

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 174

Sunday 25th September 2022

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

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday. We pick up on our usual pattern of readings following the period of national mourning for the Queen.

Scripture Passages

1 Timothy 6: 6-19

Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; ⁸ but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. ⁹ But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

¹¹ But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you ¹⁴ to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which he will bring about at the right time - he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. ¹⁶ It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no

one has ever seen or can see; to him be honour and eternal dominion.
Amen.

¹⁷ As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, ¹⁹ thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

Luke 16: 19-31

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores.

²² “The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’

²⁵ “But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶ Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’

²⁷ “He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house - ²⁸ for I have five brothers - that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’

²⁹ “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’

³⁰ “He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’

³¹ “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Reflection

Three weeks ago our readings presented us with the challenge of how we use our possessions in the light of the many pressing needs that surround us both locally and globally. What are we to do? It is easy to become either crippled by guilt or complacently indifferent but does God offer us an alternative?

And now as we resume our normal pattern of readings following the end of the period of national mourning for the Queen the same theme remains prominent. It is clearly present in the parable which Jesus tells about the rich man and a poor man, Lazarus.

At first sight this parable might seem like a blanket condemnation of wealth. Does the rich man represent all rich people and Lazarus represent all poor people? If so then this parable makes very uncomfortable reading. For in global terms it is likely that we fall into the category of rich people however unlikely we may feel this to be when we compare ourselves to our immediate neighbours.

If so is the message of the parable that the only hope for us lies in divesting ourselves of our riches to the extent that we ourselves become poor and lie in the streets?

However, when we look at this parable a bit closer we find that the rich man is not simply rich. He has made certain decisions as to how he will use his wealth. He leads a lifestyle of lavishness and pleasure which bears no

relation to what his everyday needs. He dresses in purple and feasts sumptuously every day.

This lifestyle of excessive luxury is clearly not a use of wealth which God commends. And we also learnt from the parable of the rich fool which we studied recently that another response to wealth, of storing and hoarding it up for the future, is also not commended.

So if these are not right ways to use wealth what are the alternatives? We will look at that question further when we come to the other reading for today from Paul's letter to Timothy.

But before we do so there is another aspect of the rich man's lifestyle which we may find disturbing. There is no record that the rich man was obviously or intentionally unkind to the poor man, Lazarus.

Maybe there is something of a clue as to the rich man's attitude towards Lazarus in his lifetime in the request he makes to Abraham after both of them have died. He asks that Lazarus should be sent to visit him in order to give him some water to comfort him. Could there be some arrogance underlying this request in so far as he thinks that in the afterlife he can still order Lazarus around as a person of lesser wealth and social status than himself?

However, other than that suggestion, the parable does not describe how the rich man saw Lazarus in his lifetime. And that is disturbing. Perhaps the rich man simply chose not to see Lazarus, not to notice him lying covered in sores at his gate. Perhaps rather than being deliberately cruel he was simply indifferent. Perhaps he told himself that there was nothing he could do for Lazarus even if he had wanted to do anything.

And yet compassion in this parable for the plight of Lazarus in his lifetime does exist. It is shown in the form of the dogs who come and lick Lazarus'

sores. This too is shocking. Even dogs have more compassion for the poor man than one of his fellow human beings.

As we think about this characterisation of the rich man we will reflect on our own lives. How far do we, rather than being actively cruel, try to shut out the plight of those who are in need from our lives? And what is it that we can do about them?

So when they both die their respective fates are reversed. The rich man who had received good things in his lifetime is in agony in Hades. But Lazarus who had endured a wretched life is now comforted as he rests with Abraham and the rest of God's faithful people.

But here too is perhaps a clue that the parable is not speaking in a blanket way about all rich people and all poor people. For Abraham's life was marked out not by poverty but by faithfulness. Indeed Abraham had great possessions. But when God asked him to trust God and go on a journey with an uncertain destination Abraham was prepared to obey. And yet he still took with him all his considerable entourage and possessions. And so Abraham is the father and representative of those who live by faith.

And when Abraham is asked by the rich man to send Lazarus to warn his brothers, his response is that they need to listen to Moses and the prophets. In other words, God's commandments as these are contained in the Old Testament. And at the heart of these commandments are the ones to love God and to love our neighbours as ourselves. This is not an explicit command to divest oneself of wealth but it does make us examine how we use that wealth. The essential question is what kind of people we are to be and whether we are actively kind and generous to others.

As we think of kindness and generosity and the right use of wealth we turn to our other reading, from Paul's letter to Timothy.

We need first of all to know where our heart and faith lies. The letter speaks about there being 'great gain in godliness combined with contentment'.

