

# **CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 224**

**Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2023**

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

## **Welcome**

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

## **Scripture Passage**

*Matthew 21: 23-32*

When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”

<sup>24</sup> Jesus said to them, “I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. <sup>25</sup> Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?”

And they argued with one another, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ <sup>26</sup> But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet.”

<sup>27</sup> So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.”

And he said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

<sup>28</sup> “What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’

<sup>29</sup> He answered, ‘I will not’; but later he changed his mind and went.

<sup>30</sup> The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, ‘I go, sir’; but he did not go.

<sup>31</sup> Which of the two did the will of his father?"

They said, "The first."

Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. <sup>32</sup> For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

## Reflection

I do sometimes wonder (although not enough to Google it) who it is high up in the Church of England who sets the Sunday readings for us to preach on. Because today, we have a short reading from Matthew's Gospel which doesn't on its own make a lot of sense without a slightly wider context. So we need to look at what's happened before, so the parable, and Jesus' calling out the priests can speak to us.

This is the day after what we now call Palm Sunday - Jesus had upset the Temple authorities by driving out all the stallholders, tipping the money-changers' tables over, and accusing those in charge of making what should have been a holy place "a den of thieves" - his words. And the next day, far from keeping out of the way of the furious priests, Jesus went back into the temple, and spoke to his many supporters as if nothing had happened.

Some priests and elders challenged him - what right did he have to do such things? Who gives him authority?

Jesus asked them, "Remember John the Baptist? Who gave him the authority to preach and baptise? Was it God, or man?" And the elders whispered, if we say from God, he'll ask us why we didn't believe him. And if we say from man, all these people who *did* believe John will turn on us.

So realising that whichever they said would make them seem wrong to half the people there, they said “We don’t know.”

And this is where we come in, with Jesus’ story about a man with two sons who asks them to work in the vineyard. The older one says “No”, but then changes his mind and goes, the younger says “Yes Sir,” but doesn’t. Which one, asks Jesus, did what his father wanted? And even if they thought this might be another trick question, they answered, “The elder one.” Jesus didn’t tell them if they were right, he just told them that in the queue to get into the Kingdom of God, they - the elders of Israel, the priests in the Temple - will be behind the tax collectors and prostitutes.

One of the criticisms levelled at Jesus was that he was a friend of tax collectors and prostitutes. Righteous people should give them a wide berth, they thought. People were always pointing out these two as the embodiment of evil- tax collectors were working for the Romans, they were parasites, little better than legalised thieves; and prostitutes, well, they were prostitutes, weren’t they? But the fact was, they were often people who knew, deep down, that they were wrong with God, and John’s call to repentance touched them, and as a sign of their repentance, they were baptised.

John’s baptism took place in the Jordan, where the people of Israel stopped being runaway slaves, and became a new nation. Passing through the river was for them the start of a new life. So baptism was a sign of old dirt washed clean, and a new life ahead. But the elders? The priests? The Pharisees? They didn’t need to repent - as far as they were concerned, they were the good guys - they believed the Kingdom was theirs already. They didn’t need some hairy prophet telling them they were sinners.

Back to the story. The younger son didn’t just say “Yes”- he said “Yes *sir!*” and the Greek word is *kyrios*, Lord. The priests were the ones who led worship and offered sacrifices, and the name of God – Lord - was always on their lips. But did they really do the will of God? All these burnt offerings

and prayers, all the ritual washing and not eating the wrong stuff, was that really what God wanted? No. So what does God want? I turned to John's Gospel, where Jesus says,

*It is the will of him who sent me that I should not lose any of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them all to life on the last day. For what my Father wants is that all who see the Son and believe in him should have eternal life. (John 6: 40)*

So that's what God wants! To do the will of God is to trust Jesus. That's where the priests and elders missed out. They didn't trust that Jesus was who he said he was, even after they'd seen signs and miracles, just as they never trusted John. Jesus's little story was about a son who called his father sir, made all the right noises, but didn't do the one thing his father wanted. And the other son, who was maybe a bit rude, and grudging maybe, but did as he was asked.

Sometimes people think this parable is about people who live bad lives, and then turn themselves around and start being good. The death-bed repentance, sneaking into heaven at the very last minute. Or people who live good lives, and then think "what's the point?" and turn to wicked ways. This is not the case. It's simply about trusting Jesus, and accepting that when he says your sins are forgiven, they really are, and you're free to live, and love, and forgive, and share the love of God, and his forgiveness with everybody. This is the "work" God asks us to do.

Except that we're not saved by our works, but only by God's grace. If we make trusting Jesus into work, we're missing something. Personally, I haven't done any work since 1979. Before I retired, my stipend was officially what the church gave me so I didn't have to work, so I was free to visit, and worship, and be a priest. And trusting Jesus isn't difficult. Unless you think there's no such thing as a free lunch, and treat all special offers with suspicion, hearing Jesus say "Your sins are forgiven" should make you happy. And just like in the story of the unforgiving servant we had a week

or two ago, being forgiven, and really trusting that you are, means forgiving everyone, too. My friend Jennifer in Galhampton used to say the Lord's Prayer gave her a problem. She found it hard to forgive, so she used to say "as we try to forgive those who trespass against us". Me? I'm the opposite. I find it hard to think of anyone I need to forgive.

Working in my Father's vineyard isn't really work at all. God's will is that we all share eternity with him. And trusting him is all we need to do.

*Ron*

## **Points for Prayers**

- Being able to trust God and to forgive others
- Giving thanks for the harvest
- Ongoing 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 and children of North Cadbury church school

## **Hymn**

A hymn set for this Sunday is 'Rock of ages'.

## **Services for this week and next**

Sunday 1 <sup>st</sup> October	9.00 am Communion, Yarlington
Sunday 1 <sup>st</sup> October	9.30 am Harvest Service, Blackford
Sunday 1 <sup>st</sup> October	9.30 am Harvest Service, North Cheriton
Sunday 1 <sup>st</sup> October	11.00 am Communion, North Cadbury

Sunday 8 <sup>th</sup> October	9.30 am Communion, Galhampton
Sunday 8 <sup>th</sup> October	9.30 am Communion, North Cheriton
Sunday 8 <sup>th</sup> October	9.30 am Matins, Blackford
Sunday 8 <sup>th</sup> October	11.00 am Harvest Service, South Cadbury
Sunday 8 <sup>th</sup> October	11.00 am Harvest Service, Holton

## **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 October 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)