

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 192

Sunday 29th January 2023

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

Welcome

Welcome to this Sunday’s Cutting Edge Camelot.

Scripture Passages

1 Kings 17: 8-16

Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ⁹ “Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” ¹⁰ So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink.” ¹¹ As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.”

¹² But she said, “As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.”

¹³ Elijah said to her, “Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. ¹⁴ For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth.”

¹⁵ She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. ¹⁶ The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

John 2: 1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.”

⁴ And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.”

⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

⁶ Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

⁷ Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim.

⁸ He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.”

So they took it. ⁹ When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.”

¹¹ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Reflection

We live in an age where there are shortages. Whether this is in an immediate context where energy costs are rising and we need to cut down on our use of energy or whether over the longer term we are concerned by the diminishing resources of our natural world the message is the same. There is only a finite amount on which we can draw and we are fearful of what will happen when one day these resources run out completely.

So the context of both our readings this morning is a fitting one. Our Old Testament reading comes from the book of Kings. There has been a prolonged drought in the land and this in turn has led to a shortage of food and water, the essentials of life. The prophet Elijah has been able to survive by going to a brook and being fed by ravens. But then the brook dries up and he has to move on in search of food to a widow in Zarephath.

The running out of resources in our gospel reading from John's gospel may seem less serious. Indeed it is less life threatening. There is still water to drink even if the wine has run out. We do not know why this has happened. Maybe those who were preparing for the wedding miscalculated the amount of wine. Maybe the guests simply drank too much. But whatever the reason to run out of wine is a severe social embarrassment for the bride and groom and their families. Their guests expected to be entertained with wine on these kinds of occasions and now they could not meet these expectations.

So what is the response to such shortages? Our two readings demonstrate two very different forms of response.

The first comes from the widow in Zarephath to whom the prophet Elijah has been sent in search of food.

We might indeed think that, in sending Elijah to a widow, God was challenging all normal expectations. If someone like Elijah lacked the means to live on surely it would make sense to approach people who did have the means to assist and to ask them for help.

And yet God asks Elijah to do the very opposite. Widows were proverbially known for their own powerlessness and impoverishment. They themselves often needed to depend on others. What help might a widow in a time of drought and famine be expected to offer to Elijah?

So perhaps it is not surprising that when Elijah goes to the widow with the simple request for a morsel of bread that the widow finds herself unable to offer help. This is one of the bare essentials of life. However, the widow does not have enough for herself and her son. How could she possibly find enough for a third person?

And so she tells Elijah that all she has is a handful of meal in a jar and a little oil in a jug. She is gathering together some sticks for a fire so that she can prepare a last meal for herself and her son. And after that they will die.

So the widow's response to the way in which her resources for life have run out is very simple, understandable and indeed moving. There is no solution, only death. She has given up on life for there seems to be no hope for her.

However, a very different way of responding to scarcity and shortage is demonstrated by Mary the mother of Jesus in our gospel reading.

Running out of wine is, as we have noted, not a life threatening event. But it is a severe social embarrassment and it could easily have led to a sense of panic and believing that the position was irretrievable.

Nevertheless, in these circumstances, Mary remains confident and calm. She trusts in her son's ability to rescue the young couple from social disgrace even though she does not know exactly how Jesus will do this. Certainly, she would not presume to tell Him what to do.

Instead presented with the shortage of wine, she simply says in a matter of fact way to Jesus, 'They have no wine.' And although she does not suggest what Jesus might do about this she clearly expects and trusts that Jesus will do something.

At first, however, it seems that Jesus is not interested in this request. Maybe the shortage of wine is of no concern to Him. Indeed, it is certainly not the time for His public ministry to reach its climax.

Mary on the other hand is not concerned by the apparent refusal of her son to act. Perhaps Jesus is testing her resolve, looking to see how far she will go in pursuing her request, how much it matters to her. She is certainly not willing to give up.

So instead of responding directly to Jesus' words to her she again demonstrates her faith that Jesus can and will do what is needed to remedy the shortage of wine. She addresses the servants at the wedding with the simple, confident words 'Do whatever he tells you.'

This is a statement of total trust in Jesus. She does not say what it is that Jesus will tell the servants to do. That is not her place or responsibility. All she knows is that Jesus will something and that whatever that something may be it will be enough to meet the immediate crisis.

So in the widow of Zarephath and in Mary we see two very different forms of response to an urgent shortage of resources. And yet there is a theme which binds both accounts together.

