

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 182

Christ the King, Sunday 20th November 2022

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

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

Scripture Passages

Jeremiah 23: 1-6

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD. ² Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD. ³ Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. ⁴ I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD.

⁵ The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶ In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: “The LORD is our righteousness.”

Luke 23: 33-43

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴ Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots to divide his clothing. ³⁵ And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!”

³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, ³⁷ and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” ³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.”

⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

⁴³ He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Reflection

The prophet Jeremiah lived in troubled political times. Perhaps the political turbulence which we have lived through recently can help to give us a flavour of what life was like for him.

Jeremiah, whose first loyalty was to God, found himself deeply disappointed by the rulers of his day. They seemed to him to have no respect for God and God’s ways. This is the context of Jeremiah forceful rebuke at the beginning of today’s Old Testament passage,

‘Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the

shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD.'

The shepherds were kings and other leaders. They had done the very opposite of what was expected of them. Rather than serving their people, ensuring that the most vulnerable among them was protected, they had destroyed them. They had driven them away rather than caring and looking after them.

And yet there was one king who, for Jeremiah, was an exception to this dismal rule. This was Josiah, the king whom Jeremiah had known as he was growing up. Josiah was an exemplary king who energetically restored true worship and sought to ensure that God's justice and mercy were the rule of national life. Josiah's son, however, ruled very differently and drew from Jeremiah this unflattering comparison with his father,

'Are you a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? says the LORD.' (Jeremiah 22: 15-16)

A true king for Jeremiah was defined not by impressive and competitive displays of wealth or power but by a deep, inner commitment to justice and a heart of compassion for the most needy among his people.

So in contrast to his son, Josiah was in Jeremiah's eyes a true king. We might then have expected that Josiah would have had a long and successful reign. And yet not at all. Josiah's reign was cut short by defeat in battle by the Egyptians. And then there followed the eventual break up and destruction of Josiah's kingdom. Josiah's own reign ended in defeat and the reigns of his immediate successors resulted in the disaster of exile and the downfall of his capital city, Jerusalem.

Children's history books tend to categorise kings or queens as either bad or good. The bad ones normally fail and the good ones normally succeed. And yet Josiah's story does not fit this model. Despite all his efforts at reform and the compassion and respect for justice that lay at the heart of his character his reign ended in failure.

Or was it really failure? Maybe it is a question of the standards by which you judge rulers? Do we really apply the right standards?

When we look at Jesus' ministry, many points of comparison with the Old Testament arise. For instance, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus is joined by Moses and Elijah. This suggests that he stands in the line of these prophets and indeed is their divine fulfilment.

We can also see parallels between Jesus' rule and that of Josiah. Jeremiah prophesies the rule of an ideal king who was yet to come. He says,

'The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

Yes, Josiah can be seen as the partial fulfilment of such an ideal ruler. But Jeremiah's promise was made not for the past but for the future and for an even greater king than Josiah. For this promise of a 'righteous branch' springing up out of David's lineage was only finally fulfilled in Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection.

So what is the comparison that can be made between Jesus and Josiah? They were indeed alike in their faithfulness but they were also alike in the apparent failure and defeat which ended their earthly lives.

That is the context of Luke's account of Jesus' crucifixion. It is a stark, unromanticised and unembroidered account. An inscription is placed over Jesus' head, 'This is the king of the Jews.' And yet the place of this king was one of humiliation between two criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

And the paradox of a king who is helpless and seemingly powerless as He is crucified attracts mockery from all quarters.

First of all it comes from the leaders. They mock him with the words, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!'

And this refrain is then taken up by lesser people, the ordinary soldiers who join in the mockery and challenge Jesus to save Himself if indeed He is a King. The emphasis once more is on Jesus' total powerlessness.

And finally the mockery comes from one of the criminals who is being crucified along with Jesus. Again the theme centres on Jesus' seeming powerlessness. If Jesus really is who He claimed to be, a Messiah or a King, then He should have the power to save both Himself and the criminals. But as He does not do this then His claim must be a false one.

