

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 245

Sunday 3rd March 2024

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

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

Scripture Passage

John 2: 13-22

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵ Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

¹⁸ The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?”

¹⁹ Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

²⁰ The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” ²¹ But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Reflection

Even if we secretly agree with what they say, people who bang on about what they see as wrong, or unfair, sometimes make us uncomfortable. Greta Thunberg, who speaks on the dangers of global warming is a case in point. I agree with a lot of what she says, and I can't doubt her sincerity and passion, so is it because she places the blame firmly on my generation that makes me dislike her?

Back a bit, to Band Aid, and the Live Aid concerts, and Bob Geldof made us aware of catastrophic famine in Africa. He spoke with passion, but it was his manner, and yes, his language, that put a lot of people's backs up. But he made a difference.

Back still further, and the cause of women's suffrage didn't really gain any traction until the suffragettes got violent. Women had been asking reasonably and persuasively for years, campaigning for the vote without anyone taking much notice. It took bricks through windows, violent actions and a world war before women got what they deserved.

All this is leading up to today's gospel reading. Jesus took violent action against what he saw as a great wrong - God's house, the Temple, being used by all sorts of shady business - not just casually, but on an organised and approved basis.

You just heard the story - Jesus with an improvised whip, full of righteous indignation, turning over the cash desks, setting loose the animals, and shouting the odds. In 1969, BBC showed a play by Dennis Potter, *Son of Man*, with Colin Blakely as Jesus, with a Yorkshire accent. Letters of complaint poured in, some of them from Mary Whitehouse, and it was all because of this scene. Jesus was so often portrayed as meek and mild, that a shouting, kicking, angry Jesus wasn't acceptable to a TV audience.

So what was going on? First, the money changers. Out in the markets and high street, the only currency was the Roman denarius, solidus and sesterce - good throughout the Empire, and marked with the head of the Emperor. A Graven Image if ever there was one, and so not acceptable in the Temple. So in the outer courtyard, money changers would sell you special money - temple money, and they set the rate of exchange, and kept the difference. Kerching!

We once stayed in a hotel in Turkey, and the only acceptable currency in the bars and restaurants was the plastic popper bead, in three colours according to value. The advantage was that you could wear it around your wrist, and outsiders couldn't sneak in and use the facilities. But the hotel set the rate. We were ripped off, and never found out how much our poolside beer and a sandwich really cost. And the hotel had worship, morning and evening. It was run by Christians, for Christians.

So what could you buy in the temple? Apart from a kebab, there were animals - sheep or goats, and birds - doves or pigeons for sacrifice. If you wanted your sins absolved, you went to a priest, and you made a sacrifice. And the animal had to be perfect, without spot or blemish. And would you just know it, the only place such animals could be bought was in the temple. In theory, you *could* bring your own animal in from the farm, but the priest who examined it would almost certainly tell you it wasn't up to standard. So you paid with your special money.

Bear in mind, this wasn't just going on in the temple by a bunch of chancers, this was official - the priesthood made its money by this systematic scam.

A lot of people would have seen Jesus' demonstration, and secretly cheered. About time too. But the clergy took a very dim view. Even this early in his career, they had Jesus in their sights. Notice that John puts this right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry - before any public miracles or signs. The

other gospels put it right at the end, at the beginning of Holy Week, when Jesus didn't have so much to lose.

A tiny side track here. Did it make a difference? The next day, or a week later, were all the money-changers and animal sellers still there, back in business? Or was the temple a cleaner, more kindly place? I suspect the former. Once Jesus had gone, I think the tables would have been righted, the cattle and sheep rounded up, and after a few nervous remarks about "Some people, eh?" business would have gone on. There's no record that it was otherwise.

But there are several issues here. Firstly, there is the question, "What gives you the right to do this? Who do you think you are?" And Jesus, rather than rise to their challenge to perform a miracle, or even to claim the authority of God his Father, tells them, rather cryptically, "Tear down this temple, and in three days I'll build it again," which they couldn't understand, and neither could anybody else until Jesus had been killed, and then not stayed dead. But Jesus' disciples remembered his words, and recorded them for us.

Then there is the issue of what the temple was actually for. The original temple, built by Solomon, was a place where people would be able to know the presence of God. It was even built as quietly as possible - the masons worked off-site, and the finished stones were assembled without undue banging and noise. The temple was a place of peace. Herod had begun this, the third temple on the site, because he wanted to establish himself as a true Jew, when he was only a bit Jewish really. It was a vanity project, but it was still meant to be a place of sanctuary. The hubbub in its courts would have destroyed that illusion.

And Jesus was also undermining the whole idea of sacrifice - the notion that God was only accessible via the priests, and that sins could only be absolved through sacrifice. Jesus is prefiguring his own death, the ultimate sacrifice,

once and for all. All sin forgiven, because he took the sins of all of us on himself.

When I worked in Westminster, and before you had to pay, I would sometimes go into the Abbey to pray. Fat chance! It was full of tourists, and stuff for sale, and even the little chapel of St Faith, which was set aside for quiet prayer because it was dull, with nothing to see, was next to the brass-rubbing centre, so you could hear the ringing of the tills. A few years ago, one August, Pam and I visited Truro Cathedral. The Christmas shop inside had just opened.

The temple, and the cathedrals, and our churches, should be centres of prayer, of worship, and service to the community. Too often, instead of giving, they are seen as taking, always after money for their own upkeep. Instead of being givers of charity, they become receivers of charity.

And I don't know what we can do about it.

No, we're not like the money changers, ripping people off. But there is a perception among non-churchgoers that we are after money, always for some good cause, like the roof, the tower, the bells, the organ. Think how we might turn that around. Think how we can serve our community better - in these strange times, what needs doing that we can do. Who needs cheering up that we can phone? Who might appreciate a card with a few kind words? How can we change people's perception of the church with its hand outstretched, into a power for good, being useful and serving? All suggestions gratefully received!

Ron

Points for Prayers

- Rediscovering our vocation as a church to be a servant
- For continuing and new conflicts including those in the Ukraine and the Middle East especially the supply of humanitarian aid to Gaza
- 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 'Immortal, invisible, God only wise.'

Services for this week and next

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| Sunday 3 rd March | 9.00 am | Communion, Yarlinton |
| Sunday 3 rd March | 9.30 am | Camelot Matins, North Cheriton |
| Sunday 3 rd March | 11.00 am | Group Communion, North Cadbury |
| Sunday 10 th March | 9.30 am | Communion, North Cheriton |
| Sunday 10 th March | 9.30 am | Matins, Blackford |
| Sunday 10 th March | 11.00 am | Mothering Sunday Service, Galhampton |
| Sunday 10 th March | 11.00 am | Sunday Worship, Holton |

Excalibur online

The March 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)