

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 219

Sunday 20th August 2023

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

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

Scripture Passages

Isaiah 56: 1, 6-8

Thus says the LORD:

Maintain justice,

and do what is right,

for soon my salvation will come,

and my deliverance be revealed.

⁶ And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,

to minister to him,

to love the name of the LORD,

and to be his servants,

all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,

and hold fast my covenant--

⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain,

and make them joyful in my house of prayer;

their burnt offerings and their sacrifices

will be accepted on my altar;

for my house shall be called

a house of prayer for all peoples.

⁸ Thus says the Lord GOD,

who gathers the outcasts of Israel,

I will gather others to them

besides those already gathered.

Matthew 15: 21-28

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon.

²² Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.”

²³ But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.”

²⁴ He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

²⁵ But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.”

²⁶ He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”

²⁷ She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

Reflection

Persistence is a valuable quality to have. ‘Good things come to those that wait’, the proverbial phrase goes. And yet when it comes to God and asking God for what we need and desire, we may find ourselves a little more cautious.

For a start, how do we know whether we are really praying for a need or a ‘nice to have’, a gift which we might like but which is not really essential for our lives and wellbeing? Indeed, God may even know that the desired gift might not be good for us and this is the reason why God is withholding it from us. If that is the case, why not accept God’s initial response rather than asking for what we want over and over again?

We might even think that we should not bother God in this way and that what we want is perhaps not important enough for God to be interested in.

And if we look at how the disciples respond to those who seek Jesus' ministry, we find that on various occasions they suggest that Jesus has more important matters to attend to. Perhaps they think that they are protecting Jesus from those who might be diverting His time and attention.

So, when a woman who has been suffering haemorrhages for twelve years touches Jesus' cloak and is healed, Jesus looks round to see who has done this. However, the disciples dissuade Him from this search arguing that there are so many people in the surrounding crowd that it is impossible to identify the person in question.

And on another occasion when people bring little children to Jesus, the disciples speak sternly to them, no doubt believing that the children are not important enough to take up Jesus' time.

However, on both occasions the disciples are firmly put in their place by Jesus. Each person who seeks healing from Jesus is important. So, Jesus does not rest until He has spoken personally to the woman who has touched Him. Similarly, the disciples are very firmly told by Jesus that little children do matter and, indeed, that the kingdom of God belongs to those who receive it like a little child.

In today's gospel, the pattern begins, as in these other accounts, with the disciples trying to protect Jesus from what they see as the distraction of the woman who is shouting that her daughter is being tormented by a demon. The disciples urge Jesus to send her away.

At this point perhaps we are expecting that the pattern which we see elsewhere will be repeated. Jesus will confront His disciples and will show them how wrong their priorities are. So, what follows is even more shocking

than it might otherwise be. Far from welcoming the woman, Jesus tells her that she is outside the scope of His mission as He was 'sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel'. She, as a Canaanite woman is not one of the lost sheep of the house of Israel and so He cannot help her.

Jesus' initial answer of 'no' seems stark and unequivocal. Surely the plea does not need to be repeated. The message is clear. And I wonder whether we would keep on 'bothering' Jesus when God seems to have quite clearly said 'No' to our request. Surely it would be more spiritual quietly to accept that God's ways are indeed at times mysterious and that sometimes we are given the answer 'No'. We may not understand why this might be so, but perhaps it is not our place to do so and we feel that we should not argue with God's verdict but accept it with good grace.

But this woman does not behave in this way. She pays no attention to what Jesus has said. Rather she redoubles her entreaties, falling at Jesus' feet and saying simply 'Lord, help me.'

And at that point we think to ourselves that Jesus surely will help her. But just as the woman's prayers have intensified so too does His refusal of her requests. Indeed, his next response seems harsh and even insulting, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs'.

Again, if we had been in this woman's position would we have stopped bothering God at this point? At what point would we have accepted 'no' for an answer? Might it have been when we heard the disciples initially seeking to send us away? We can often be swayed by what others tell us about God and what we can or cannot say to God.

However, we might go on and approach Jesus directly. But would we have stopped when we heard His first unmistakably clear statement that it is not part of His mission to respond to a request like ours? Perhaps we might

stop but then again this might depend on how desperate we were for God's help and how deeply heart felt our prayers were.

In this case, we might have decided to give this just one more try. Perhaps we did not hear Jesus correctly the first time and perhaps His refusal to help is not quite what it seems. And so, like the woman, we might have intensified our efforts.

