

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 205

Sunday 30th April 2023

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

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

Scripture Passages

Acts 2: 42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

John 10: 1-10

“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷ So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

Reflection

In this Easter season, our gospel readings are combined with readings from the Acts of the Apostles. These readings from Acts depict the life of the early church. This combination enables us to see connections between Jesus’ ministry and resurrection and its impact on the life of the church. And more than that, as we see these connections it also causes us to ask what parallels and lessons from the early church, we might draw for our church life today.

This week’s gospel reading is drawn from that part of John’s gospel known as the Good Shepherd discourse. The image of the Good Shepherd is indeed a powerful one. It is embodied in Jesus’ willingness, just like a good shepherd, to lay down His life for His sheep and then, through the power of the resurrection, to take His life up again.

But along with the image of the sheep and the shepherd, another image is intertwined. This is the gate or entrance to the sheepfold.

The gate opens in response to the shepherd’s arrival. The shepherd comes quite openly through the gate and the gate will readily and easily be opened as the person of the shepherd is recognised. As Jesus puts it, ‘The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.’

The shepherd, in other words, is trusted. The alarm systems do not go off at his approach and the dogs wag their tails rather than bark. In a potentially dangerous world, the shepherd is friend not foe.

And the trusting nature of the relationship between the shepherd and sheep is exemplified by their response to the shepherd's voice.

The shepherd leads the sheep through the gate and then goes out ahead of them. Rather than driving the sheep from behind, he leads them from in front relying on nothing except their recognition of his voice to encourage them to follow. And indeed the sheep do 'follow him because they know his voice.'

The images of the shepherd and the gate are indeed intertwined. So much so that Jesus as well as speaking of Himself as the shepherd also refers to Himself as the gate. As the gate, Jesus is our entrance point for a relationship with God, the way by which we can come to know God and to enter into the beauty and holiness of God's presence. As Jesus puts it, 'I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.'

Jesus provides an open gate. He does not turn away any who come to Him in sincere and open trust. Jesus is the way to truly free and unrestricted living. There is no attempt to keep the sheep enclosed or locked up so that they will not stray. The reason why the sheep will go in and out and not wander away is because of the relationship of trust that they have with the shepherd.

This metaphor of an open gate is also one which we can find powerfully illustrated within the life of the community of the early church. This is described in our reading from Acts.

It speaks of a dynamic and compelling way of life. This is centred round the importance both of community and of a growing relationship with God.

The life of the church has its firm foundations and a clear sense of direction based on the apostles' teaching, fellowship, prayers and the breaking of bread. In an open atmosphere of faith and love, miracles flow. There is a strong sense of community among the believers as they are all together and have all things in common. Whenever a need arises in their number there is a corresponding and practical generosity as the wealthier members of the church community 'sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need'.

It is a way of life characterised by integrity and sincerity as they spend time together in public, in the temple and also meet privately, breaking bread at home and eating together with 'glad and generous hearts'. Praise and worship are at the heart of this community of believers.

In all these ways, this church offers an open gate towards Jesus and towards other people. So, it is not surprising that it is also a growing church, 'Day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.' This is a natural outcome of the kind of healthy church that they were. Indeed, it would have been surprising if such growth had not been the result of this open gated community.

This continual church growth does not come about through inventing special programmes. Rather it is the natural overflow of a church life which is centred around Jesus, prayer, worship and the Holy Spirit and which is characterised by a generosity of heart and practical action.

Jesus speaks of Himself as being both the shepherd and the gate. There is, however, another vital but perhaps less obvious role which is mentioned in the Good Shepherd discourse.

This role is that of the gatekeeper. This is the person who opens the gate for the shepherd so that the sheep can follow the shepherd out into the pasture. Through the gatekeeper's ministry, the sheepfold becomes a place of rest and protection as opposed to being one of confinement and separation from the outside world.

And yet, as sadly we know only too often in the life of the church, this ideal picture of being an open gate manned by willing gatekeepers is not always one that is fulfilled in practice by the church.

For, the gatekeeper may not faithfully respond to his or her role in opening the gate for the sheep to go in and out. They may even, over time, come to see this role in terms of exercising a personal power and control over other people.

So, for instance, they may exercise their own judgement as to who they will choose to let in through the gate, perhaps people that they approve of and who are 'like us'.

And we need to be careful as to whom we choose as our shepherds. Not all who have the title of shepherds have, in reality, the true shepherd's heart.

Indeed, Jesus warns us that there are those who do not enter the sheepfold through the gate but come in by another route. Faith in Christ needs to be central in the lives of those who are to be true shepherds to their sheep. Without such true and sincere faith, the sheep are vulnerable to becoming the prey of thieves and bandits.

Not surprisingly the relationship of trust which is so apparent and paramount between the true shepherd and His sheep does not exist with these impostors. Instead of the easy way in which the true shepherd leads simply through the sound of His voice, the sheep will run away from the voice of a stranger which they do not recognise.

We can see a graphic illustration of our different responses to hearing the voice of someone we know and of someone we do not when we answer the telephone. If a friend or a member of the family calls we will recognise their voice and normally we will relax and begin talking openly and without reserve. On the other hand, if a stranger makes a cold call informing us that he or she has discovered all kinds of problems with our computer and that we need to give out our bank account details in order to fix the problem it is more than likely that we will run away or put the phone down. We do not trust or recognise the voice of this stranger.

So, in our role as gatekeepers seeking to draw people towards the church or maybe even keeping them away, we may ask ourselves how far we are really known and trusted by other people. Are we seen more in terms of friends and family or the dreaded cold caller from whom people run?

And if we think about the good shepherd we might ask whether we have such a depth of relationship with those for whom we care and are responsible that they will follow us simply by recognising the sound of our voice and with no need to be driven?

The good shepherd is one who is truly concerned for the lasting good of others. That is why He is recognised, trusted and followed. May we too both as individuals and as a church find the qualities of the good shepherd and also the willing and faithful gatekeeper growingly displayed in our lives.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- Seeing the qualities of the good shepherd reflected in our lives
- Conflict in the Sudan and the evacuation efforts
- Resolution to industrial disputes especially in the healthcare sector

- Conflict between Russia and the Ukraine and those who are refugees from this conflict
- Preparations for the King's coronation
- 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 based on the image of God as a shepherd is 'The king of love my shepherd is.'

Services for this week and next

Sunday 30 th April	9.30 am Family Service, North Cheriton
Sunday 30 th April	11.00 am Communion, Maperton
Sunday 30 th April	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Bratton Seymour
Sunday 30 th April	6.30 pm Evensong, Galhampton
Sunday 7 th May	9.00 am Communion, Yarlington
Sunday 7 th May	9.30 am Coronation Service, North Cheriton
Sunday 7 th May	11 am Coronation 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 May 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)