

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 179

Sunday 30th October 2022

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

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

Scripture Passages

Psalm 32: 1-8

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

² Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

³ While I kept silence,
my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.

⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah*

⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity;
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,”
and you forgave the guilt of my sin. *Selah*

⁶ Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you;
at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.

⁷ You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. *Selah*

⁸ I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

Luke 19: 1-10

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. ² A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³ He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way.

⁵ When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” ⁶ So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him.

⁷ All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.”

⁸ Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.”

⁹ Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

Reflection

Since acquiring an electric car the days of going to filling stations are no more. I cannot say that I have missed these journeys. However, recently I was asked to go to a filling station to pick up some petrol for a lawnmower. On the way back some petrol got spilt in my car.

And its effects were obvious in terms of smell. But for some reason I did not want to tell anyone about what had happened and so I wondered what I could do to disguise the smell. So I started to open my windows for a while before anyone else was to get in the car in the hope that this would get rid of it.

However, this was rather a superficial solution. A thorough clean was probably what was needed. And what happened if it was raining and by opening the windows the inside of the car got wet?

This has now been put right but it was a reminder to me that cover ups simply don't work. Indeed in many respects cover ups can cause more difficulties than the problem that they attempt to conceal. We can think, for instance, of Watergate and the many political scandals that have followed all now (perhaps rather unimaginatively) christened 'gate'.

It just seems to be part of human nature that we are drawn towards cover ups however many additional problems they themselves cause.

And these problems are real and serious. Our reading from Psalm 32 demonstrates this. Here the effects of a cover up are wide ranging affecting the Psalmist physically, spiritually and psychologically.

The Psalmist keeps silence. But this failure to acknowledge sin openly leads to physical consequences. We should be careful, as the example of Job's friends reminds us, of explaining away all sickness and suffering as the effects of sin. On the other hand, many would acknowledge, perhaps from personal experience, the link between spiritual health or sickness and its physical, mental and emotional counterparts.

For the Psalmist silence leads to the wasting away of his body and the drying up of his strength while his mental and emotional anguish is shown through his groaning all day long.

And this should not surprise us because when we cover up our true state before God and other people we are afraid to show them who we truly are. This creates strain and pressure for ourselves and also leads to social isolation with all its damaging physical and emotional consequences.

On the other hand we can get to a point in our lives when we realise that continuing to engage in a cover up simply won't work. This is because our problems have become too big or evident to be hidden any longer. Everyone can see them. This is without doubt a very difficult and uncomfortable place to be in. However, paradoxically, it can also result in our being in a much better place to receive the grace, forgiveness and healing that God offers us.

In today's gospel reading we find Zacchaeus in just such a position. In last week's reading, the parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee, we looked at how socially disadvantaged tax collectors were in general. They had a very poor reputation as they were seen as the agents of the occupying Roman power. And in addition to this they were likely to be dishonest and to collect more than was legally due in order fraudulently to keep the rest for themselves.

And if this was the reputation of tax collectors in general how much more did it apply to Zacchaeus in particular. For Zacchaeus was not simply an ordinary tax collector but a chief tax collector. Furthermore he is rich which acts as a clue that not all of his wealth was acquired honestly. So, if tax collectors as a whole are despised and socially marginalised, how much more is this true of Zacchaeus.

So cover ups for Zacchaeus will simply not work. Everyone knows who he is and they shun him. Nevertheless, Zacchaeus has a spiritual hunger and desire to meet with Jesus. Here again he is handicapped because he is too short to see above the rest of the crowd in order to see Jesus.

But he is not deterred by these obstacles in his way. He must and will see Jesus. His resourcefulness and the strength of his desire to see Jesus for himself comes to the fore as he climbs a sycamore tree placed on the route that Jesus was likely to take.

And in response to Zacchaeus' spiritual hunger and desire, Jesus offers him recognition and an active welcome.

He notices Zacchaeus by looking up to the tree where Zacchaeus is to be found. As in all of His ministry Jesus is interested in and notices the socially marginalised and despised whom we so often overlook. Indeed, He goes further than simply noticing Zacchaeus by exercising a costly form of compassion. He tells him that he must stay at Zacchaeus' house. This breaks the rules of social and religious convention but it gives Zacchaeus a new spiritual status.

