

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 200

Sunday 26th March 2023

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

Welcome

Welcome to this Sunday’s Cutting Edge Camelot.

Scripture Passages

Ezekiel 37: 1-14

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones.

² He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³ He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?”

I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.”

⁴ Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵ Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.”

⁷ So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone.

⁸ I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them.

⁹ Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” ¹⁰ I prophesied as he

commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

¹¹ Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ ¹² Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³ And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴ I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD.”

John 11: 1-45

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.”

⁴ But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” ⁵ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶ after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.”

⁸ The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?”

⁹ Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world.

¹⁰ But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.”

¹¹ After saying this, he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.”

¹² The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” ¹³ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep.

¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

¹⁶ Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home.

²¹ Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.”

²³ Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

²⁴ Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

²⁷ She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

²⁸ When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” ²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

³¹ The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

³² When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

³⁴ He said, "Where have you laid him?"

They said to him, "Lord, come and see."

³⁵ Jesus began to weep.

³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone."

Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days."

⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me."

⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth.

Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

⁴⁵ Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Reflection

Lazarus is dying. He and his family, his sisters Mary and Martha, are among Jesus' closest friends and disciples. The family home is at Bethany, a convenient place for Jesus and His disciples to stay on their way to Jerusalem. On one such visit, Martha finds herself distracted by all the preparations she has to make in order to provide hospitality for the visitors. However, her sister Mary simply sits quietly at Jesus' feet listening to Him. And on another occasion, Mary pours out costly perfume on Jesus' feet to anoint Him for His coming death and burial.

And so, not unnaturally, the family send word to Jesus. Surely, in view of these ties of friendship, Jesus will come straight away and spare no pains to rescue His friend Lazarus from this desperate predicament.

We can imagine that the atmosphere in the house of Lazarus and his family must have been one of struggle and anxiety. It could even have reached a point of desperation sometimes oscillating with moments of hope as their brother perhaps seemed to rally.

We may well find echoes of this in our own experience. We may also think of the conflicting emotions that we feel when we deeply want someone we love to continue living and yet we recognise all the signs that life for them is simply running out. And in the case of a younger person, as Lazarus was, these emotions can be particularly acute.

And so, the sisters send a message to Jesus to come. And yet at first, He delays and simply stays where He is for a while. They must have wondered what was happening and perhaps we do as well.

Sometimes this kind of delay can be explained by an embarrassment or awkwardness on the part of the person who is asked to help. They are perhaps not quite sure whether they are really needed or whether they will be intruding.

And then there is the difficulty of not knowing what to do or to say. For instance, we may wonder, after a bereavement, once the funeral and the initial letters are over how much contact the bereaved person really wants. Might they want some time on their own to process their thoughts and feelings? The answers to these questions will vary with individual people. There may be no one right answer.

All of this does not necessarily indicate a lack of compassion but more a difficulty in knowing how best to express compassion. So was Jesus' delay an expression of this kind of uncertainty?

The answer to this is surely no. For if there is any model of how to express compassion for those who are bereaved surely we find this in Jesus.

For when confronted with the reality of death and of bereavement Jesus expresses to the fullest possible extent what it means to have humanity and compassion on such occasions.

He enters into the emotions of those around Him and does not hold back in any way. He asks to meet Lazarus' sister Mary and when Mary comes to Him, He shares in the expression of deep grief. When Jesus sees Mary and her companions weeping, we are told that He was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

And Jesus does not back off from witnessing the realities of death. He wants to know where Lazarus has been buried and this prompts the invitation to see for Himself. Then Jesus Himself begins to weep, prompting those who stand by to say, 'See how he loved him!'

There is a power and a deep compassion in this ministry of presence which Jesus offers which must have been of great help to Mary and to those others who were mourning the loss of Lazarus.

As we reflect on the significance of this, we may also be reminded of how hard it was for this ministry of presence in times of dying and bereavement to be denied to close relatives during the recent times of covid lockdowns. Perhaps it was one of the hardest deprivations of all.

And so, the expression of deep compassion and the ability to be with someone in times of great and ultimate need is very important. But nevertheless, this does not mean that death is defeated. And it is this greater and even more awesome reality to which the whole of Jesus' ministry points.

For Easter reminds us of the truth that it is God alone who has the power over both life and death and that in the end it is God who reigns supreme.

Resurrection is not a fanning into flames of what is dying but rather a sign of an entirely new reality, of miraculously bringing life out of death. For this to happen the old has fully to die before the new can take its place.

Our Old Testament account of Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones brings this truth home to us.

Ezekiel's vision is one which, in its time, symbolised the hope of Israel, the Old Testament people of God, that one day their graves would be opened up and that they would return to their own land.

As Christians we see this hope as foreshadowing and being fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Christ.

