

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 228

Sunday 29th October 2023

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

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

Scripture Passages

Leviticus 19: 1-2, 15-18

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ² Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

¹⁵ You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbour.

¹⁶ You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbour: I am the LORD.

¹⁷ You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself.

¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD.

Matthew 22: 34-46

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵ and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”

³⁷ He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the greatest and first

commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: ⁴² “What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?”

They said to him, “The son of David.”

⁴³ He said to them, “How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

⁴⁴ ‘The Lord said to my Lord,

“Sit at my right hand,

until I put your enemies under your feet”?”

⁴⁵ “If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?”

⁴⁶ No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Reflection

Last week, in looking at Jesus’ well known saying ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s’, we asked ourselves what belonged to God.

And it is not accidental that in today’s passage from Matthew gospel which follows on almost immediately from this saying, Jesus tells us that the most important commandment, the primary thing that belongs to God, is our wholehearted love for God.

Jesus is responding to a question asked by the Pharisees, ‘which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ His response is clear and unequivocal. The most important commandment of all is to love God with all our heart, soul and mind.

He then emphasises the importance of a second, linked commandment. This is to love our neighbours as ourselves. Our first reading from the Old Testament book of Leviticus sets out this commandment and gives it a very practical application. We are not to hold grudges or take revenge, we need to be concerned for justice and we are not to malign other people by what we say. Most important of all, we should not hate other people in our hearts. For that is the opposite of love and is the root cause of all these other destructive forms of behaviour.

The link between these two commands reminds us that loving God is not simply a matter of having a rich, inner devotional life full of praise, prayer and worship in our hearts. This will not count for anything unless this love for God is reflected and expressed in the relationships of love which we have with those around us. And our love for our neighbour needs to be shown in very practical forms of behaviour.

In all of this, Jesus' answer is clear, unequivocal and in line with the established teaching of the Old Testament. These are principles which are likely to find assent among those who affirm any kind of belief in God and who wish to know how to live in an ethical way which honours God. And even those who do not believe in God could take the second of these commands, to love our neighbours as ourselves as a guide for life.

And we too, though no doubt in a different way, find ourselves echoing the Pharisees' question about what commandment is most important, whatever point we have reached on our spiritual journey.

For, this is a question about what truly matters in life and what kind of lives we need to live. So having listened to Jesus' reply with its link between loving God and loving our neighbour we might ask ourselves, why do we need anything else? Do we need to add in any specific belief in Jesus Christ? And, if so, why? What does this bring us?

However, having answered the Pharisees' question, Jesus promptly turns the tables by asking them a question of His own. Just as the Pharisees' question is likely to find an echo within our hearts, so we find that Jesus' question challenges us, as much as it did the Pharisees.

His question is focussed, in an indirect fashion, about who He really is. The importance of Jesus' true identity emerges throughout the New Testament. His question here relates to who the Messiah is and the relationship between the Messiah and the most prominent of the Old Testament kings, David. Whose son is the Messiah? The Pharisees' answer to this question is quite straightforward. The Messiah is the son of David.

In this answer we find encapsulated the Messianic hopes for a successor to David, someone in the same line and tradition as David, a great military leader who will be able to throw off the yoke of Roman oppression under which the nation was currently suffering.

It was these hopes which are voiced in the cry of the crowds as Jesus and His disciples enter Jerusalem on what we know as Palm Sunday, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' (Matthew 21: 9).

But Jesus was not prepared simply to accept this understanding of the Messiah's identity. He challenged it by referring to one of the Psalms of David, Psalm 110. In interpreting this Psalm, Jesus points out that David speaks of the Messiah as his Lord. If this is the case, then how can the Messiah simply be David's son? The Messiah must be more than this, indeed the Messiah must be someone who can be placed on the same level as God.

In none of this does Jesus claim overtly to be the Messiah or to say outright that the Messiah is the Son of God. And yet His meaning and intention is clear. Later on, He will be more open and explicit. When He is on trial for His life and is being questioned by the high priest, He is asked to tell the

high priest and the assembled council if He is the Messiah, the Son of God. His reply at that point is simply 'You have said so' (Matthew 26:64). It is this answer which proves to be Jesus' death sentence.

Reflecting on the Pharisees' question to Jesus and Jesus' own question to the Pharisees, we might ask ourselves how the second question fits in with the first and why indeed the second is necessary at all. After all, do we not have everything we need for living our lives in the right way set out in the two great Old Testament commands which Jesus affirms. Why do we need to add to this?

Recently, I listened to a very stimulating speaker who had been a vicar in a rural multi parish benefice. He had seen a number of people come to faith under His ministry. In what follows, I may be conflating one or two of the examples which he gave but I think nonetheless that I am reflecting the spirit of what he was saying accurately.

He spoke of someone who was trying desperately hard to be a 'good Christian' and yet kept on failing. He found that he was simply unable to live up to the seemingly impossible standards of loving God with his whole heart and loving his neighbour as himself.

And despite many arguments and points put forward by his vicar he just also found himself unable to accept Jesus' claims to be the Son of God or the Messiah or indeed to understand why this was so important.

But one day, on the spur of the moment when he was visiting London, he decided to go into a church which he did not know and simply to sit there for a few minutes. As he did so, he had a profound and personal experience of being enveloped and overwhelmed by the love of God. And this was accompanied by a simple acceptance of Jesus' claims to be the Son of God.

As I say, I may have conflated this from a variety of different stories that I heard. However, I do know that this very much relates to my own personal experience at the start of my Christian life. For as I too wrestled with what to make about Jesus' claims about Himself, I also suddenly had a dramatic encounter which showed me the immense depth and personal nature of God's love for me in Jesus Christ. This helped me to accept that Jesus was who He claimed to be and this encounter changed the course of my life.

Not all of us, of course, will have such dramatic encounters. Indeed, the speaker's own experience of coming to faith was much more measured and considered.

However, we will find that if we are truly to be able to love God and other people with all our hearts, we first need to accept God's love for us. And this involves accepting the claim of Jesus on our lives. We might say that it is not a matter of trying to be a good Christian but of trusting in Christ and receiving all the love, forgiveness and sense of God's presence that He gives us.

We have many questions to ask of God. But, also, as today's gospel passage shows, God has some questions to ask of us. These questions cause us to reflect on where we stand in our own spiritual journey and in relation to who Jesus claims to be. What will our answer to those questions be?

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- The questions we have for God and that God has for us
- Giving thanks for the harvest
- For Israel, Gaza and the Middle East
- 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 concerning Jesus as Messiah is 'Hail to the Lord's anointed.'

Services for this week and next

Sunday 29 th October	9.30 am Family Service, North Cheriton
Sunday 29 th October	11.00 am Communion, Maperton
Sunday 29 th October	11.00 am Harvest Service, Bratton Seymour
Sunday 29 th October	4.00 pm Evensong, Galhampton
Sunday 5 th November	9.00 am Communion, Yarlington
Sunday 5 th November	9.30 am Camelot Matins, North Cheriton
Sunday 5 th November	11.00 am Group Communion

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 November 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)