

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 252

Sunday 21st April 2024

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

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

Scripture Passages

Acts 4: 5-12

The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, ⁶ with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷ When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?”

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. ¹¹ This Jesus is

‘the stone that was rejected by you, the builders;
it has become the cornerstone.’

¹² “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.”

John 10: 11-18

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away-- and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep.

¹⁴ “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

Reflection

Sometimes when we read the news we find ourselves feeling enormously grateful that we do not have to face the challenges with which some people are confronted. Would we, for instance, have changed positions with Alexei Navalny? He was a prominent Russian dissident who because of his criticisms of the governing regime was poisoned and then put in prison, finally being transferred to the harsh and inhospitable conditions of the Arctic Circle. Very shortly after that he died.

And if I try to put myself into his position, I imagine that, at a much earlier stage, I would have made a compromise with the authorities. Perhaps I would have agreed to stop criticising them at least hoping that my life would be spared.

But actually who knows how we will respond when faced with such an extreme challenge? And there may be some of us who are convinced that their courage would not fail in these circumstances, that they would have been prepared to do the right thing whatever the consequences.

This takes courage. Jesus was a person of courage. In our gospel reading this morning, He tells us,

'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.'

I asked a group of children at our local school whether they thought being a shepherd was an especially dangerous job. Most of them thought not although we all agreed that it was a demanding and valuable job.

So perhaps we might not think that Jesus' saying that He is the good shepherd is a declaration of courage. However, we need to understand that in ancient times, shepherds could quite literally be required to lay down their lives for their sheep. Predators such as lions, wolves and bears might attack the flock and the shepherd would be expected to ward them off perhaps by using a club or staff. Or the flock might be in danger from thieves.

David, for instance, before he became a king and when he was first called to fight Goliath remembers his former occupation as a shepherd when he risked his life for his sheep in this way.

Jesus in speaking of Himself as the good shepherd is inviting us to see Him as the ideal fulfilment of David and other earthly rulers. However, in contrast to many human rulers, His rule is a servant and sacrificial one. When He speaks about laying down His life for the sheep these are not mere words. Rather, through the Cross, they are fulfilled. Jesus has laid down His life for His sheep.

And yet no-one has forced Him to do so. His sacrifice is a voluntary one, He says of His life, 'I lay it down of my own accord'. And more than that, His sacrifice is made in the hope and assurance that through the power of God, He will take up His life again in the Resurrection.

Jesus is, of course, the supreme example of courage. But would we be able to follow Him if and when we were to find ourselves placed under extreme pressure?

One person who might have answered this question in a positive way is the apostle Peter. We remember how before Jesus' death, he expressed complete confidence that although everyone else might run away and desert Jesus, he would be the exception to this rule. He would have the courage to stand by Jesus even to the point of death.

And yet when Peter's moment came to express this courage he failed. He denied three times that he had ever known Jesus. Then the cock crowed and remembering Jesus's prophecy about denying Him, he breaks down in tears.

Clearly, whatever courage Peter thought he had was not enough for the test that he was to undergo. However, in our reading this morning from the book of Acts, this same Peter demonstrates a remarkable and unequivocal courage.

This reading follows on from the one last week where Peter heals a lame beggar. Subsequently, he and his fellow apostle John are arrested and put in prison for this. The next day they are put on trial and interrogated by a hostile court for what they have done.

So, they have every excuse to try and get out of the dangerous position in which they find themselves. Perhaps one of the most obvious tactics which

they might try would be to engage in profuse apologies to save their own skins.

And yet Peter has no apology to offer. The very opposite. He confronts this powerful court with the reality of their own sin and the part that they have played in Jesus' crucifixion. It is this same Jesus, whose claims the court has rejected, who has been raised from the dead and in whose name the lame man has been healed. Jesus is at the heart of everything for in Jesus alone can salvation be found.

It is difficult to imagine a more direct expression of faith or one which shrinks less from confrontation with an opponent who, in a worldly sense, is much more powerful.

