

# **CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 244**

**Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2024**

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

## **Welcome**

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

## **Scripture Passages**

*Romans 4: 13-25*

For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith.

<sup>14</sup> If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. <sup>15</sup> For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

<sup>16</sup> For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, <sup>17</sup> as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”) - in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

<sup>18</sup> Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So numerous shall your descendants be.” <sup>19</sup> He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. <sup>20</sup> No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup> being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. <sup>22</sup> Therefore his faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness.” <sup>23</sup> Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written

not for his sake alone, <sup>24</sup> but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, <sup>25</sup> who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

### *Mark 8: 31-38*

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

<sup>33</sup> But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

<sup>34</sup> He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?

<sup>37</sup> Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? <sup>38</sup> Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

## **Reflection**

Sometimes, we can think that it is our or someone else’s job to ‘sell’ the gospel. After all, do we not all want to see full churches that pay their financial way? And how will this be done without selling our product?

And so to achieve this objective, we may think that we need to make some compromises. Rather like banks who lure in new customers with headline making rates and then after six months or so stop the introductory offer so

that the account dramatically falls off the 'best buy' tables, we may think that in order to attract people we need to accentuate the positive aspects of our message.

We can focus on questions like 'What can God do for me?' or 'How can God help me?' And while these questions are not wrong in themselves, they sideline some aspects of the gospel which we may think are unattractive and off putting. Where, for instance, in the question 'What can God do for me?' is there any mention of the need for self-sacrifice? Such a call tends not to go down well in a consumer centred culture.

But we tell ourselves that we will speak about those parts of the gospel later when our new customers are firmly on the hook. However, when we adopt this attitude, later never seems to arrive. The result is that we may end up speaking only of a faith which is superficial and which lacks the lasting roots to withstand times of hardship and deprivation.

Some of this kind of thinking may have been in the apostle Peter's mind when he rebukes Jesus for speaking about suffering, rejection and death. Surely no-one wants to hear a message of that kind. It does not fit in with the popular concept at the time of an all conquering Messiah who would bring national liberation. Peter may have wondered how people were possibly going to be attracted to follow Jesus with a message like that.

However, Jesus' response to Peter's objection is, in its own turn, stark and unequivocal. Rejection, suffering and the humiliation of death on the Cross lie at the heart of Jesus' mission, they are not elements which can be tactfully omitted to make the whole message rather more palatable.

Indeed, Jesus contrasts two opposite ways of thinking which are incompatible with one another. The first is a purely human way of thinking, as exemplified by Peter. This sees as its goal human success and acclaim.

The second is God's way of thinking which means treading a path of sacrifice leading to death.

Indeed, Jesus goes further and speaks of Peter as representing the devil or Satan. Peter, of course, will become a truly great saint of God, indeed the foundation stone on which the whole church is built.

However, at this point, Peter, just like Satan in the temptations of the wilderness, presents Jesus with a superficially attractive course of action. But the problem is that this involves Jesus turning His back on His God given destiny. So, Peter's temptation comes from the devil and needs to be recognised as such.

There is a different set of opposites presented in our reading from the book of Romans. These opposites are those of law and of grace. Again, these can be seen as representing the difference between human thinking and God's thinking.

The question is how we can be acceptable to and please God. The way of the law involves keeping the demands and principles set out in the Old Testament through Moses. There is the moral law such as the Ten Commandments. And there is also the ceremonial law which sets out the right way to make religious observances such as sacrifices in the Temple. Some people in Paul's time argued that it was only by scrupulous observance of the law in all its complexity that we could be accepted by and have a relationship with God.

This may not be a very contemporary concern. On the other hand, many people might assume that the way to please God is to pile up as many good deeds as we can in the hope that these will outweigh any wrong that we might do. In this way, our destiny with God is entirely in our hands. It is up to us to do the best we can.

There may be attractions in this way of thinking but once again this represents a human rather than God's way of thinking. For Paul tells us all our best efforts will inevitably end up in failure and frustration, resulting in our being judged rather than accepted by God.

