

# **CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 213**

**Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> June 2023**

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

## **Welcome**

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

## **Scripture Passages**

*Jeremiah 20: 7-13*

O LORD, you have enticed me, and I was enticed;  
you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed.  
I have become a laughingstock all day long;  
everyone mocks me.

<sup>8</sup> For whenever I speak, I must cry out,  
I must shout, “Violence and destruction!”  
For the word of the LORD has become for me  
a reproach and derision all day long.

<sup>9</sup> If I say, “I will not mention him,  
or speak any more in his name,”  
then within me there is something  
like a burning fire shut up in my bones;  
I am weary with holding it in,  
and I cannot.

<sup>10</sup> For I hear many whispering:  
“Terror is all around! Denounce him! Let us denounce him!”  
All my close friends  
are watching for me to stumble.  
“Perhaps he can be enticed,  
and we can prevail against him,  
and take our revenge on him.”

<sup>11</sup> But the LORD is with me like a dread warrior;  
therefore my persecutors will stumble, and they will not prevail.  
They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed.  
Their eternal dishonour will never be forgotten.

<sup>12</sup> O LORD of hosts, you test the righteous,  
you see the heart and the mind;  
let me see your retribution upon them,  
for to you I have committed my cause.

<sup>13</sup> Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD!  
For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.

*Matthew 10: 24-39*

“A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; <sup>25</sup> it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

<sup>26</sup> “So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. <sup>27</sup> What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. <sup>28</sup> Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. <sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup> And even the hairs of your head are all counted. <sup>31</sup> So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

<sup>32</sup> “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; <sup>33</sup> but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

<sup>34</sup> “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law

against her mother-in-law; <sup>36</sup> and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

<sup>37</sup> Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; <sup>38</sup> and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

<sup>39</sup> Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

## **Reflection**

Sometimes, as disciples of Christ, we find unexpected opposition and hostility unsettling. Surely this was not part of what we signed up to when we responded to Christ's invitation to receive God's love and grace.

And yet, however much we may want to gloss over it, suffering as part of our faith is indeed part of the 'package'. This morning's gospel passage is not unique in this emphasis.

Jesus, in this passage, tells us that encountering spiritual opposition is an inevitability.

The reason for this can be found in Jesus's own ministry. For, not everyone was delighted with all the works of healing and compassion that He was doing. We might wonder who could possibly object to a person who went round doing good to other people and meeting their spiritual and physical needs.

However, Jesus did provoke opposition and this was of a spiritual nature. Some even commented that the works that He was doing in God's name and by God's power were in fact done through being in league with the devil.

This seems a bizarre accusation. And yet Jesus' opponents were spiritually threatened by Jesus' ministry. So, they respond with a spiritual accusation designed to undermine confidence in Jesus. This opposition would end up in the crucifixion of Jesus.

Jesus warns us that those who follow Him will attract the same spiritual opposition and persecution. As He puts it, 'If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!'

Such opposition and spiritual attacks may come from the most difficult and unexpected quarters, from those who are closest to us, members of our own family and household. Our faith can be a cause of family division where, for instance, a son is set against his father and a daughter against her mother.

But how do we know when we are facing this kind of spiritual opposition caused by our faith?

Sadly, in many areas of the world, the answer to this question is obvious. For instance, the Barnabas Fund which was set up to help persecuted churches cites a number of examples of recent persecution such as in Nigeria where terrorist attacks were targeted at Christians and claimed the lives of many victims.

Although people in this country may also be the target of terrorist attacks the reason for this is not generally their Christian faith. So, opposition here is likely to take a gentler and subtler form perhaps one of mockery or being quietly but studiously ignored.

And yet such less extreme forms of attack present us with an important question. How do we know whether we are in fact experiencing persecution? Might there rather be something wrong with us in the way that we are behaving?

I don't think it is necessary to name any high profile public figures who have recently claimed that they are being persecuted. There is more than one person to choose from here. But how much credence do we give to these claims? Do we think it is right to support them or are we more sceptical?

Whatever our answer to this, a 'persecution complex' is a reality. Not all claims of persecution can or should be accepted at face value. They may instead be the result of a misunderstanding. Or, more seriously, they may spring from a desire to distort the truth.

But whatever our view is in relation to high profile public figures, it is more relevant to think about our own response to difficulties and opposition.

Such opposition may take different forms. Someone may blatantly ignore us or pretend that we do not exist. We may experience criticism that far from being constructive seems pointed, personal and unfair. Someone may seem just to be waiting for an opportunity to catch us out.

Is this just the result of a misunderstanding or even something for which we are at least partially responsible? Or might it indeed be a form of mild persecution?

One way of trying to answer this question is to ask ourselves about our motives and the cause of the opposition. For myself, two different occasions immediately spring to mind in thinking about possible spiritual opposition.

The first was when I wrote an article which related to my understanding of an aspect of my faith and submitted it for possible publication.

