

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 198

Sunday 12th March 2023

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

Welcome

Welcome to this Sunday’s Cutting Edge Camelot.

Scripture Passages

Exodus 17: 1-7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² The people quarrelled with Moses, and said, “Give us water to drink.”

Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?”

³ But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?”

⁴ So Moses cried out to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

⁵ The LORD said to Moses, “Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.” Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

John 4: 5-26

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."

¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband."

Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"

¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.”

²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.”

²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

Reflection

Physical water is a basic necessity of life. A few years ago, our Lent lunches supported an organisation called Water Aid. This drew our attention to how essential clean, hygienic water is to health and indeed to life, particularly in developing countries.

So immediately we find our sympathies and attention engaged by our reading this morning from Exodus. The people of Israel, in their journey through the desert towards the Promised Land, are consumed with thirst. We can well imagine that the satisfaction of this basic need would have completely occupied their minds and hearts.

And in our gospel passage we learn that Jesus Himself is not immune from the natural demands of thirst and fatigue. He is tired after a long journey. When the Samaritan woman comes to draw water from the well where He is resting, He asks her for a drink in order to quench this thirst.

However, Jesus' physical thirst provides the opening for a very significant spiritual conversation. Jesus admits that He needs water and this attracts the woman's attention. She is surprised that a Jewish man would open up a conversation with a Samaritan woman. However, as the conversation progresses, Jesus' initial request for water seems to be forgotten as physical needs become subordinate to spiritual ones.

And so our natural thirst and need for water becomes a metaphor for those spiritual needs that we all have to find purpose and meaning in our lives.

We might think that both physical and spiritual thirst would lead to straightforward results. We desire to satisfy these needs and so we are naturally led to those sources, both physical and spiritual, from which this can happen.

However, life and faith are not, in practice, as straightforward as this. We find this illustrated by our Old Testament passage where an argumentativeness combined with a lack of faith and trust leads to a position of deadlock where progress in satisfying physical and spiritual needs seems impossible.

The congregation in our Exodus passage are angry and impatient in their demands for water. However, their quarrel is not simply with Moses. At a deeper level the quarrel is with God. Moses highlights this deep, spiritual level of rebellion with his question 'Why do you test God?'

But this question simply meets with an expression of complete lack of trust in Moses. They believe that Moses has deliberately led them to this parched and desolate place so that they and their children and livestock will die there from thirst.

We can find certain parallels with the way that the Samaritan woman initially responds to Jesus. She seems somewhat suspicious. When Jesus

asks her for a drink of water, she questions whether it is right (in view of the long centuries of enmity between these peoples) for Jews to ask Samaritans for a drink.

And she continues to challenge Jesus as He explains to her that He is not really speaking about physical water but about the spiritual water of faith that He can offer. But, once more the woman does not seem to be very responsive. Perhaps there is a note of mockery and ridicule as she questions whether Jesus is greater than their ancestor Jacob who gave them this well in the first place. Certainly, the need to quench her spiritual thirst does not seem to be uppermost in her thoughts at that point.

But as the conversation progresses something in the woman's attitude and receptiveness towards Jesus does seem to shift.

When Jesus meets her challenge about whether or not He is greater than the patriarch Jacob with a simple declaration of the promise that He can give her the water of eternal life, the tone of her response changes. It is still a questioning one but now the questions seem more straightforward and to be ones which are genuinely looking for positive answers.

It is as if at this point that the woman recognises that she needs what Jesus can give her. And so, she simply asks where she might find this water which will, for all time, satisfy her deepest spiritual longings.

In response to this, Jesus links the gift of the water of eternal life with the forgiveness of sins. He asks the woman to call her husband. In doing this, Jesus is bringing to the surface areas of her life in which there is sin and brokenness, areas which she no doubt would prefer were kept hidden and that others did not know about. However, it is these areas in her life that Jesus wants to heal and restore.

Jesus' question is met with a truthful and straightforward answer on the part of the woman. She tells Him that she has no husband. Jesus in reply both recognises the realities of her lifestyle and yet also affirms her. Jesus shows that He knows all about the woman's circumstances. She has had five marriages and is now living with someone who is not her husband. But Jesus does not dwell on this. Rather, He affirms the truthful and right way in which the woman is speaking to Him.

And yet even at this point the conversation does not lead immediately to an expression of faith in Jesus on the woman's part. Rather she has more questions that she wishes to ask. She draws the conversation back to the deep and bitter history of divisions between Jews and Samaritans and asks Jesus, as a prophet, to comment on this. However, this past history of division and conflict is not at the heart of Jesus' mission. Instead, He wants the woman to come to an understanding of who He really is. For His role and mission is more than that of a prophet.

The kingdom which Jesus will bring is completely different from and much greater than any particular religious practice. Worship is not a matter of being in a particular place, on this mountain or that mountain. Rather it is a matter of worshipping in spirit and in truth.

It is at this point that the woman shows her overriding trust and faith in the Messiah, another name for Christ. For when the Messiah comes then He will explain everything. This is the opening that Jesus needs to proclaim to her that, in fact, He is the Messiah. In this way the woman comes to faith and later on we find her enthusiastically sharing this faith with others.

As we reflect on these two passages, we might be drawn to examining what role questioning plays in our faith. Is it always wrong to question God?

Certainly, our Old Testament passage illustrates the dangers of what happens when such questioning is accompanied by an angry lack of trust in

God and when the questions become accusations rather than genuinely looking for answers.

However, this need not be the case as Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman demonstrates. Her attitude towards Jesus is a more complex one. Perhaps the ridicule which may be seen in her Initial questions does suggest a resistance to faith.

And yet a clear turning point occurs in which she becomes genuinely interested in finding out more about Jesus and in the life giving, spiritual water that He offers.

But that does not mean that her questions immediately disappear. Indeed, Jesus allows her to continue to ask questions and He, in turn, continues to answer them. And this process leads to the culminating point of Jesus announcing to her that He is the Messiah. It is this that finally brings the Samaritan woman to the point of faith in Him.

So we must not be afraid of asking questions of God nor indeed of accepting that there may be a dialogue between ourselves and God.

At the deepest level of our being, we each have a spiritual thirst which is as real and as urgent as our physical thirst for water. Rather than fighting this thirst we need to let it come to the surface and lead us where it will. This will not mean that the many questions that we have about God have to be set aside. Rather as the example of the Samaritan woman shows us, they can become an important part of the process by which we (and others) come to faith.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- Bringing our questions to God
- For those facing shortages of the essentials of life such as food or 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

One hymn set for this Sunday is 'All my hope on God is founded.'

Services for this week and next

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
Sunday 19 th March	9.30 am Communion, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 19 th March	11.00 am Sunday Worship, North Cadbury
Sunday 19 th March	11.00 am Mothering Sunday Service, Maperton
Sunday 19 th March	4.00 pm Evensong, Yarlington

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)