What is the material with which God works in order miraculously to meet these pressing needs? A caricature view of miracles can be that they always involve the showy and the spectacular and what is completely outside the normal run of events.

Amazement is a very common response to miracles. And yet often God chooses to work miracles through the very unspectacular, everyday materials that we see around us. But the miracle causes us to see those materials in a completely new and different light.

And so it is both in the case of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath and of the wedding at Cana in Galilee.

All that Elijah is given to work on are the miniscule resources that the widow already has, the handful of meal in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And yet tiny and ordinary though these resources are, they are enough for God's purposes.

They simply need first to be offered up to God. In response to the widow's expression of despair, Elijah asks her not to be afraid but to exercise faith. This faith is to be demonstrated by the widow holding back on her planned last meal for herself and her son in order first of all to use what she has to feed Elijah with a little cake.

And then Elijah gives the promise of supernatural blessing. New resources are not going to appear out of nowhere. The widow will never reach the position where she does not need to ask and trust God for daily provision for herself, her son and Elijah. No, day by day the resources she already has will continue to give of themselves so that they will not be exhausted. The jar of meal will not become empty and the jug of oil will not fail until the day finally comes when the drought ends and God once again sends rain on the land.

And with this the widow's perspective on her desperate position is completely turned round. She chooses to believe God's promise which Elijah gives her. So she does as she has been asked and makes a little cake for Elijah. After that the miraculous provision for herself and her household continues for many days to come. God's word that the jar of meal will not become empty nor the jug of oil fail is fulfilled.

And we see this same pattern of God working through the ordinary, everyday materials of life in the wedding at Cana in Galilee. This time God

uses water in order for the miracle to take place. What could be simpler or more basic than water?

Jesus commands the servants to fill six stone water jars up to the brim. And then Jesus gives them another very straightforward and clear command. They are to draw some water from these water jars and to take it to the steward who is in charge. No need for any magic incantation or special ceremony.

And just as with the widow a powerful miracle occurs through the willingness to trust in this simple, everyday instruction. By the time that the water reaches the chief steward it has become wine. We do not know when this occurred or how. We simply know that it did. And the response is, quite rightly, one of awe and amazement. The very pragmatic rule that the best wine is served first and the inferior later when everyone is too drunk to notice is turned upside down. In this instance the best wine has been kept till last.

There is indeed awe and amazement and yet the purpose of the miracle is deeper than that. Its intended effect is to lead people to place their trust in Jesus and so to experience a lasting change in their relationship with God.

When we think of ourselves perhaps we most naturally think of times when we have faced overwhelming odds, circumstances that we were simply not able to deal with. Probably all of us who have been through such experiences can understand why the widow of Zarephath was tempted just to give up.

And yet we may also have explored the path that Mary shows us. This is a costly pattern of openness and trust in God. It is not easy to do this but perhaps these times of extreme challenge have shown us how God can use the very ordinary materials of our everyday lives. Water, meal, oil, there is

nothing special or spectacular about these except when God chooses to work through them.

Do we fully appreciate how God is able to work through the everyday material of our lives when we offer this up to God? Can we echo the words of Mary and ask God to do with the metaphorical water of our lives whatever it is that Jesus tells us to do?

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- For all those facing shortages of the essentials of life such as food or the means of heating
- For our own openness and trust in God especially in challenging times
- Those seeking to help those facing hardship through projects such as the Lord's Larder and other foodbanks, community fridges and the provision of warm spaces
- Resolution to various industrial disputes
- Conflict between Russia and the Ukraine and those who are refugees from this conflict
- Those whom we know who are facing illnesses of all kinds and have recently been bereaved
- For Elliscombe House in Higher Holton and its residents
- For teachers, children and parents of North Cadbury church school

Hymn

A hymn which speaks of God's transforming presence in our lives is 'Breathe on me, breath of God'.

Services for this week and next

Sunday 29 th January	8.00 am Communion, Blackford
Sunday 29 th January	9.30 am Family Service, North Cheriton
Sunday 29 th January	11.00 am Matins, Maperton
Sunday 29 th January	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Bratton Seymour
Sunday 29 th January	4.00 pm Evensong, Galhampton
Sunday 5 th February	9.00 am Communion, Yarlinton
Sunday 5 th February	9.30 am Camelot Matins, North Cheriton
Sunday 5 th February	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 December and January editions of Excalibur have 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)