On other hand the opposite to the life of law is the life of grace. This is a life in which we receive unconditional love, forgiveness and mercy from God. We simply have to accept that rather than being able to earn God's love and approval in any way, God loves us because God loves us.

Now that surely is attractive. And when we look again at the message that Jesus places before those who would follow Him, there is the promise of a joy and freedom which lies beyond the rigorous challenge of the way of the Cross. For, yes, Jesus does say that His followers must deny themselves and take up their cross. Nevertheless, this sacrifice is not futile or life denying. For it is the road to true and lasting joy,' those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.'

On the other hand, sadly, those who live for short term gain and who have no perspective beyond this present life will end up losing everything that matters most, 'For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?'

The word translated 'life' in these verses can equally be translated 'soul'. Life is not simply physical life, but the essence of what matters in life, our spiritual life. So, when we speak of people as having lost their soul, we mean that they have abandoned and betrayed all that truly makes life worth living

This focusses our attention on what life really means. Such issues come to the fore when we face really tough and challenging circumstances. It is then that the hope and endurance that Christ brings to us really makes a difference.

For it is no accident that the church has often grown fastest and been at its strongest when it has faced suffering and persecution. We can think of the explosive growth of the church in its early centuries when suffering persecution from the Roman Empire. Or nearer our own time we can think of the strength of the 'underground' churches in communist regimes in Eastern Europe.

For beyond the Cross lies the Resurrection. Jesus' teaching does indeed begin with the necessity of suffering and sacrifice and yet it ends with the hope of the Resurrection, 'the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again'.

This is a faith which sustains us when our circumstances are desperate, it is not simply an 'added extra' which makes us feel good when life is all going our way. Paul gives us the example of Abraham who 'was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old)' nevertheless 'hoping against hope' that God's promise that he would become the father of many nations would be fulfilled.

I began by thinking about how we might 'advertise' our faith and I gave the example of a bank enticing customers in by a headline grabbing rate and shortly afterwards dramatically slashing this rate. This, of course, is an example of a human rather than a divine way of thinking.

But then I wondered whether I could find an example of a different way of advertising the Christian faith, one which was truthful and which did not gloss over its challenges. Perhaps it is instructive that I could not find a similar but contrasting example from the commercial world.

However, I concluded that it is we, as people, who can form the best advertisements for the Christian faith. For, God's message did not come in the form of a slogan but in the form of a human being, Jesus Christ, the

Word made flesh. Jesus, in His own life, death and resurrection shows us what it means both to walk the way of the Cross and to experience the joy of God's Resurrection. And Christ comes to live within us in the form of Holy Spirit as we welcome Him into our own lives and follow Him.

And as we faithfully follow Christ through all the seasons of life what will other people see in us? A deep peace, hope and joy which sustains us through all our circumstances, no matter how challenging these might be. And surely the life of Christ seen in our lives will also draw others to desire to know for themselves the reality of God's life and love.

*Tristram*

## **Points for Prayers**

- Being an 'advertisement' for Christ
- 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 this Sunday is 'O Jesus I have promised.'

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

Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> February                      8.00 am      Communion, Blackford

Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> February                      9.30 am      Communion, South Cadbury

Sunday 25 <sup>th</sup> February	9.30 am	Matins, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 25 <sup>th</sup> February	9.30 am	Morning Worship, North Cheriton
Sunday 25 <sup>th</sup> February	11.00 am	Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 25 <sup>th</sup> February	11.00 am	Communion, Holton
Sunday 25 <sup>th</sup> February	11.00 am	Sunday Worship, Yarlington
Sunday 25 <sup>th</sup> February	4.00 pm	Evening Service, Galhampton
Sunday 3 <sup>rd</sup> March	9.00 am	Communion, Yarlington
Sunday 3 <sup>rd</sup> March	9.30 am	Camelot Matins, North Cheriton
Sunday 3 <sup>rd</sup> March	11.00 am	Group Communion, North Cadbury

## **Excalibur online**

The March edition of Excalibur has now been published online at [camelotparishes.co.uk](http://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](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)