

³ The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD, over mighty waters.

⁴ The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.

⁵ The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

⁶ He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
and Sirion like a young wild ox.

⁷ The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.

⁸ The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

⁹ The voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl,
and strips the forest bare;
and in his temple all say, “Glory!”

¹⁰ The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.

¹¹ May the LORD give strength to his people!
May the LORD bless his people with peace!

Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶ John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Reflection

In a different part of the world which is much more prone to violent storms a young boy who loved to observe nature sat close to the sliding door of his family’s living room fascinated by the thunder and lightning display going on outside. He sat enthralled with his nose on the glass door. Suddenly there was a tremendous flash of sheet lightning and a blast of thunder that shook whole house. The boy jumped back, landing in the middle of the room, wide eyed and with the single word ‘Wow!’ on his lips.¹

I wonder what emotions this boy or indeed any of us would have experienced in these circumstances? Probably there would have been a

¹ This story is recounted by Gerald Wilson in his Commentary on the Psalms in the NIV Application Commentary series, Vol 1, p.510.

mixture of feelings such as amazement, terror and awe. The boy no doubt learnt from this experience that thunder and lightning are more than just a beautiful and impressive display of natural phenomena, these elements of nature are also powerful and potentially destructive.

Stories like this can help us to understand something of the emotional and spiritual atmosphere of Psalm 29 which is the Psalm set for this Sunday. Key to an understanding of this psalm is an awareness and declaration of God's glory. Indeed the word 'glory' recurs in each of the first few verses of the psalm.

And the words which are linked with 'glory' help to explain what it means. Words and concepts such as strength, holiness and splendour. God is powerful and mighty, awe inspiring and morally pure.

These aspects of God's character are undoubtedly challenging. We might find it easier to accept a more domesticated version of God, someone whom we may feel is more on our level. On the other hand how far would such a God be able to help us in our times of trouble or difficulty?

For alongside its celebration of God's majesty there runs in Psalm 29 a stark and vivid portrayal of the powerful and potentially destructive forces of nature, the 'mighty waters'. But we are reminded that however violent such forces might be, in the end it is God who is all powerful, whose voice is 'over the waters'.

God's voice and God's power continue to be linked in the verses which follow. So the voice of the Lord is 'full of majesty' and powerful enough to break apart the strong and durable cedar trees, to strip the forest bare and to shake the wilderness. This is not a God to be trifled with just as the young boy learnt that displays of thunder and lightning were not simply a spectacular show in the sky. But as we learn to treat God with respect and awe so also we can look to God for strength when this is needed.

So the appropriate response in worship to this powerful display of God's might is the simple cry of 'Glory!' The message of the Psalm is one of God's ultimate authority and power, God's kingship. However unruly and potentially destructive the flood waters may be God is more powerful than these, for 'The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.'

The Psalm concludes with God's blessing and invocation of strength and peace. This means that although God's power may be awe inspiring we are also able to look to Him for our own strength when we need this.

This psalm also reminds us of how important it is for us to hear God's voice. And this provides a connection with our gospel reading, the narrative of the baptism of Jesus.

For at this starting point of Jesus' ministry, heaven is opened and the Holy Spirit descends bodily on Jesus in the form of a dove. And a voice comes from heaven saying, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

The voice of God connects the two readings but there is also a contrast to be found between them. First of all, although the occasion of Jesus' baptism was in its own way a dramatic moment the atmosphere and mood also seems much quieter and gentler when compared with the thunder, the shattering of trees and the shaking of the ground which the psalm describes.

And we also find that in Jesus' baptism the voice of God focusses not so much on the way in which God works through Creation but on God's choice of Jesus as His Son. Jesus is declared to be God's beloved Son. It is a statement of God's lasting love for both Jesus and for us. For when we come to faith in Christ we too share Jesus' status as a beloved child of God. This can in its own way also be a challenging truth for us to accept. We

may feel that we need to earn God's love or that we must try to be 'good enough' for God. And yet this unconditional affirmation of God's love came to Jesus before He had done anything for God in His public ministry.

What is true for Jesus also holds good for us in our life of faith. God's love comes to us unconditionally and unearned.

We may ask also how we ourselves hear God's voice. Perhaps for many of us the starting point might be to hear God through the beauties and wonders of the natural world. Quite often people may say that my church is this hill or this wood. And indeed it is possible to get close to God in this way.

And yet when we say this I wonder whether we truly take into account the potential destructiveness of natural forces as well as their undoubted beauty. As sadly floods become more and more part of our everyday lives do we not need to be reminded of the psalmist's truth that God is enthroned over the waters and over the flood?

And do we not also yearn to know God at a more personal level? For it is the work of the Holy Spirit to guide us to Jesus Christ and to recognise that in Him we find the beloved Son of God. In this recognition we also realise that we are ourselves are deeply and personally loved by God. How do we come to this point in our lives? This can only come through the Holy Spirit. It may come all of a sudden at one dramatic moment or it may come as the culmination of a gradual process of spiritual awakening. In the end the process is not what is lastingly important. What however does matter is that we hear and receive for ourselves those same words of infinite strength and comfort as are spoken to Jesus at His baptism, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

Tristram

Masks are still back

Just a reminder to everyone that under the government's Plan B covid restrictions masks are once more mandatory in churches.

Points for Prayers

- Hearing God's voice to assure us that Jesus is God's Beloved Son and that we too are loved in Him
- Continuing concerns about the rise in cases of the Omicron variant and the pressures that this places on everyone
- 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
- Our curate Anna and her family as they prepare for their move to Cornwall
- 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
- For Elliscombe House in Higher Holton now reopened and for its first residents
- For North Cadbury Church School and other local schools as they prepare for their new term
- Prayers and thanksgiving for contributions to the foodbanks and for those helping to take these to the foodbanks.

Hymn

A hymn which speaks of the impact of the voice of Jesus is 'I heard the voice of Jesus say.'

Services for this Sunday and next

Sunday 9 th January	9.30 am Communion, Galhampton
Sunday 9 th January	9.30 am Communion, North Cheriton
Sunday 9 th January	9.30 am Matins, Blackford
Sunday 9 th January	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Holton
Sunday 16 th January	9.30 am Communion, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 16 th January	11.00 am Communion, Maperton
Sunday 16 th January	11.00 am Sunday Worship, North Cadbury
Sunday 16 th January	4.00 pm Evensong, Yarlington

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 December and January editions of Excalibur have 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)