

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 253

Sunday 28th April 2024

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

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

Scripture Passages

Acts 8: 26-40

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a wilderness road.) ²⁷ So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.”

³⁰ So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

³¹ He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him.

³² Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth.”

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶ As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” ³⁸ He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

John 15: 1-8

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

Reflection

'I can do this all by myself, I don't need your help.' This the latest phrase of my daughter Tahlia as she grows up. And my reaction? It is a mixed one. On the one hand, I am pleased about her independence and the growing number of tasks that she is able to do by herself. But on the other, I still want to offer her my help.

Indeed, the whole process of growing up is one of increasing independence and we need to encourage this. However, independence carries its own drawbacks. For we can become so independent that we cut ourselves off from relationships with other people. We can also become too proud to ask other people's help when we need to do this.

On a spiritual level, Jesus' words in our reading from John's gospel contain a clear and stark warning about the dangers of our becoming independent from God and from Christ,

'Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.'

Such a clear and unequivocal warning may take us somewhat by surprise. Surely, we think that there is much that we can achieve through our own unaided efforts. Is it really necessary to do everything through Christ's strength and in relationship with Him? And yet this is what the words, 'apart from me you can do nothing' seem to suggest.

The metaphor of the vine and its branches is indeed a powerful one. At its heart, it speaks of the need for a relationship with Christ and how inextricably close, fruitful, attractive and stable this relationship is.

However, in order to enter into this relationship there is the need to sacrifice our spiritual independence, our desire to live apart from Christ. And there is a cost to this which we cannot ignore. We all like or are tempted to make our own decisions in our own way without the need to keep on coming back to prayer and to seek God's will in them. After all, God's will may not be always be our will. There is always a risk in asking God about the right way forward. The answer that we receive may not be the one we want to hear.

But even though there is a real cost in laying down our spiritual independence in order to enter into a relationship with Christ, the rewards which this brings are also immense.

For just as all of us have this need for independence and to grow in our ability to cope with life, we also have a need for close relationships. Jesus' words about the vine and the branches remind us that, first of all, this need for relationship is to be satisfied in Christ Himself. However, as we form and grow in a close relationship with Christ so we will also find our capacity to form close relationships with other people is enhanced. And we all need such relationships. As the poet John Donne put it, 'No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.' And many studies have shown that when we cut ourselves off from relationships with others our health, mental, social and even physical, suffers.

And the more that we dwell on this metaphor of our relationship with Jesus being that of the vine and its branches, the more powerful and attractive we will find it to be. Just as the branch experiences the life giving sap and power of the main vine, so we find ourselves nourished spiritually by receiving and drinking in the love and the life of Jesus Christ.

And there is a security and stability in this relationship. Many of us find ourselves leading quite busy lives and, in this context, the need to expend

great amounts of time and energy in ensuring that our spiritual lives are performing as they should be can be just one more source of pressure.

However, as we think about the vine and the branches, we realise that the branches do not need to be continually busy in order to experience growth. Rather the fruit that they produce comes naturally as they just remain where they are, rooted and centred in Christ the true vine, rather than straining to go off in their own separate directions.

At this point, we may think that this is all very well. But is not a life where we just remain where we are, dwelling in Christ a rather staid and dull one?

If we do think like that, then a look at our passage from Acts should be enough to dispel any such notion.

This reading tells us about one of the early evangelists of the church, Philip. He is a person who is undoubtedly rooted and centred in Christ and this gives him a remarkable ability to know what he should be doing and where he should be at any given moment. His is a life which is undoubtedly fruitful for Christ. And yet at the same time it is a life which is full of unexpected adventures and changes of direction in response to God's promptings.

At the beginning of this passage, we find Philip embarking on a journey. It is God who, through the agency of an angel, prompts Philip to go to the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. What or who might Philip meet on this road and why might God want him to go on this particular road rather than any other? Philip is not told about any of this. Nevertheless, his rooted and grounded relationship with Christ means that he has the trust to get up and go, simply to do what God says not knowing exactly what this might result in.

And on the road, he finds that he has come at exactly the right moment. He meets an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official who has reached a crucial

spiritual turning point in his life. But in order to make the right choices and to know the direction in which he should go he needs the help of an experienced spiritual guide such as Philip.

And so Philip, again prompted by the Holy Spirit, joins the eunuch's chariot to find that he is reading from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. The eunuch is reading but he does not understand its full meaning and he needs Philip to explain this to him.

So, Philip's sensitivity to God and ability to listen to Holy Spirit results in an exciting journey of discipleship full of surprises and the unexpected. Philip is an example of being connected with God so that his life produces much fruit. The life of the Ethiopian eunuch is dramatically and suddenly transformed.

As Philip does his work of patient explanation of the scriptures, so the Ethiopian eunuch comes to faith in Christ. This results in his newfound faith being marked outwardly through baptism in some water which they find on the side of the road.

And now Philip's work with the eunuch is complete. Again, God's spirit intervenes and Philip finds himself journeying to a completely different place where once again there is fruitful work for him to do.

'I can do it all by myself'. We all, however young or old we may be, are susceptible to the promptings of this voice. And although this instinct to develop ourselves and our gifts and abilities is one which is healthy in itself, we also need to listen to another voice, 'I am the vine, you are the branches...apart from me you can do nothing.' Responding to Christ's call does mean sacrificing our spiritual independence. But it also results in a richly attractive and fruitful life, one which is both grounded, secure and with deep roots but at the same time full of movement and adventure.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- Coming to and remaining in Christ the True Vine
- The King's return to public duties
- 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

One hymn set for this Sunday is 'Love divine, all loves excelling.'

Services for this week and next

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
Sunday 5 th May	9.00 am Communion, Yarlington
Sunday 5 th May	9.30 am Camelot Matins, North Cheriton
Sunday 5 th May	11.00 am Group Communion, North Cadbury

Excalibur online

The May 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)