But at that point we receive a yet more stinging and stern 'No' from Jesus. Surely now all our options are exhausted and we simply have to accept gracefully and no doubt sadly that 'No' means 'No' when we hear this message repeated.

However, just as in Jesus' parables where the widow persists to the extent of becoming a nuisance to the unjust judge as does the man who knocks at his friend's door at midnight insisting that he be given food, so this woman demonstrates a persistence that in the end will not be denied. Far from being deterred she tries a new tack. Rather than pleading, she answers Jesus back in a witty but provocative way, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.'

And at this point we might think to ourselves that this time the woman has surely gone too far. We expect a repeat of the previous exchange where an intensification of the plea is met by a corresponding intensification of Jesus' refusal to help. What can Jesus do now except end this encounter altogether with an outright condemnation of this woman's insolent defiance?

But once again the expected pattern is turned upside down. Astonishingly Jesus gives completely the opposite answer to the one that we expect to hear. This time He does not simply grant the woman's request without further delay but does so with an affirmation of her faith which is just as strong and unequivocal as His previous refusals to help her, "Woman, great

is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And instantly the woman’s daughter is healed.

So persistence does pay off. Even persistence which is so daring that it seems to border on insolence. There is a lesson for us here in how we are to approach God. Our concerns, our long cherished dreams and needs, do matter to God. We should not lightly stop placing them before God even when other people think we are mistaken in this or it seems that God is simply not interested.

That is an important lesson. However, when we reflect on our life of prayer, we also have to recognise that there are prayers which, however persistent we have been, simply have not received an answer. Indeed, if we have prayed for people whom we have loved and they have since died, our prayers have gone beyond an answer in this life.

How do we make sense of this? It is at this point that our Old Testament reading from Isaiah might help. Perhaps this reading or a similar one may have been the foundation of the woman’s insistence that the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the children’s table.

For Isaiah promises that one day God’s people will not be restricted, as in Old Testament times, simply to the chosen people of Israel. There will come a time when foreigners will also be included among those who belong and minister to God. They too will be given joy in God’s house of prayer. God will gather in not simply the outcasts of Israel but others as well.

This is a promise which God makes for the future. It is a vision of what will be at the end of time when the wolf and the lamb will feed together and the lion will eat straw like the ox (see Isaiah 65: 25).

But this vision is not simply for the end of time. It is a portrait of the Messianic age and, in Jesus, we have begun to see this Messianic age

fulfilled. So the woman is right to insist that she, as a Canaanite Gentile, should receive ministry from Jesus just as much as the lost sheep of Israel to whom He was originally sent.

But still a tension remains. The Kingdom of God will be finally fulfilled at the end of time and yet in Jesus we can see the Kingdom partially fulfilled here and now.

And in many ways, as we pray for God's Kingdom to come so we see this happening. Many of the prayers and desires of our hearts are answered and fulfilled. But not all of them.

In theological terms, we speak of God's Kingdom as being both 'Now' and 'Not Yet'. We have to hold these two in balance. We do indeed need to persist in prayer. Just like the Canaanite woman, we can find that as we persist in this way, we can experience the joy of God's kingdom here and now. But there are also times when we can only look beyond this life for our answers. As we do so, we await that final coming of God's kingdom which is still yet to be and where in the words of the book of Revelation, there will be no more mourning and crying and pain.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- The need to persist in prayer
- Small boats crossing in the Channel and the recent deaths
- 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 refreshment for teachers, children and parents of North Cadbury church school in the school holidays

Hymn

One of the hymns chosen for this Sunday is 'Praise to the holiest in the height.'

Services for this week and next

Sunday 20 th August	9.30 am Communion, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 20 th August	11.00 am Communion, Maperton
Sunday 20 th August	11.00 am Sunday Worship, North Cadbury
Sunday 20 th August	6.30 pm Evensong, Yarlington
Sunday 27 th August	8.00 am Communion, Blackford
Sunday 27 th August	9.30 am Communion, South Cadbury
Sunday 27 th August	9.30 am Matins, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 27 th August	9.30 am Morning Worship, North Cheriton
Sunday 27 th August	11.00 am Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 27 th August	11.00 am Communion, Holton
Sunday 27 th August	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Yarlington
Sunday 27 th August	6.30 pm Evening Service, Galhampton

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 August 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)