

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 155

Sunday 24th April 2022

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

Welcome

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

Scripture Passages

Acts 5: 27-32

When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, ²⁸ saying, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us."

²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. ³⁰ The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."

John 20: 19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to

them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.”

²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Reflection

How does faith come to us? For some it may come in the form of a very direct and powerful experience. For others it might come much more gently in a gradual process over the course of time.

The first disciples certainly had a very direct and powerful experience of Jesus’ resurrection on that first Easter Sunday. Jesus does not hold back from demonstrating to them that it is really Him by showing them His hands

and His side. Luke's gospel even mentions that He eats a piece of broiled fish in their presence to show that He is not a ghost.

So Jesus does not want to leave His disciples in any doubt as to the reality of His bodily resurrection. After all, they are to be the first and key witnesses to the Resurrection for other people. So it is important that they are able to base this witness on a powerful and direct personal experience.

And yet one disciple was not present during this powerful encounter. He missed out on what all the others had. This disciple was Thomas whom we sometimes and perhaps unfairly call Doubting Thomas.

Thomas of course could have relied on the witness of his fellow disciples and have enquired no further as to the reality of their accounts. Maybe even this is what he should have done if he had complete trust in them.

But this is not what he does. And perhaps we can sympathise with him in this. For he wants his own direct and personal experience of the risen Lord Jesus, one which is not based on the accounts of other people.

In this way at a positive level Thomas becomes a model for a particular kind of disciple. One who hungers and thirsts after direct personal experience of God. One who is not satisfied with second best. One who is prepared to argue and wrestle with God.

So when the other disciples tell him 'We have seen the Lord', he in his turn responds 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

And indeed Thomas is rewarded for desiring such a first hand and compelling experience of the risen Lord. Jesus invites him to put his hand into His side and Thomas then responds with a confession of faith which has been described as the highwater mark of faith in the New Testament.

Nowhere previously has Jesus been addressed so directly as this. Thomas says to Him, 'My Lord and my God.' Thomas' words leave us in no doubt that he believes Jesus to be God in human form.

And yet powerful personal experience is not by itself a guide to the depth or fullness of a person's faith. Some people have very powerful experiences which lead them to faith but others do not. They may simply rely on the word of scripture or trust what other people say without feeling the need to wrestle with or check out such accounts in such a dramatic way.

This is another way of coming to faith. Which way we take may depend a great deal on personal temperament or indeed circumstances. Thomas no doubt felt excluded and left out from the very powerful and direct experience which the others had had of the risen Lord.

But even if we have had a very powerful and direct experience of God we cannot bottle up or freeze such experiences so that they stay with us with the same intensity. We cannot remain on the mountaintop for ever. Peter, for instance, tried to freeze in time the intense experience of the Transfiguration by building three shelters, one each for Moses, Jesus and Elijah. But still the disciples had to go down the mountain and to live out their faith within the challenges and mundane nature of everyday life (such as quarrels on a dusty road). These would eventually lead to the Cross.

So for us as well, powerful experiences will fade. We cannot and must not try to hang on to them, saying this is what happened ten years ago or so. And yet such experiences leave an imprint behind them if we truly accept the lessons they bring with them.

And so Jesus reminds Thomas and the others that though they and Thomas are indeed blessed in what they have received others who come after them may not be given the same powerful personal experience. Their faith will rest on what is written down in scripture by these first apostolic witnesses. For them it will be a matter of simple, calm accepting trust and faith. They

too will be blessed. For there are no first or second class citizens in the Kingdom of Heaven. And so Jesus says to the disciples 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

And again John's gospel assures us that what is written and handed down in the gospel is enough to bring us to a living knowledge of and trust in Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God.

In our passage from the Acts of the Apostles we see how this powerful personal experience of the risen Lord Jesus has matured into a simple acceptance and trust in Jesus as risen Lord and Saviour and how this affects the lives and ministries of the first apostles.

The apostles are told not to minister or teach in Jesus' name. They are even put in prison in an attempt to teach them this lesson. However, they are released by angels. And undeterred they simply begin ministering in Jesus' name again.

And when challenged by the authorities they distinguish between God's authority which they have known so clearly through the Resurrection appearances and human authority. If the two are in conflict with one another (as they are here) then it is God's authority which must prevail and be obeyed.

The undeterred witness of the early apostles causes us to ask ourselves how deep our own trust and faith in Jesus really is. Faced with such a challenge would we simply back down or would we continue to work out what we believed to be God's purposes for our lives?

Some of us may have had more direct and powerful experiences of faith than others. But that is not what is at issue. Rather the question is how deep our trust in Jesus has become over the years. Such trust may have been

nurtured through other people or through reading the words of scripture or through direct experience. But what have we made of all of this? How deeply have we allowed our faith in Jesus to affect and govern the course of our lives?

Tristram

Bishop's Visit and Service

Our Acting Diocesan Bishop, Bishop Ruth, will be visiting the Camelot Parishes this Tuesday 26th April with two of her advisers, Rob Walrond and Caroline Gray. The visit will include a visit to North Cadbury Church School in the afternoon.

The day will conclude with an evening service at St Michael's North Cadbury following which there will be tea, coffee and cakes. All are encouraged and invited to come to this service. It will be a chance to hear from and meet with our Bishop.

Points for Prayers

- Coming to a point of deep faith and trust in Jesus and the Resurrection
- Peace and justice to prevail in the conflict between Russia and the Ukraine and for humanitarian efforts to help all those harmed by the conflict
- Continuing prevalence of covid cases and continued thanksgiving for the care, skill and courage of all healthcare workers
- Those whom we know who are facing illnesses of all kinds and have recently been bereaved
- Bishop Ruth's visit and service at North Cadbury this Tuesday

- 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 the Bishop's visit to North Cadbury church school on Tuesday
- Prayers and thanksgiving for contributions to the foodbanks and for those helping to take these to the foodbanks.

Hymn

A hymn which we will sing at Compton Pauncefoot this week celebrating a deep trust in Jesus is 'Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine.'

Services for this week and next

Sunday 24 th April	8.00 am Communion, Blackford
Sunday 24 th April	9.30 am Communion, South Cadbury
Sunday 24 th April	9.30 am Matins, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 24 th April	9.30 am Morning Worship, North Cheriton
Sunday 24 th April	11.00 am Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 24 th April	11.00 am Communion, Holton
Sunday 24 th April	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Yarlington
Sunday 24 th April	6.30 pm Evening Service, Galhampton
Tuesday 26 th April	4.30 pm Evening Service, North Cadbury (with the Bishop of Taunton)
Sunday 1 st May	9.00 am Communion, Yarlington
Sunday 1 st May	9.30 am Camelot Matins, North Cheriton
Sunday 1 st May	11 am Group Communion, North Cadbury

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 April edition of Excalibur has now been published online at camelotparishes.co.uk.

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)