

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 231

Sunday 19th November 2023

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

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

Scripture Passages

1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. ² For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ When they say, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape!

⁴ But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; ⁵ for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. ⁶ So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; ⁷ for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Matthew 25: 14-30

“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵ to one he gave five talents, to another two,

to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶ The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷ In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸ But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

¹⁹ "After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.'

²¹ "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

²² "And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.'

²³ "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

²⁴ "Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.'

²⁶ "But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest.

²⁸ So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents.

²⁹ For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰ As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Reflection

God does not micromanage us. Perhaps we might find it easier if we knew for certain what God wants for us in every minute detail of our lives. On the other hand, we might find this unbearably constricting.

There is a verse in the Psalms which sums up very neatly the dividing line between what is God's responsibility and what is ours, 'The heavens are the LORD's heavens, but the earth he has given to human beings.' (Psalm 115: 16).

Or in other words, the ultimate spiritual direction of both our lives and of the Creation as a whole is in God's hands, but God has nevertheless entrusted the care of the earth and our responsibilities in this world to us.

This also means that we live in a world of risk. We can seek faithfully to fulfil the responsibilities which God has given us but as we live out our life of faith step by step we have no guarantee of what the immediate outcome of each step will be.

Rather we have to keep on entrusting ourselves and the path that we choose to follow to God. Along the way, we will no doubt meet with both success and with what appears at least at the immediate level to be failure. And yet we can learn from both success and failure and, most importantly, how to keep on living faithfully through all circumstances and seasons of our lives.

We have genuine freedom. But along with this freedom, there also comes the challenge of genuine responsibilities and the need to take genuine risks.

And this brings us to the setting of this morning's gospel parable, one which we usually know as the Parable of the Talents. A master has gone away on a long journey. But before he goes, he entrusts his servants with the administration of his property. Different amounts of talents are given to

each of three different servants. Talents, we may note, in the original story means sums of money rather than the subsequently acquired meaning of personal gifts or attributes.

And then the master goes off and does not return for a long time. During this period of absence, he is not looking over his servants' shoulders to see what they are doing with the property which he has entrusted to them. However, he is expecting his servants during his absence to be dealing faithfully with their trust. And when he returns he asks for an account of what they have done and what his property now represents.

As well as being a realistic account of a master going on a journey, the position of this parable within Matthew's gospel indicates that we are also to link the long period of the master's absence with the theme of the delay in Jesus' return. This parable is positioned between the parable of the ten bridesmaids in which the bridegroom suddenly returns in the middle of the night after a long delay and the parable of the sheep and the goats which is a vision of the final judgement.

This theme is also picked up in our reading from Paul's epistle to the Thessalonians. Here, Paul again stresses the unexpected nature of Jesus' return and of the final judgement, saying 'For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.'

And in the light of this, he counsels the Thessalonians to live faithfully and expectantly so that they are not surprised by the coming of this day. Rather their faithful behaviour in the meantime will equip them to withstand the spiritual testing and judgement of this time, since they live as children of light and not of darkness.

Sadly, however, there are other alternatives in the exercise of the freedom which God gives us. Rather than living faithfully, we can abuse the freedom that we are given. Why might this happen?

The parable of the Talents offers us some insight into this question through the character of the third servant. In contrast to the first two servants, the third refuses to take any risks with the money which he has been given. Rather, he hides his talent in the ground so that when his master returns, he knows that he can give him back exactly the same amount as he has originally been given. There is no chance that his master will suffer loss or that he will be blamed for this loss.

The master describes the third servant as being lazy. But is laziness really his true, underlying motivation? For, at a deeper level, the third servant seems to be governed by fear. As he tells his master, 'I knew that you were a harsh man...so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.'

Fear can be a very powerful motivation and is connected with how we see the person of whom we are afraid. The third servant believes the master to be harsh. This paralyses him from taking any effective action in relation to the money which has been entrusted to him because he is afraid of taking any risks. What might his master's response be if those risks were to prove to be unsuccessful and he was to lose all his master's money? In weighing this up, he prefers to 'play it safe.'

And when we consider this, we need also to recognise that, although we do not know the details of what happened when the first two servants traded with the monies entrusted to them, we know from the realities of commercial life that it would be very unlikely that all their ventures would have been successful. Along the way, they would have suffered losses as well as gains. But, on the whole and over a long period of time, their trading was successful.

But what kept them going in the times of failure and enabled them to continue to take risks with their master's money? They must have trusted their master and their view of him must have been very different from that of

the third servant. And even more than trust, we can suggest that they were motivated by love.

There are various Jewish parables which parallel the one which Jesus told His disciples. One of them distinguishes between two servants, one of whom both fears and loves the king and the other of whom simply fears the king. Just as in Jesus' parable, when the king goes into a far country, the first servant plants gardens, orchards and all kinds of fruit while the second one does nothing at all. Again, it is the first servant, who both loves and fears the king, who is rewarded rather than the second one who simply fears the king.

Certainly, in Jesus' parable, the relationships which the first and second servants enjoy with their master are very different from that of the third. We may suggest that it was their existing relationship of trust and love which enabled the first two servants to go out and take the risks that they did without the fear of failure or its consequences.

And when their master comes back, they are rewarded in two ways. First, they are given a yet greater measure of responsibility. And secondly their relationship with their master develops and grows deeper. They are put in charge of many things and are invited to enter into the joy of their master.

As for the third servant, his view of his master as a harsh man proves to be a self-fulfilling prophecy as he is sentenced to be thrown into the darkness. But this also simply reflects the lack of a true relationship with his master in the first place. There is no joy for him to enter into because his understanding of his master is such a negative one.

This parable causes us to look carefully at our own relationship with God and the way that we are exercising the responsibilities of our faith. Is our view of God essentially that of a harsh tyrant? If it is, we will be likely to

find it very difficult to take any risks for God in our life of faith. Governed by fear, we will be much more likely just to want to play it safe.

But, of course, this is in fact the riskiest thing we could possibly do as we could lose everything through our lack of action. If, on the other hand, we are secure in our relationship of love and trust with God and believe God to be merciful and generous, then this will motivate us to take the risks that are inevitable in being faithful stewards of all that God has given us. And as we do continue this way, over time we will find that, though no doubt not without setbacks on the way, what God has given us will grow and we too will enter more and more deeply into the joy of God.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- Being secure enough in our relationship with God to take risks in our life of faith
- 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 which we are singing this Sunday is 'Father, hear the prayer we offer.'

Services for this week and next

Sunday 19 th November	9.30 am Communion, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 19 th November	11.00 am Communion, Maperton
Sunday 19 th November	11.00 am Sunday Worship, North Cadbury
Sunday 19 th November	4.00 pm Evensong, Yarlington
Sunday 26 th November	8.00 am Communion, Blackford
Sunday 26 th November	9.30 am Communion, South Cadbury
Sunday 26 th November	9.30 am Matins, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 26 th November	9.30 am Morning Worship, North Cheriton
Sunday 26 th November	11.00 am Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 26 th November	11.00 am Communion, Holton
Sunday 26 th November	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Yarlington
Sunday 26 th November	4.00 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 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)