

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 197

Sunday 5th March 2023

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

Welcome

Welcome to this Sunday’s Cutting Edge Camelot.

Scripture Passages

John 3: 1-17

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”

³ Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”

⁴ Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?”

⁵ Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

⁹ Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?”

¹⁰ Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹ Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony.

¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷ Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Reflection

When I was young, I saw a preacher who took a coconut into the pulpit, and when he cracked it like an egg, there was a piece of paper inside. Unfolded, it read, “For God loved the world so much, he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him will not die, but have everlasting life.” *And that*, he said, *is the Gospel in a nutshell*. And that was it. That was all he said. Later, it was made clear to me at theological college that if you couldn’t preach a sermon on this text, you really ought not to be preaching at all.

The language of Christianity is littered with words like salvation, and redemption, and we know what we mean, but people we try and share with might not. It becomes a sort of jargon, So what do we mean, and where do we start? We start with the idea of sin. It isn’t universal, but most cultures, going right back to ancient times, and primitive cultures in recent times, have a concept of right and wrong, what is acceptable behaviour and what isn’t, and they’ve most often explained those rules as being laid down by their god or gods, because that’s the only way they could explain the inner feeling we have that some things are just *wrong*. Sin.

And in our own faith, we believe that God passed on to us his definitions of what’s right and what’s wrong, and gave his people a set of rules to live by,

which can really be summed up in two - love God, and love other people. Loving someone means avoiding anything that would cause them hurt, distress or pain. So as we come to understand what God is like, what he wants of us, what he likes, and what he hates, we try to do what he would want of us. That's loving him. And the same with other people. The Golden Rule has been *treat other people as you would like them to treat you*. And however you cut it, none of us can boast that we've always done that. So we have offended God, driven a wedge between him and ourselves, and don't deserve his love and friendship, but fortunately, deserving has nothing to do with it.

So here we are, individually and collectively cut off from God, and there's nothing we can do about it. God is just, which means sin must be punished, or the universe is a chaotic place where anything goes. And the punishment for sin isn't death in the sense that our physical lives will be ended - that's going to happen anyway - but in the sense that we would always be cut off from God.

God always had the solution to this. It isn't that he gave the Law a thousand years, and then thought, *No, this isn't working. People are still killing and fighting and stealing and adulterating. I need another plan. What might I do?* That wasn't it. The Law is there to show *us* what God wants us to be like, and in most cases, the lesson didn't sink in, or if it did, we were too feeble to follow. Temptation is very strong.

So, in his own good time, God became human - born into our world. Jesus was called the Son of Man, but also the Son of God, and we worship him now as God the Son. *If you've seen me*, he said, *you've seen my Father*. And he spelled it out. *I and the Father are one*. And Jesus lived a life just like ours, with one crucial difference. Jesus was without sin. Nothing he did upset his Father, or made a rift between them, and he never did anything with the intention of hurting anyone else. True, he got up the noses of a lot

of people who just didn't get him, and he made people angry, but that was their problem, not his.

It became Jesus' problem when people wanted him dead, and put in motion the machinery that would make that happen.

A bit of an aside here. There's a war going on. President Putin made the decision to invade Ukraine. President Zelenski mobilised his troops to defend against the invasion. But you notice President Putin doesn't go, gun in hand, and fight? He sends the army - conscripts and convicts, the husbands, brothers and sons of other people to fight, get blown up, wounded or killed.

That isn't what God did. He didn't *send* his Son. He became human in the person of Jesus, so if there was any dying to do, any suffering to happen, he did it. God, in Jesus, was on that cross.

What happened on the cross? What difference does it make? God accepted the suffering and death of Jesus, who was without sin, as the price and punishment for all and any of our sins. We are forgiven, because the punishment has already happened. That's what being saved means. So if some spotty Evangelical guy in a fairisle tank-top comes up to you at a party and asks *Are you saved?* you can just say *yes*.

The other word we use is Redeemer. One of our Christmas hymns says *Hail redemption's happy dawn*. The last time that word was used outside the church was in the days of Green Shield stamps. A lot of shops, and particularly garages, gave you stamps with your stuff, and when you had enough, you took them to a Redemption Centre and spent them on electric kettles or pillow slips. They became Argos, by the way. But there is this idea that because we are sinners, we belong to the devil, only Jesus has bought us back out of pawn, by paying with his life. We're his now.

Jesus takes us back to the Old Testament. The Israelites, somewhere between captivity in Egypt and freedom in their Promised Land, found themselves in a place infested with venomous snakes. A bite was fatal. Moses was told to make a bronze snake, and set it up on a pole in the middle of the camp. If you were bitten by a snake, you only had to look at the bronze one, and you wouldn't die. It was an exercise in faith. You didn't have to believe it, you only had to try it. And in those circumstances, who wouldn't? And Jesus said that he would be lifted up - as in crucified, and whoever looks at him will be saved. When it comes to it, who wouldn't? If you believe that your eternal life is changed by the fact of Jesus on the cross, doesn't it make sense?

But there's that other bit. *Whoever believes in him...* because we have to trust Jesus that all this is true. Unless we accept that our sins are forgiven, they might as well not be, so we go on feeling guilty and bad. It's like if someone, usually a Nigerian prince, puts a vast amount of money in my bank account, if I don't believe it's there, I can't enjoy it. Benny Hill suffered from that. He never really believed he was rich, because he couldn't see a roomful of cash, and the figures on paper meant nothing to him. So he lived over a shop, and only had one suit.

So we have to trust Jesus that we are forgiven, and splash it around. All that forgiveness can't just rot in our account - we have to use it, forgive anyone who hurts us. My friend Jennifer used to have trouble with that bit in the Lord's Prayer, and she'd say *try to forgive*. I have a different problem. I find it hard to think of anyone who's sinned against me.

Years ago, my boys and I were watching skiing on TV. Every time a skier crossed the line, a hand would emerge from the spectators waving a little sign in front of the camera. It said *John 3:16*. And that's why the little prompt if I mistype my computer password says *Good News Skiing*.

Ron

Points for Prayers

- Trusting that in Jesus we are forgiven
- For those facing shortages of the essentials of life such as food or the means of heating and those seeking to help those facing such hardship
- 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 set for this Sunday which speaks of Jesus' call on our lives is 'Will you come and follow me if I but call your name ?'

Services for this week and next

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
Sunday 12 th March	9.30 am Communion, Galhampton
Sunday 12 th March	9.30 am Communion, North Cheriton
Sunday 12 th March	9.30 am Matins, Blackford
Sunday 12 th March	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Holton

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 March 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)