The soldiers whose bones Ezekiel sees in the valley have not died in a recent battle. Their remains have been stripped bare and dried out by the passage

of time. In all probability they have died in one of the battles fought when the Babylonians conquered the land of Judah and the city of Jerusalem.

God then asks Ezekiel what must have seemed an extraordinary question 'Can these bones live?' Although the immediate and common sense answer is 'No', Ezekiel knows that he is in the presence of God who has the power over both life and death. So wisely he decides to put this question back to God with the words 'O Lord God, you know'.

God then presents Ezekiel with the extraordinary challenge of speaking God's word to the bones. The words that Ezekiel are to speak are straightforward words of promise of new life to the bones. There is no showmanship or hyperbole involved here. And so, Ezekiel humbly obeys. The bones become covered with flesh. And then Ezekiel is told by God to ask the breath of life to come into the bodies so that they might come fully alive. Once again Ezekiel simply does what he is asked to do.

It is a powerful vision of the miracle of new life coming to an army of people who have long since been dead. And this miracle does not come about through any supernatural effort made on the part of Ezekiel. Rather it demonstrates God's power and is entirely of God.

In Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead we can find a number of parallels. This miracle too will not occur until the last breath of life has undoubtedly left Lazarus' body. And so, Jesus purposely stays where He is when the initial news of Lazarus' illness comes to Him.

This leads to His being misunderstood and even criticised. Does Jesus have no idea of the urgency that this illness requires? Is His delay a sign that He does not care or cannot be bothered? The disciples do not understand what Jesus is saying and later on perhaps we can find a note of reproach in Martha's words to Him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not

have died'. The unspoken question behind this is perhaps 'Why were you not here earlier, why did you delay?'

And yet a deep sense of purpose lies behind Jesus' delay. He expresses this purpose at the beginning of this passage when He says in faith that Lazarus' illness will not end in death but will be a means by which God is glorified.

So, by the time Jesus comes to Lazarus' tomb, Lazarus is most undoubtedly dead. After four days in the tomb his body is in danger of decomposition and there is likely to be a stench. And yet now when the hope of clinging on to life has completely vanished is the time for Jesus to perform the miracle of bringing new life through which God will be glorified.

And just as with Ezekiel, the words that Jesus uses are clear and to the point. He only needs to speak the straightforward word of command to Lazarus to come out of the tomb. No more is needed. Once again there is no ostentatious display or show. This glory of this miracle needs to go totally to God. As Jesus says to Martha, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?'

And so, the miracle happens and the dead man walks out of the tomb. In spiritual terms, the result is that many people put their trust in God and in Jesus, the Son of God.

As we reflect on these passages, perhaps our most immediate response centres around the mortality of ourselves and others, our need to trust in God and to believe in the new life and resurrection which Jesus gives us and which is such a key part of the Easter message.

And yet perhaps there are other wider connections which we might make. There can be a different form of struggle in which we try to hold on to a certain phase of our life or work and are unwilling to let go. And sometimes

we come to a point where it becomes clear that what we need to do is to stop struggling and to trust God to bring something entirely new into our lives.

This may involve letting go of long held dreams, plans and ambitions. It may mean accepting changes in our lives that we might naturally resist.

And it is never easy to let go in this way and to stop struggling. Indeed, we need to reach a very deep place of trust in God in order to be able to do this. And yet the rewards of such a level of trust in God are also great.

Perhaps God does not immediately bring new life and purposes in place of an ambition or dream of which we have let go and allowed to die. After all, Easter Sunday does not immediately follow Good Friday. There is the interval of Holy Saturday where we simply wait in trust for the new life to come. And yet Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones and the raising of Lazarus from the dead assures us that God is indeed the one who has power over life and death. And so as we continue to wait in patient trust we too will be rewarded by the new life and hope that Jesus brings us.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- A trust in the power of God over life and death
- Tornado in Mississippi and its effects
- For those facing shortages of the essentials of life such as food or heating and those seeking to help those facing such hardship
- 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 celebrates God's power and glory is 'O worship the King, all glorious above.'

Services for this week and next

Sunday 26 th March	8.00 am Communion, Blackford
Sunday 26 th March	9.30 am Communion, South Cadbury
Sunday 26 th March	9.30 am Matins, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 26 th March	9.30 am Morning Worship, North Cheriton
Sunday 26 th March	11.00 am Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 26 th March	11.00 am Communion, Holton
Sunday 26 th March	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Yarlington
Sunday 26 th March	6.30 pm Evening Service, Galhampton
Palm Sunday, 2 nd April	9.00 am Communion, Yarlington
Palm Sunday, 2 nd April	9.30 am Camelot Matins, North Cheriton
Palm Sunday, 2 nd April	10.50 am Palm Sunday Service, 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 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)