

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 177

Sunday 16th October 2022

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

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

Scripture Passages

Genesis 32: 22-31

The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. ²⁴ Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. ²⁵ When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob’s hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶ Then he said, “Let me go, for the day is breaking.”

But Jacob said, “I will not let you go, unless you bless me.”

²⁷ So he said to him, “What is your name?”

And he said, “Jacob.”

²⁸ Then the man said, “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.”

²⁹ Then Jacob asked him, “Please tell me your name.”

But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And there he blessed him.

³⁰ So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.”

³¹ The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.

Luke 18: 1-8

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. ² He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. ³ In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.'

⁴ For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'"

⁶ And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? ⁸ I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Reflection

Generally speaking, persistence is an admirable quality. However, there are times when being persistent can turn into becoming a nuisance.

For instance, our dachshund Jack has a certain specific bark which he uses in order to tell us that life is not arranged exactly as he wishes. And then after a time if that bark does not produce the required result a strange quietness follows. However, that does not mean that he has given up. On the contrary, you will often find that the contents of a room have been rearranged with waste papers baskets turned upside down and their contents chewed up to serve as reminders that his requests need to be answered. And that is a nuisance.

On the other hand, perhaps at times we do need to be prepared to be so persistent that we actually become a nuisance. Sometimes polite

acquiescence is not the answer and we just need to keep on asking for what we want.

This is one of the lessons which emerges from the parable which Jesus tells in our passage from Luke's gospel this morning. The parable relates to the need for persistence specifically in connection with prayer, the 'need to pray always and not to lose heart.' And its central character a widow is so persistent that she does not mind becoming a nuisance. Indeed it is through being a nuisance that she eventually gets what she is asking for.

In the Bible, widows typically represent people who are powerless and liable to be exploited and oppressed by others. In the society of the day there was no social security and with limited opportunities for work, a widow could find herself in a very vulnerable position.

And this particular widow finds herself oppressed by two different and much more powerful opponents. The first is an adversary who has committed some form of injustice from which she suffers and which she seeks to put right. And the second is the judge to whom she appeals for justice. Unfortunately, this judge is not inclined to listen to her because he neither fears God nor respects other people.

The judge does not recognise the standards of behaviour that would have been expected of someone in his position. So what will possibly cause him to act in the right way? He must have been in his own right a tough, unyielding opponent for the woman to have, quite apart from the original adversary who had wronged her. So many people in her position might have accepted that in the end there was nothing that they could do about the wrong that had been done to them and that they would simply have to put up with what had happened.

But this reckons without this woman's persistence. She refuses to accept defeat and to acknowledge that there is nothing that she can do. So she

simply keeps on coming back to the unjust judge and putting her case to him again and again saying 'grant me justice against my opponent.'

And eventually this tactic pays off. Although the judge initially holds out against her requests, eventually he finds himself being quite worn out by the woman's incessant pleas. She simply will not take 'No' for an answer.

But even at this stage, the judge is not motivated by the requirements of justice or what is right and fair. He does not fear God or respect other people. However, he is interested in his own comfort and convenience and this woman is disturbing these to such an extent that really, he thinks, it would be easier simply to grant her what she asks for. After all, that would stop her bothering and wearing him out.

And so despite all the odds that are stacked against her, the opposition of two determined and much more powerful people, in the end she wins her case. This parable is indeed a powerful illustration of the need for persistence especially on the part of those who lack worldly power.

But it is also an illustration of how we should pray and in this respect the fact that the subject of her continued appeal concerns justice is instructive. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus sets out for us a model of how we should pray. Our own needs do have their proper place in the petition for daily bread. And yet this request does not dominate the concerns of the prayer. Rather the entire prayer is framed by the perspective and needs of God's kingdom. It is God's kingdom that we pray will come and God's will that we pray will be done. Anything that we might ask for ourselves needs to find its place within this overall framework.

Justice for the oppressed is undoubtedly a central feature of God's Kingdom. When at the outset of His ministry Jesus summarises its essential content, He uses the words of Isaiah that He has come to bring good news to the

poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free (see Luke 4:18).

So prayer is linked with the establishment of justice. And continued prayer also demonstrates our faith in God, that God has the power miraculously to give us what seems impossible and to overturn all the obstacles that stand in our way.

For, as Jesus points out, if even the unjust judge will eventually do what is right how much more will God do what is right. For God is both perfectly just and perfectly loving. Those who cry out to God day and night will indeed be helped and justice will be given to them. So we are reminded that we must never give up in our search to establish God's kingdom. For God is looking for those who have not given up, those who demonstrate their faith through their continued prayers.