This act of compassion is costly because it results in a backlash of misunderstanding. The bystanders grumble and criticise. They complain that Jesus is accepting hospitality from Zacchaeus whom they see as a sinner. But in doing so they overlook their own sin.

Moving back to Zacchaeus we find that something is also required from him in return. And he gives this voluntarily and freely. For Jesus' gracious love and forgiveness evokes a response of real gratitude on Zacchaeus' part and a genuine and radical change of lifestyle.

The first response that Zacchaeus gives to Jesus' welcome is pure and straightforward. It is a response of pure joy. He hurries down from the tree and is happy to welcome Jesus.

But then comes something that is altogether more radical and costly. In theological terms it illustrates graphically what repentance and new life in Jesus means. For Zacchaeus moves beyond any attempt to cover up his past sins. As we have seen this would not be effective anyway because everyone knew about them. However, he now seeks through practical actions to do what he can to put right the past. He tells Jesus that he will give half his possessions to the poor and if he has defrauded anyone of anything then he will pay this back fourfold.

Zacchaeus has the confidence to do this in the light of the unconditional love which Jesus has shown him. For all of us a response to Jesus' unconditional love must come first and it is this which causes us to open up our lives to God.

Last week when we looked at the parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee we asked whether the tax collector would come back to the Temple on the next occasion in the same state and with the same simple cry for mercy. Zacchaeus' response to Jesus gives us the answer to this question. Truly encountering Jesus means embarking on a journey of deep and lasting change. For Zacchaeus this change shows itself in the desire to make financial restitution to right past wrongs and to be generous with his wealth by giving to those in need.

Zacchaeus, as we have seen, had nothing to lose by showing others who he truly was. For they knew this anyway and so this may have made it easier for him to respond to Jesus in a simple and joyful manner. And yet for all that he still needed courage to be open before Jesus and other people about the reality of his past life. But by doing so he laid foundation of a life that was truly and lastingly changed by God.

We find the same message coming to us from Psalm 32. Verse 5 marks a turning point in the psalm. Instead of persisting in the silence and cover up which has led to physical and emotional sickness the Psalmist decides to be open before God, to confess and acknowledge his sin. And just as with Zacchaeus this leads to God's forgiveness being received.

After this turning point the psalm focusses on the resulting blessing. As a consequence of God's forgiveness and enjoying a renewed relationship of faith in God, protection and security are offered. God is a hiding place in times of trouble. Those who are faithful receive the ability to hear from and be instructed by God so that past mistakes are not repeated. Just as with

Zacchaeus the destructive cycle of the past is broken and a genuinely new way of life is on offer.

The beginning of the Psalm summarises its entire message. It is about the forgiveness of our sins. Forgiveness does in itself involve its own kind of cover up. But this is of a very different quality for it is initiated not by us but by the Lord who covers our sin. However, on our side it is still required that we are open and honest before God. There must not be any deceit in our spirit.

And the message of the encounter with Zacchaeus is summarised in parallel terms. Jesus proclaims that salvation has come to Zacchaeus. Salvation means wholeness, the forgiveness of sins and the formation of a living relationship with God through Jesus. Indeed what has happened to Zacchaeus is an example of the central focus of Jesus' ministry which is to seek out and save the lost.

As we reflect on these passages we can no doubt think of various cover ups which we know of, past and present. After all, human nature is drawn to this form of behaviour. Perhaps there have been times in our own lives where we have realised that these cover ups can no longer be sustained. In those circumstances, we can, like Zacchaeus and the psalmist, be assured of God's mercy, forgiveness and healing. And yet there is still something required of us. That is to be open and honest before God. And for all of us such a step is not easy, it takes courage. Do we have that kind of courage?

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- To live openly and honestly before God without cover ups
- Our new Prime Minister and government as they face many different challenges

- 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 about God's forgiveness is 'Dear Lord and Father of mankind.'

Services for this week and next

Sunday 30 th October	8.00 am Communion, Blackford
Sunday 30 th October	9.30 am Family Service, North Cheriton
Sunday 30 th October	11.00 am Matins, Maperton
Sunday 30 th October	11.00 am Harvest Service, Bratton Seymour
Sunday 30 th October	4.00 pm Evensong, Galhampton
Sunday 6 th November	9.00 am Communion, Yarlington
Sunday 6 th November	9.30 am Camelot Matins, North Cheriton
Sunday 6 th November	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 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)