

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 243

Sunday 18th February 2024

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

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

Scripture Passages

Genesis 9: 8-17

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

¹² God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³ I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.”

¹⁷ God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

Mark 1: 9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.

¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Reflection

This is the first Sunday in Lent. So, familiarity had led me to assume that I would be speaking on the subject of temptation. Satan tempting Jesus in the wilderness and offering Him the options of turning stones into bread, of throwing Himself down spectacularly from the temple, and of ruling over all the kingdoms of the world if only He would worship Satan.

And then I read this morning’s passage from Mark’s gospel and I found none of this. Yes, there is a very passing reference to temptation but in very general rather than any specific terms. ‘He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan’.

And in the passage as a whole we find that this very brief summary of Jesus’ temptation is sandwiched between two summaries of other very significant stages in Jesus’ life and ministry.

Before the temptation, we learn of Jesus’ baptism. This is a moment of great affirmation for Jesus. As He comes up out of the waters of baptism,

He sees the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove. And then the voice comes from heaven proclaiming that He is the beloved Son of God and, in Him, God is well pleased.

This is about who Jesus is. It is not an assessment of the value of Jesus' ministry. Indeed, there could be no such assessment because as yet Jesus' ministry has not begun. Instead, it is Jesus' relationship with God as His Son which is so powerfully endorsed. God is pleased in who Jesus is. God loves His Son completely and unconditionally.

As we read these words, they may bring to mind times when we have been affirmed in a strong way either by our parents or by other people. Perhaps, on the other hand, we might have longed to have heard these kinds of words but we cannot recall having heard them. Either way, affirmation and encouragement has a profound impact on the way we see ourselves and the way we live our lives.

And then on the other side of the account of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness comes another brief summary, this time of the beginning of Jesus' public ministry and the message that He came to bring. This message is centred around the kingdom of God. However, even though its focus is very clearly on God and God's kingdom this message is also a deeply personal one. For it is in Jesus Himself that the kingdom from being a far off hope and expectation becomes a reality which can be experienced here and now. In Jesus, the kingdom has come near and through the light of Jesus' presence there comes the call to repent and believe in the gospel.

So what lies in the middle of the sandwich, between the love and affirmation of Jesus as God's beloved Son and the powerful beginning of Jesus' public ministry with such a clear and compelling message?

No time is wasted following the account of Jesus' baptism. We are told that 'immediately' the Spirit drives Jesus out into the wilderness.

We may find ourselves taken aback by this short, yet vivid description. Perhaps we may be more accustomed to descriptions of the Spirit drawing or leading people. Certainly, the description of the Spirit as being like a dove in the account of Jesus' baptism emphasises the gentle side of the Spirit's ministry.

But here the language is more forceful, almost brutal in its power. Immediately, the Spirit drives Jesus out into the wilderness.

As we consider what happened to Jesus in the wilderness, certainly temptation is an appropriate word. However, the Greek word for temptation, *peirasmos* has a dual meaning. It can indeed mean temptation but it can also mean testing.

Testing and hardship can be used to reveal and strengthen the inner qualities of a person. So we speak, say, of a metal being tested and purified by fire. Jesus' inner character and commitment to His God given mission certainly was tested through the hardships of his forty days in the wilderness.

There was, first of all, the inhospitable terrain in which He found Himself, a place which was not conducive to any natural growth or supplies. And it was a place where Jesus had no human companionship. The only company were the wild beasts and rather than finding any companionship in them, they represented a source of danger and potential destruction.

All Jesus was left with in His need to resist the temptations of Satan was the help that He could find in God. This, He found, as 'the angels waited on him.'

The whole experience was one in which Jesus was driven into complete reliance on God without any of the other sources of help and comfort for which we are so often grateful in our own lives.

As we turn to our reading from the Old Testament, we can see a similar pattern. This speaks of the rainbow as a sign of God's promise following the devastation of Noah's flood. For Noah and his family, the waters which covered the earth must have been like a wilderness in which they were entirely sustained by the hope of God's promises.

They are strengthened and tested by this experience. But now as the floods withdraw, Noah and his descendants are again offered a future hope which is underpinned by God's promise made with them that 'never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' And the visible sign of this promise is the rainbow in the clouds.

As we think about the shape of our own lives, ministries and callings perhaps we too can trace a similar pattern to the one we see in our two readings this morning.

A moment of deep, personal affirmation can be followed almost immediately by our being driven out into a personal wilderness, whatever shape that might take. Perhaps this could be the wilderness of personal bereavement or the loss of a job. However, in that wilderness, we can be sustained by the powerful memory of knowing how precious we are in God's sight.

And equally we have all no doubt known periods of private, inner testing which prepare us for a new form of public service.

The pattern is one of an affirmation of ourselves and our calling. This is followed by a period of testing which in turn precedes the beginning of the fulfilment of the vision which God has set before us.

In my own life, I have certainly known spiritual high points immediately preceding some very difficult news such as the unexpected and serious

illness of a family member. Those spiritual high points helped to sustain my faith in the difficult days that followed.

And also, the period of preparation for ordained ministry at theological college seemed at times to me rather like a testing wilderness. However, I also recognise how important that time of patient writing of essays seeking to set out ordered answers in response to hypothetical questions has been. For when a crisis comes in ministry and there is a need for a swift response then somehow a solution comes to mind which both puts Christ first while at the same time recognising and understanding the complexity of the circumstances in which a response is needed. At such times, I remember that I owe some of my ability to respond in this way to that time of preparation carefully shielded from the public gaze.

What, I wonder, has your experience been? Have there been spiritual highs which have preceded a time in the wilderness? And how has that time prepared you for the future demands of life?

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- Drawing from God in our 'wilderness' experiences
- 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 for the beginning of Lent is 'Forty days and forty nights.'

Services for this week and next

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
Sunday 25 th February	8.00 am	Communion, Blackford
Sunday 25 th February	9.30 am	Communion, South Cadbury
Sunday 25 th February	9.30 am	Matins, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 25 th February	9.30 am	Morning Worship, North Cheriton
Sunday 25 th February	11.00 am	Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 25 th February	11.00 am	Communion, Holton
Sunday 25 th February	11.00 am	Sunday Worship, Yarlington
Sunday 25 th February	4.00 pm	Evening Service, Galhampton

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)