

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 242

Sunday 11th February 2024

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

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

Scripture Passages

2 Kings 2: 1-12

Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. ² Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here; for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel.” But Elisha said, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel.

³ The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, “Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?” And he said, “Yes, I know; keep silent.”

⁴ Elijah said to him, “Elisha, stay here; for the LORD has sent me to Jericho.” But he said, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they came to Jericho.

⁵ The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, “Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?” And he answered, “Yes, I know; be silent.”

⁶ Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here; for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.” But he said, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them went on.

⁷ Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. ⁸ Then

Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

⁹ When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit."

¹⁰ He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not."

¹¹ As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven.

¹² Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

Mark 9: 2-9

² Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³ and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

⁵ Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁶ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

⁸ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Reflection

Recently, I needed some advice from an expert. On arriving at our appointment, I knew exactly the question which I wanted him to answer. It was a clear and definite question and the response to it would, I hoped, lead to some very specific action.

But, immediately we met and before I had had any time to explain why I had come, I was greeted with a whole barrage of words and seemingly disconnected thoughts.

Was I registered for this scheme or that scheme? he asked. No, I had not heard of these schemes and was completely unsure of what they might do for me. But why not?, he said. How foolish this was. These schemes could do a great deal for me.

And what advice had I received the last time I came in? I remembered this perfectly clearly and was able to tell him. But how extraordinary! Who could have possibly told you that? Your colleague, I replied. He looked at me as if he could not quite believe that but then repeated that the colleague's advice had been entirely wrong and indeed quite extraordinary.

And then followed a whole series of questions on what seemed to me to be unrelated subjects. As I responded as best I could I found myself confronted with a whole arsenal of various charts, rates and tables.

I had come in with a clear and definite focus, a question to which I wanted an answer, an action that I wanted to achieve. But by this stage I was thoroughly confused and bewildered and had lost my sense of focus. I did not know what I was doing.

And we all need a sense of focus in life. What are we living for? What are we hoping to achieve? Without this sense of focus, our lives just become a

succession of responses to different, disparate demands and tasks which pull us this way and then another.

Sometimes, as Christians, when we complain of a lack of focus in our lives, someone might suggest that we take some time out, go on a retreat in order to seek God to find again our purpose in life and to regain our focus.

But is 'time out' enough by itself to address this problem? Often I find that when I take some time to reflect, the immediate issues which are besieging me simply follow me. Barely have I had enough time for these to quieten down in my mind when I need to go back to 'normality' and to everyday life.

If we look at our gospel account of Jesus' Transfiguration we find Peter, James and John being taken away from all external distractions and from the multiplicity of demands upon them which come as they accompany Jesus in His ministry. They are led by Jesus up a high mountain by themselves in order to get closer to God.

Jesus, indeed, always retained a sense of aim and focus. His whole life was entirely devoted to fulfilling God's purposes. He knew what distractions to avoid. But He also knew when apparent distractions needed to be pursued in order to lead to fruitful ministry.

And on this occasion, Jesus knows that He needs to be freed from the immediate demands of His ministry in order to meet with God in a closer and deeper way. So, He goes up the mountain, away from the crowds, and accompanied only by His three closest disciples, Peter, James and John.

However, these disciples seem to have brought the distractions of their everyday lives along with them just as we can bring our immediate problems and distractions with us when we go on retreat. From Peter's remarks, it seems that even though they were alone on that mountain with Jesus, God,

Moses and Elijah, there were many fragmentary thoughts still going through their minds.

So, just as in my experience of consulting an expert, Peter's words seem to come out of his mouth in a way that does not appear to appreciate the significance of Jesus' dramatic encounter with God. Peter says, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' This is a call to action, no doubt. But what is its purpose? What is Peter trying to achieve? How does it relate to what he and the others have been seeing?

The gospel simply comments that 'He did not know what to say'. The disciples are indeed terrified by this extraordinary event of the Transfiguration where Jesus' clothes become dazzling white. But in Peter's fear and confusion, he says whatever first comes into his mind without weighing up whether or not it is appropriate.

So far, Peter and the others have not regained their sense of focus through being taken up the mountain. However, God swiftly offers them an opportunity to recover their focus. A voice comes from the cloud which overshadows them and says 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!'

Jesus, in other words, is the focus which we always need to keep uppermost in our hearts and minds. As we retain our focus on Jesus, even though we may be confronted with many different and seemingly incompatible demands on our lives, we will find that, over time, we do fulfil God's purposes for our lives.