And yet this is the same Peter who had previously denied ever knowing Jesus in order to save his own skin. What has happened? What has made the difference?

The difference is indeed very simple and we find ourselves pointed to it in the words which immediately precede Peter's speech. Peter is 'filled with the Holy Spirit'. So Peter's new found courage is not a product of his drawing more deeply on his own resources. These have already been found to be inadequate for the purpose. Now he has learnt to draw on God's infinite resources given to him by the Holy Spirit. And this gives him what he needs to speak God's words on this occasion.

There is a lesson here for all of us. If we believe that in times of danger we might be found wanting and run away when we should stand firm, we need to remember that it is God who can give us the courage that we ourselves might naturally lack. And if we are full of self-confidence that we can in fact withstand whatever pressure in which we find ourselves, then Peter's example should give us reason to pause and think. It is only by admitting

our own weakness and drawing on God's strength that we will be able to do what is required of us.

There is a saying which offers us a rather similar perspective on this, 'Courage is not the absence of fear but knowing that there is something more important than fear which enables us to carry on despite our fear'.

However, in speaking about the Good Shepherd, Jesus also warns us about another kind of person who looks after sheep who is far from displaying courage in times of danger. This person is the hired hand.

And far from being prepared to put his life in danger when the wolf comes, the hired hand just runs away. He feels no sense of responsibility. He is just 'doing a job'. And though he might be happy enough to do what he is asked to do, his contract has very definite limits and he is not prepared to go beyond these limits. He neither owns the sheep nor when the crisis comes does he care about them. At that point his instincts for self-preservation become paramount.

Both the hired hand and the Good Shepherd have much to teach us although in very different ways. Although we all need to maintain appropriate boundaries when we are doing a job, whether paid or unpaid, it can be dangerous to have the attitude of 'It's just a job'. This can lead us to avoid challenges and difficulties even if we do not actually run away. Our own strict limits on what we are prepared to do may lead us to withhold support from colleagues when they need it because this goes beyond what we have signed up for. Or it may mean that we simply do not care about the wider picture and the impact this might have on other people. Sometimes there are occasions when we simply need to go the extra mile.

And on the other hand, there is the challenge and the encouragement of the Good Shepherd. None of us can predict what crisis we may be called to face. Nor can we know in advance whether we will have the resources of

courage to meet such a crisis. Who, for instance, would have predicted the magnitude of the challenges that we faced in the covid pandemic before they happened?

However, whether we feel confident that we would be able to cope with such a challenge or whether we feel doubtful about this, we need to reflect on the difference between the natural confidence of Peter before Christ's crucifixion and the confidence given to Peter by the Holy Spirit following Christ's resurrection. The first was not enough to prevent Peter acting like the hired hand and running away at the point of danger. The second gave him true courage and the ability to exemplify what a good shepherd looks like when challenged and under pressure.

And that is what we all need. As we look to Christ, the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for His sheep, so we will be given all the strength and resources which we need whatever challenges and dangers life may bring our way.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- Following Christ the Good Shepherd especially in challenging circumstances
- For continuing and new conflicts including those in the Ukraine, Israel, Gaza and Iran
- 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

There are a number of excellent hymn settings, both old and new, of the Lord is my shepherd.

Services for this week and next

Sunday 21 st April	9.30 am Communion, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 21 st April	11.00 am Communion, Maperton
Sunday 21 st April	11.00 am Sunday Worship, North Cadbury
Sunday 21 st April	6.30 pm Evensong, Yarlington
Sunday 28 th April	8.00 am Communion, Blackford
Sunday 28 th April	9.30 am Communion, South Cadbury
Sunday 28 th April	9.30 am Matins, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 28 th April	9.30 am Morning Worship, North Cheriton
Sunday 28 th April	11.00 am Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 28 th April	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Yarlington
Sunday 28 th April	6.30 pm Evening Service, Galhampton

Excalibur online

The April 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)