This presents us with a very attractive alternative to the greed and materialism which is so prevalent in our culture but which does not lead us, as the parable demonstrates, to peace with God. This alternative consists in being devoted to God and in being content with what we have rather than in endlessly seeking more goods and possessions.

And there is wisdom in this attitude because it reflects an underlying reality about life and death. In a sentence of scripture which is often read at funerals, we can bring nothing into the world and take nothing out.

So contentment enables us to be happy simply with the necessities of life, food and clothing. For many people in the world these necessities are not a given; their existence is at a very basic level precarious. So it is right for us who have these necessities to be grateful for them.

The desire to be rich on the other hand can be a snare and cause our own downfall.

And then comes another verse of scripture which is very widely referred to in many different contexts. Sometimes it is misquoted so that it is believed that money in itself is the root of all evil. But it is not money in itself (which can be used for good or bad purposes) but the love of money which causes evil behaviour. Indeed the love of money can even cause us to lose our faith as other goals in our lives become more important to us than God.

So what is the antidote to all of this? Once again it is a question of where our hearts lie. It is our faith which needs to be uppermost in our lives. If faith is indeed uppermost then rather than being preoccupied with greater wealth our hearts will be full of desire for the qualities of God such as faith, love and gentleness.

Later on in this letter, Paul comes to the crucial question which lies at the centre of our concerns. Can we use wealth for good? Can we use wealth in ways which contrast with the lifestyle of excessive consumption and indifference to the plight of the poor man which leads to the downfall of the rich man in the parable?

The recipe given is clear and simple. As we have seen before it begins with the heart. We are to be humble and not arrogant, it is our inner attitude towards God and others which is of the first importance. And then where do our hearts and hopes lie? We must not be pursuing the uncertainty of riches. We cannot rely on these. Rather our hearts and hopes need to be turned towards God.

So does this mean turning away from all the good things that God provides us with and living a lifestyle of voluntary poverty? Not necessarily although this may be the calling of some such as St Francis. But it is not wrong to enjoy what God has given us. Rather we should enjoy what God gives us but to do so in such a way that we always remember that all that we have comes from God.

And more than that as we turn our attention outwards to other people we are actively, to paraphrase the famous words of John Wesley, to do all the good we can, in all the ways we can, in every place and time, for as long as we can. In other words there is no limit to the good that we can do. And in financial terms we need specifically to be generous and ready to share.

If we do all of this then Paul assures us that rather than meeting with the fate of the rich man in the parable, this type of generous and trusting lifestyle will lead to a good foundation for the life that is to come which is also life in its truest and fullest meaning. For all the display and luxury of the rich man in the parable was hollow and empty.

As we reflect on both readings perhaps the most immediate challenge to us might be the question of whether we are simply indifferent to the plight of those around us, whether we seek simply not to notice or to shut out what we do not wish to see.

As we turn from such indifference we are challenged by the question of what we are to do. We cannot do everything about the needs we see around us but we can do something. We are to be generous and ready to share. But how? The letter to Timothy does not give us specific sums that we should give away. These are for us to work out in terms of our own circumstances. But it all starts with the heart and with faith. As we allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives at a deep level then the Holy Spirit will cause us to notice the needs that we can do something about. And as we in Paul's words 'pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness' then the generosity and contentment of which he speaks will follow.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- What it means to live contentedly and with generosity
- Thanksgiving for Queen's life and service
- Royal Family as they take up new responsibilities especially King Charles
- Economic crisis and measures taken to address it
- Climate emergency
- 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 teachers, children and parents of North Cadbury church school and other local schools
- Prayers and thanksgiving for contributions to the foodbanks and for those helping to take these to the foodbanks.

Hymn

One well known hymn chosen for this morning is 'Immortal, invisible.'

Services for this week and next

Sunday 25 th September	8.00 am Communion, Blackford
Sunday 25 th September	9.30 am Communion, South Cadbury
Sunday 25 th September	9.30 am Harvest Matins, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 25 th September	9.30 am Morning Worship, North Cheriton
Sunday 25 th September	11.00 am Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 25 th September	11.00 am Communion, Holton
Sunday 25 th September	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Yarlington
Sunday 25 th September	6.30 pm Evening Service, Galhampton
Sunday 2 nd October	9.00 am Communion, Yarlington
Sunday 2 nd October	9.30 am Camelot Matins, North Cheriton
Sunday 2 nd October	9.30 am Harvest and Patronal, Blackford
Sunday 2 nd October	11.00 am Group Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 2 nd October	11.00 am Harvest Service, South 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 September 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)