

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 169

Sunday 31st July 2022

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

Welcome

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

Scripture Passage

Luke 12: 13-21

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.”

¹⁴ But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” ¹⁵ And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

¹⁶ Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷ And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’

¹⁸ “Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’

²⁰ “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’

²¹ “So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

Reflection

In the era of the Soviet Union I remember an advertisement from a prominent life insurance firm of the day. At that time, leaders of the Soviet Union were becoming older and older. And when one leader died in office, he was replaced by another who was almost as old or maybe even older. Clearly it was inadvisable for any of them to retire.

And so the insurance firm showed a photograph of all the leaders together in Moscow as their troops and military capabilities paraded past on their annual review. And in this photograph there was a caption of one of the old men turning aside from the parade to say wistfully 'I wish I had taken out that pensions plan with whatever the name of the firm was'.

And this was resonant on two levels. First in the context of the day it provided some comic relief at the very real threat of nuclear annihilation, symbolised by all the military equipment which was being marched past. This threat of nuclear annihilation is of course still with us today but it has perhaps receded more into the background while other threats to human survival such as environmental disaster have become more prominent.

But secondly who does not dream of a care free retirement which is secured by ample material resources?

And so although the rich man in Jesus' parables undoubtedly has more resources than most we can nevertheless sympathise with his response when his land produces a bumper crop.

His instinct is to save up the abundance that he has in the present to provide for the future. For who knows what the future will bring? He wants to give himself the best chance possible of being financially secure whatever the future might hold. So he decides to store up his crops by building

bigger barns. Then he can always sell or use this in future years without any more trouble or care on his part.

And though this man's wealth may be great surely his pattern of thought is one that we can follow easily enough. It is about making a plan for the future and not spending all we have in the present. In principle, this seems prudent and sensible.

And his underlying philosophy of life, even if we may not agree with it, does not seem so extraordinary. It might reflect the way in which many people would approach life. For if we have no vision of any higher meaning or purpose in life, what are we to do with ourselves? One very common answer to this question is simply to enjoy life for ourselves for as long as we can and as much as we can. Eat, drink and be merry as the rich man says to himself. And that does reflect a certain wisdom of the day being a popularised interpretation of Epicurus, a significant philosopher of that time.

And yet Jesus' description of the rich man is that far from being wise he is a fool. So what is so foolish about this man's approach to possessions and indeed to life itself?

There is, first of all, the foolishness of believing that it possible to live any form of meaningful life in isolation from other people.

For the portrait of the rich man is of a person who is entirely cut off from other people. This is both foolish and indeed tragic.

The man's isolation is most graphically demonstrated when he addresses his own soul

'And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'

This dialogue is a purely internal one. There is no attempt to involve either his family or his neighbours in the decision which he makes. Indeed we do not know whether this man has a family. Certainly, the challenge that comes to him at the end of the parable, '*And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?*', suggests that he may not have any obvious heirs.

But quite apart from this, the picture is a sad one. It is of a life lived without any sense of responsibility towards other people. Surely, even if such a life is filled with selfish pleasures it will at its heart always be empty and lacking in purpose. The result is a self-imposed loneliness and isolation. This is surely a foolish choice to make.

But then there is a further form of foolishness. It is a foolishness which can have even deeper implications. It is a trap into which even those who maintain good connections with their family, friends and neighbours can fall.

And this is the belief that someone's life is entirely their own possession and that they can do what they like with it. Their choices are theirs to make and should not be constrained in any way.

And a related belief is that a person's material possessions are their absolute property and also theirs to deal with as they choose.

However, when a crisis comes in anyone's life, such as the news of a serious illness, we very soon become aware of the flimsy basis of these assumptions. We can find ourselves helpless in those circumstances and wishing we could make bargains with God that are impossible. As Elizabeth I of England is reputed to have said at the end of her life, '*All my possessions for a moment of time.*'

And so when the rich man is told that this very night his life is being demanded of him, we are presented with the truth which applies to all of us

that our lives are not our own but rather on loan from God. And this is a loan of which God can demand repayment at any time. So we need to live our lives mindful of this truth.

And nor do our material possessions truly belong to us. They too are on loan and one day, when we leave this life, these possessions will be passed on to other people to enjoy. So what is the sense in piling up excess possessions purely for our own use and enjoyment?

That is not to say we cannot enjoy material possessions. However, we always need to recognise that they are a gift from God even if we have ourselves worked hard for them. In the parable it is the land which produces abundantly. So however much work the rich man may have put into the cultivation of his land in the end it is the processes of nature for which he needs to give thanks. But he fails to recognise this truth and this too is foolish.

So if the rich man is indeed foolish where can we find true wisdom when we think of our material possessions?

We need to start from a different point than that of the rich man. And this means, first of all, that unlike him we start by recognising our responsibilities and connections with others. And this is simply living in the real world. As the poet John Donne put it, '*no man is an island entire of itself.*'

And when we do recognise these connections then we realise that giving and generosity honours this reality and so is true wisdom. As we give to others we also recognise that our lives themselves are not our own. They too are gifts from God. So we need to allow God to direct the course of our lives. As we are grateful for God's gifts both of life and of material blessings so we become generous and rich in relation both to God and to other people.

For what will truly last in our lives is our relationship with God. If we are rich towards God then we are rich in a way that truly lasts. For as Jesus reminds us, the value of our lives does not consist in the abundance of our possessions.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- Wisdom in relation to our lives and material possessions
- Need to choose new Prime Minister
- Rising number of new covid cases
- Conflict between Russia and the Ukraine
- Those whom we know who are facing illnesses of all kinds and have recently been bereaved
- For the Deanery in considering Pastoral Reorganisation
- For Elliscombe House in Higher Holton now reopened and for its first residents
- For refreshment for teachers, children and parents of North Cadbury church school and other local schools in their school holidays
- Prayers and thanksgiving for contributions to the foodbanks and for those helping to take these to the foodbanks.

Hymn

One hymn chosen for today which expresses our thanksgiving to God is 'Now thank we all our God.'

Services for this week and next

Sunday 31st July

8.00 am Communion, Blackford

Sunday 31 st July	9.30 am Family Service, North Cheriton
Sunday 31 st July	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Bratton Seymour
Sunday 31 st July	11.00 am Matins, Maperton
Sunday 31 st July	6.30 pm Evensong, Galhampton
Sunday 7 th August	9.00 am Communion, Yarlington
Sunday 7 th August	9.30 am Camelot Matins, North Cheriton
Sunday 7 th August	11.00 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 August 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)