

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 196

Sunday 26th February 2023

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

Welcome

Welcome to this Sunday’s Cutting Edge Camelot.

Scripture Passages

Genesis 2: 15-17, 3:1-7

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

^{3:1} Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’”

⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; ⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Matthew 4: 1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”

⁴ But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”

⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; ⁹ and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Reflection

As we enter Lent one question which we are very likely to be asked is what are we giving up for Lent? This church season is one that is traditionally linked with sacrifice and an accompanying generosity.

And yet, in the light of the two temptation stories which are set for the first Sunday in Lent, I wonder whether there are not even deeper questions that we need to ask ourselves.

For our response to temptation tells us a great deal about our inner strength of character. Despite being placed in extreme circumstances, famished and depleted of physical resources after a fast of forty days in the wilderness, Jesus resists every temptation put to Him by the devil. In the end, the devil is left with no choice but to leave Jesus alone (at least for the moment). By contrast, the serpent (another representation of the devil) finds out the weak places in Adam and Eve's defences and by playing on these achieves his purpose of estranging from their Creator God.

But if our response to temptation is linked with our inner strength of character how can we strengthen ourselves so that we, like Jesus, can resist temptation?

Perhaps we can begin to answer this question by studying the account of the temptation of Adam and Eve and how they succumbed to temptation.

The first point that may strike us is that this temptation did not begin with an all-out assault, a straightforward invitation to do something that Adam and Eve clearly knew was wrong. The process of temptation was more subtle than that, more akin to a gradual erosion of a cliff face by the continual washing of the waves. And then one day there is a sudden cliff fall. It takes us by surprise but in fact, in hidden ways, it has been coming for some time.

Perhaps as we reflect on times when we have succumbed to temptation we may see this same pattern, one of a gradual, almost imperceptible wearing down of our defences.

So the serpent, who is called the most crafty of all the animals, begins with what is apparently an innocent request for information. Did God really tell Adam and Eve not to eat from any tree in the garden? The answer to this question is clearly, no. The serpent has misrepresented both what God has said and the character of God.

For the serpent has completely left out of this question all the positive aspects of God's relationship with Adam and Eve. God begins by giving them care, purpose and provision. They are placed in the garden of Eden to cultivate the soil, to be good stewards of what God has given them. And then God's generosity is stressed by the freedom which He offers them of eating of every tree in the garden.

It is in the context of this care and generosity that the prohibition which God gives them must be seen. The prohibition is not a negative and restrictive one, rather it is a protective one to keep them from any harm. For God knows that if Adam and Eve were to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil then they will die.

But in misrepresenting God's words the process of temptation has begun. The serpent is playing on Eve's uncertainties and on her potential lack of trust in God. He has opened up a conversation which he will continue until it results in what he is looking for.

So Eve indeed begins by seeking to defend God through correcting the serpent's words and recalling the positive nature of God's permission to eat the fruit of any tree in the garden. However, her uncertainties and potential lack of trust in God are shown when she adds her own stricter prohibition to what God has said. More than simply forbidding them to eat the fruit of the tree, Eve thinks that God has forbidden them even to touch the tree. The intensification of this prohibition shows that Eve is not entirely trusting in God's generosity and care for their wellbeing.

And so through Eve's willingness to engage in debate about God's words and what they mean the door has been opened for the serpent to go further. Eve's memory of what God actually said is shaky and points to a lack of full understanding and trust in God's character. Having laid the foundation, the serpent now has the opportunity to mount an all-out attack on Eve's relationship with God.

No, he says, God is not to be trusted. God is deceiving them. First of all, Adam and Eve will not die if they eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. God is simply wrong about this. The motive which underlies this deception is based on God's jealousy and the wish to keep Adam and Eve in a permanently subordinate position. For when they do eat of the fruit, they will become equal in status to God, no longer needing to live in a relationship of humility and trust but able to live their own lives and to make moral decisions for themselves.

So finally, Eve succumbs and Adam too as he eats the fruit which is offered to him. The desire to do what is wrong has become too strong. And so humanity's Fall occurs with all its tragic consequences of violence, greed and selfishness which are still with us to this day.

But what a contrast there is with the account of the temptations of Christ. Jesus demonstrates a clear and steadfast trust in God whatever temptations the devil might throw at Him and however alluring they might appear to be.

In response to each of the temptations Jesus responds with words of scripture. Unlike Eve, he does not add to these words. And also, He can tell when scripture is being twisted or misrepresented even though its actual words may be quoted accurately.