In prayer we do indeed ask for outcomes. These may be personal as in our request for daily bread or these may be wider ranging as in our desire for God's kingdom to come. We long to see God at work and this is a right motivation to sustain us in our prayer.

And yet it is also true that prayer changes us and helps to develop our God given character. In our Old Testament reading we look at an episode in the life of Jacob.

Up to this point, Jacob's history has been a mixed one. Born after his twin Esau, his name literally means the one who supplants. And Jacob has certainly lived up to this name as he supplants his brother in the family hierarchy by taking the blessing that by right belonged to his brother Esau. But the way he obtained his blessing was by deceit, by successfully pretending that he was his brother rather than himself. And so deceitfulness is also associated with this name.

Following Jacob's deception, not unnaturally Esau is angry and is pursuing Jacob. So we find Jacob fleeing from Esau. In the course of his flight he sends his wives and the rest of his household ahead of him to safety across the river Jabbok.

This leaves Jacob alone and vulnerable in a new way before God. In his state of aloneness, Jacob has an encounter with God which at the time he does not recognise as such. He wrestles with an unknown man until daybreak.

And true to his character Jacob shows great tenacity, resolve and resourcefulness in this struggle. The unknown man is unable to defeat Jacob and at last a permanent mark of the wrestling match is placed on Jacob's body. Jacob's hip is struck and put out of joint.

Jacob's persistent tenacity has marked and changed his character for ever. As the sun rises he continues his journey but now with a permanent limp because of the mark on his hip.

And in the meantime, Jacob has received from God a new name which fits the change in his character that has occurred. The old ways of deceit and self-sufficiency in which he relies on clever stratagems to overcome his opponents are no more. Rather his new name Israel signifies that he has indeed struggled both with God and with other people and has prevailed. His persistence has led to him inheriting a God given destiny and one in which his own character is to be transformed.

So persistence in prayer changes us but it can also change the focus of what we seek in prayer. Yes, specific outcomes and results are important but more than that prayer is a means of building a living relationship with God.

And in any relationship which we value surely it is simply more and more the presence of that person which we seek over and above anything which that person might give us.

And so persistent prayer leads to a hunger for God's presence in and of itself, over and above anything that God might give us.

As Jacob encounters God, so he refuses to let the man go. No, he will not let him go until he receives a blessing from him. This is a sign of his hunger for God's presence. And later on when the man refuses to tell Jacob his own name he realises that he has been wrestling not just with a human being but with God. Awed by this Jacob realises that he has been given the immense and immeasurable privilege of seeing God face to face. Indeed this is such a rare and intense privilege that he can be thankful that his own life has been spared in this encounter.

So Jacob is indeed blessed and the essence of this blessing consists simply of his being able to see God.

As we reflect on these two passages we may think that sometimes we can be too polite and accepting as far as God is concerned. We can say of something that we might bring to God in prayer 'I am sure God is not interested in this, it's too small a thing for God to bother about.' And yet the persistence of the widow which is commended surely should lead us to the opposite conclusion. God is interested in us and our wellbeing, both the great and the small things that contribute to this. So are we prepared to go as far as this widow and become a nuisance to God in prayer? Jesus, we are told, is looking both for persistence and for faith.

And in the end what is it that we are asking for in prayer? We may well begin in prayer with our own needs and that is indeed a natural starting point. But as we grow in our prayer lives so the establishment of justice and of God's kingdom will become increasingly important to us. And after that

how far can we say of ourselves that our prayer has become one of simple hunger for God's presence?

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- Being persistent in prayer and having a hunger for God's presence
- Thanksgiving for Harvest and the Harvest services taking place today
- Our response to the cost of living and wider economic crisis
- 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 and its 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

A well known hymn of praise chosen for this morning is 'Praise to the Lord, the Almighty.'

Services for this week and next

Sunday 16th October 9.30 am Communion, Compton Pauncefoot

Sunday 16th October 11.00 am Harvest Service, Maperton

Sunday 16 th October	11.00 am Harvest Service, North Cadbury
Sunday 16 th October	6.30 pm Harvest Evensong, Yarlington
Sunday 23 rd October	8.00 am Communion, Blackford
Sunday 23 rd October	9.30 am Communion, South Cadbury
Sunday 23 rd October	9.30 am Matins, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 23 rd October	9.30 am Morning Worship, North Cheriton
Sunday 23 rd October	11.00 am Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 23 rd October	11.00 am Communion, Holton
Sunday 23 rd October	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Yarlington
Sunday 23 rd October	6.30 pm Evening Service, 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.

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)