Jesus' life is ending in apparent failure. But maybe we need to look a bit more closely at what success really means and how we measure success. For if Jesus' kingdom really is not of this world, then the world's standards are not the ones which we should use for the purposes of judgement. But what alternative do we have?

The gospels record seven sayings which Jesus spoke from the Cross. Two of them are recorded in this passage from Luke. Both of them demonstrate the true nature of Jesus' power and authority.

The first of them shows the power of forgiveness. Even as He endures the cruel mockery of those who crucify Him, Jesus utters the simple yet powerful words 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.'

The contrast between the two sides could not be greater. On the one hand, Jesus the king offering forgiveness and asking His heavenly Father to make this gift to His enemies. Surely this is a true exercise of power.

And on the other? A futile continuation of cruelty as the soldiers cast lots to divide Jesus' clothing. The offer of forgiveness is simply ignored. Their actions lack any dignity and compassion. Surely these actions are those of people who in a true sense are powerless.

And the second of Jesus' sayings show His power to decide who will share in His kingdom and what place they will have in it.

For the second criminal, in contrast to the first one, offers a very different perspective. He recognises that ultimately God is the one who decides what justice means. The criminal knows that he and his companion are indeed guilty and yet Jesus is innocent in God's sight whatever human law may say. In his truthfulness, he is able to recognise who Jesus really is.

He knows that, despite all outward appearances, Jesus is indeed a real and eternal King. And so, He asks simply to be remembered when Jesus comes into His kingdom which is not of this world but which lies beyond crucifixion and death. This is an expression both of faith and of humility.

And, in response Jesus expresses the true nature of His authority. His kingdom is indeed not of this world for He has the power to give this criminal who turns to Him in faith everlasting life. The repentant criminal will be with Jesus in Paradise.

As we respond to this account of Jesus' crucifixion, perhaps first of all we can find ourselves identifying with Jesus in His powerlessness. So much of life, after all, can make us feel powerless and as if we do not really matter. What notice does anyone take of what we might say, think or feel?

And yet we are never really so powerless however much the odds of this world may be stacked against us. For, in Jesus, we have the power to forgive. This capacity to forgive may be difficult for us to exercise but it is always available to us even in the extremities of life. And it is only by forgiving that we are freed from the burden and entanglement of the past.

And then there is the power of faith. The repentant criminal saw something in Jesus, a quality of deep peace even while undergoing the most testing and painful of trials. And what he saw in Jesus' life led him to accept that Jesus' claim to be our true and lasting King is a real one on which we can depend. True and lasting power rested with Jesus and not with the authorities of this world who were punishing Jesus unjustly and without cause.

As people of faith do we also allow our faith to be visible in our lives? For if we do then by the way we live we too will have a real and lasting impact on the lives of other people.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- Being willing to forgive and to allow our faith to be visible in our lives
- All those facing hardship this winter, needing to choose between food and heating
- Our continued contributions to foodbanks such as the Lord's Larder
- 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

Hymn

A hymn by Charles Wesley which celebrates the kingship of Christ is 'Rejoice ! The Lord is king.'

Services for this week and next

Sunday 20 th November	9.30 am Communion, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 20 th November	11.00 am Communion, Maperton
Sunday 20 th November	11.00 am Sunday Worship, North Cadbury
Sunday 20 th November	4.00 pm Evensong, Yarlington
Sunday 27 th November	8.00 am Communion, Blackford
Sunday 27 th November	9.30 am Communion, South Cadbury
Sunday 27 th November	9.30 am Matins, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 27 th November	9.30 am Morning Worship, North Cheriton
Sunday 27 th November	11.00 am Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 27 th November	11.00 am Communion, Holton
Sunday 27 th November	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Yarlington
Sunday 27 th November	4.00 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 November 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)