The first temptation comes at the point of His maximum vulnerability after forty days and nights of fasting. At the end of this time Jesus truly is famished. So, the first temptation of commanding the stones that surround Him to become bread has a powerful force and appeal.

Nevertheless, Jesus resists this temptation with the simple words drawn from Deuteronomy that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

The second temptation is one of self-aggrandisement and display. Will Jesus throw Himself down from the top of the temple just to show how great His faith in God is and in the expectation that God will miraculously intervene and save Him?

But God's miracles do not occur on demand and for the sake of showing off someone's miraculous powers. And even though the devil has quoted scripture in the form of one of the psalms to back up his temptation, Jesus is not lured in to this trap. For when we twist the words of scripture so that they give a result contrary to what God has intended then this too needs to be resisted.

So Jesus resists this temptation with another verse from Deuteronomy that we are not to put God to the test.

And the temptations conclude, as in the case of Adam and Eve, with a straightforward and outright assault on Jesus' faith and loyalty. The devil leads Jesus up a very high mountain and promises Him all the kingdoms of the world. But there is a price to pay for this worldly status and glory. That price is a simple one and yet deadly. The price is for Jesus to give His heart, allegiance and worship to the devil rather than to God.

This undermining of Jesus' faith, trust and love for God has been the devil's aim all along just as the serpent in the garden wanted to undermine Adam and Eve's relationship with God. But, unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus proves equal to this temptation.

Jesus simply says 'No' to this temptation countering it with yet another quotation from Deuteronomy. The worship and allegiance of the heart is to belong entirely to God. Trust and love for God are more important than all the kingdoms of the world. Nothing else, however outwardly attractive it might be, can take the place of this relationship. There can be no mixed loyalties.

And so there is a contrast between the temptations of Jesus and the temptation of Adam and Eve. Jesus is strong and successful while Adam and Eve are weak and fail. What is it that makes the difference?

At one level we might point to the contrast between Jesus' accurate recollection of scripture as opposed to Adam and Eve's rather sketchy recollection of what God had said to them. Does this simply mean that if we memorise enough scripture all will be well?

But valuable and strengthening though the memorisation of scripture may be surely this approach is too superficial.

For, Jesus does not simply mechanically memorise the words of the scripture. Rather it is clear that He has also been deeply pondering its significance in the context of His own relationship of love and trust with God His Father. And so when the devil quotes scripture back at Him in the form of the words of one of the psalms, Jesus is able to recognise that these words are taken out of context and do not represent God's heart.

Surely then we must begin from a different starting point as we seek to strengthen our character so that we too can succeed in resisting temptation. Perhaps one such starting point is to recognise and acknowledge what our own areas of weakness might be. For, as we see from these accounts, this is where temptation begins. Adam and Eve were not aware of their own potential vulnerability and, in the end, they proved to lack the strength to resist temptation.

On the other hand, if we do have the self-awareness to recognise where our own potential weaknesses lie, we can then take the next step which is to ask for God's help in strengthening and protecting us.

For a living relationship with God is vital in giving us the strength which we need to resist temptation. If we read the verse in Matthew's gospel which

immediately precedes the account of Jesus' temptations this records a voice from heaven affirming Jesus' relationship with God with the following words 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'

And the importance of Jesus' relationship with God also emerges in the spiritual help that He is able to call on both at the beginning and at the end of His series of temptations. At the beginning, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness. And at the end, the angels come and minister to Him to strengthen Him after His ordeal.

We, like Jesus, need to begin by knowing God's unconditional love for us and being secure in this knowledge.

These are the essential foundations on which to build a strength of character. On this foundation we can by all means build. We can do this through acts of sacrifice and generosity and also through deep meditation on scripture. But first of all, we must start from the right foundations if we, like Jesus, are to know the strength with which to resist temptation.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- Building the strength of character necessary to resist temptation
- For those facing shortages of the essentials of life such as food or the means of heating
- 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 traditional hymn for Lent is 'Forty days and forty nights.'

Services for this week and next

Sunday 26 th February	8.00 am Communion, Blackford
Sunday 26 th February	9.30 am Communion, South Cadbury
Sunday 26 th February	9.30 am Matins, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 26 th February	9.30 am Morning Worship, North Cheriton
Sunday 26 th February	11.00 am Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 26 th February	11.00 am Communion, Holton
Sunday 26 th February	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Yarlington
Sunday 26 th February	4.00 pm Evening Service, Galhampton
Sunday 5 th March	9.00 am Communion, Yarlington
Sunday 5 th March	9.30 am Camelot Matins, North Cheriton
Sunday 5 th March	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 February 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)