This is a message which emerges clearly from our other passage, the Old Testament account of Elisha following Elijah as he is taken up into heaven by a whirlwind.

Elisha does not have the luxury of being taken by himself up a mountain in order to reflect on what God is saying to him. Rather, he has to work out what God wants him to do for himself, 'on the move', as he journeys with his master Elijah.

And on this journey, he encounters many potential distractions. First, there is the company of prophets who, on two separate occasions at Bethel and then at Jericho, ask him whether he knows that God is going to take his master Elijah away from him on that very day.

To each question, Elisha replies in a very simple but very determined manner. He does know and these repeated questions are not helpful to him. So, he asks his questioners to keep silent. This reply gives some indication of how focused Elisha is on what God has in store for him. Unlike the apostles on the mountain, he will not give way to fear or anxiety.

For Elisha knows that all the training that he has received from Elijah has been moving towards one central moment of destiny for his life. This is the time when Elisha will take over and continue Elijah's prophetic ministry. This is not something which Elisha is grasping as if he wanted Elijah off the scene as soon as possible. On the contrary, when Elijah is taken from him, it is a moment of great personal distress. When he can no longer see Elijah he tears his clothes in pieces, exclaiming, 'Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!'

Nevertheless, this clear and central sense of focus remains with Elisha through his journey with all its potential distractions. We see it also in Elisha's initial refusal of Elijah's offer for him to stay behind while Elijah journeys on alone.

Elisha is then given two more opportunities to abandon Elijah before he departs into heaven. But on each occasion Elisha turns down Elijah's offer. The purpose behind Elisha's steadfast refusal to leave Elijah becomes clear

when Elijah responds to Elisha's request that he might inherit a double portion of Elijah's spirit or in other words that he might be Elijah's successor as prophet.

The granting of this request completely depends on Elisha's persisting to the end in being with Elijah. Unless Elisha actually sees Elijah as he is being taken up into heaven the request will not be granted.

So, it is this sense of purpose, Elisha's consciousness of his God given destiny as Elijah's successor that has spurred him on through all the difficulties and distractions of his journey. Now we see the reason behind Elisha's repeated refusal to leave Elijah and his refusal to be drawn in by the questions and comments of his fellow prophets. Elisha's focus on his journey has been pure and undiluted. And it is this which eventually results in his reward of his indeed being given a double portion of Elijah's spirit.

So where do we stand in terms of our own vision and focus for our lives? We may perhaps feel that we have lost this at the moment. We seem to be surrounded by so many disparate and incompatible calls on our time and attention and how can we work out which of them are truly and lastingly important?

Taking time out to go on a retreat may be an option for some of us and this may be what people advise us to do. And yet sifting through the jumble of thoughts that are competing for attention in our minds cannot be sorted out simply by going somewhere new and away from our everyday lives.

And anyway, on many occasions, there may be no mountain to which we can go. In such times, our lives feel much more like Elisha's journey in which we encounter many competing voices and priorities but through which we need to stand firm in identifying and pursuing what God truly desires for us.

What sustained Elisha in such a constant sense of purpose? We are not told. However, one resource which was available to him and which is also available to us is that of prayer and meditating on the promises of the Bible. This does not need to take any long drawn out and elaborate time. God knows the pressures on our lives and the time that we have available. But as we 'check in' each day and commit the events of the day to God, so we will find our sense of focus and calling renewed and strengthened.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- Retaining our focus on God in our lives
- The King's health
- For continuing and new conflicts including those in the Yemen, Israel, Gaza and 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

One hymn we are singing this Sunday which encourages us to focus on God is 'Be still for the presence of the Lord.'

Services for this week and next

Sunday 11 th February	9.30 am Communion, Galhampton
Sunday 11 th February	9.30 am Communion, North Cheriton
Sunday 11 th February	9.30 am Matins, Blackford

Sunday 11 th February	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Holton
Sunday 18 th February	9.30 am Communion, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 18 th February	11.00 am Communion, Maperton
Sunday 18 th February	11.00 am Sunday Worship, North Cadbury
Sunday 18 th February	4.00 pm Evensong, Yarlington

Excalibur online

The February edition of Excalibur has now been published online at camelotparishes.co.uk. It contains details of Camelot people, a record of baptisms, weddings and funerals undertaken through the church in the Camelot Parishes.

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)