It was turned down. There was nothing wrong with that. What made me wonder whether any spiritual opposition was involved was the very harsh and destructive tone of the criticisms that accompanied the rejection. It was difficult to see them in any way as intended to be helpful. What was the

point of adding all these comments if all you needed to say was, No? Could it be that the people to whom I sent the article for publication were threatened spiritually by what I had said?

The second occasion was when I thought someone was friendly towards me. However, we disagreed about a particular issue. There is nothing wrong about that either. But the next time we met, he behaved as if he had never met me before. He sat next to me but only spoke to or addressed the other people around the table. Could he really have forgotten who I was or could he too have felt spiritually threatened?

But, in both cases, I had thought that I was doing the right thing, what I needed to do as a disciple of Christ. And as far as I knew my underlying motives were those of compassion, truth and justice. So maybe there was some form of spiritual opposition although who knows.

But whatever the answer to this, the next question is how we respond to spiritual opposition, whether real or imagined.

One form of response is just to run away and hide. It is natural to be afraid of those who might harm us. Jesus knows this and so He challenges us as to whom we should fear.

The answer is the person who has ultimate power over our lives. Is this God or other people? Jesus encourages His disciples not to be afraid of other people because their power to harm is limited. Yes, they can kill our bodies but they have no power over our souls. God, however, has power over both body and soul. So should we not fear God more than other people?

This argument in itself might seem rather intimidating. But Jesus then reminds us that God, as well as having this kind of power, is also a loving father. God cares even for sparrows who are sold for less than a penny. We are worth more than many sparrows so we should not be afraid.

Another response to the realities of spiritual opposition and persecution comes in our Old Testament reading from the prophet Jeremiah.

The context of this passage is that Jeremiah has suffered persecution at the hands of his opponent Pashhur. He has struck Jeremiah and put him in the stocks. In response, Jeremiah repeats the unpopular, yet God given, message which originally got him into trouble. This message is that disaster is coming upon Jerusalem and its people through the Babylonians. In repeating this message Jeremiah shows no fear of Pashhur despite that person's past actions.

The secret of Jeremiah's strength in such testing times lies in the strength of his prayer life. The tone of Jeremiah's prayer in this passage is raw and honest, a mark of its authenticity and power.

In fact he begins by accusing God, 'O LORD, you have enticed me, and I was enticed'. What does this mean? How was Jeremiah enticed by God? As we reflect on our own experience, we often find that when we have been called by God to a particular role and ministry, we have at first found ourselves attracted by what God was offering us and enthusiastic about taking up this call.

And then when we take up this new role, the difficulties start coming and may multiply. Then we think that we have been taken in under false pretences. If only God had told us about these difficulties, we would not have been so eager to take this on. We may feel unfairly enticed.

But even though Jeremiah may protest at his responsibility as a prophet he cannot evade it. For, he finds that God keeps motivating and spurring him on. When he decides that he will no longer speak in God's name he finds that 'within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones'. And if he tries to avoid speaking on God's prompting, he becomes weary and finds it impossible to hold his words in.

The strength of Jeremiah's response lies in his decision to address God with his feelings and frustrations rather than other people. He is brutally honest in his assessment of those who whisper their denunciations while waiting for the right time to declare them publicly.

However, by coming to God in prayer about these realities, Jeremiah finds the strength which he needs to persist in his costly prophetic call. And so he continues with an expression of trust in God and finally praise as he finds the certainty that God will in the end vindicate him, 'Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.'

Jeremiah's prayer may seem disturbing in the way it brings his concerns before God with such unvarnished honesty. However, when our circumstances are desperate it is this form of realistic honesty before God which we need.

So, certainly we need to pray for those Christians, wherever they may be, who are undoubtedly suffering persecution. But what of ourselves? Is it possible that our suffering is at least in part the result of mild persecution? Whatever the answer to that question, we need to live free from fear of other people and be able, like Jeremiah, to come to God in simple, humble and honest prayer.

*Tristram*

## **Points for Prayers**

- Praying for those who suffer persecution and living free from fear of other people
- Victims of Titanic submarine disaster
- Crisis in Russia and war in the Ukraine



- 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 expresses solidarity with Christians everywhere through the ages is ‘For all the saints.’

## Services for this week and next

Sunday 25 <sup>th</sup> June	8.00 am Communion, Blackford
Sunday 25 <sup>th</sup> June	9.30 am Communion, South Cadbury
Sunday 25 <sup>th</sup> June	9.30 am Matins, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 25 <sup>th</sup> June	9.30 am Morning Worship, North Cheriton
Sunday 25 <sup>th</sup> June	11.00 am Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 25 <sup>th</sup> June	11.00 am Communion, Holton
Sunday 25 <sup>th</sup> June	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Yarlington
Sunday 25 <sup>th</sup> June	6.30 pm Evening Service, Galhampton
Sunday 2 <sup>nd</sup> July	9.00 am Communion, Yarlington
Sunday 2 <sup>nd</sup> July	9.30 am Camelot Matins, North Cheriton
Sunday 2 <sup>nd</sup> July	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 July edition of Excalibur has now been published online at [camelotparishes.co.uk](http://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](mailto: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)