

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 254

Sunday 5th May 2024

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

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

Scripture Passages

1 John 5: 1-8

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. ² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. ³ For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, ⁴ for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. ⁵ Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

⁶ This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth. ⁷ There are three that testify: ⁸ the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree.

John 15: 9-17

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹² “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.
¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.
¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶ You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Reflection

For a while now, my computer has been urging me to install Outlook for Windows, which will improve my life in some unspecified way. Trouble is, I like my computer the way it is, and I’m reluctant to try anything new without knowing how my life will be enhanced by making the change. If it isn’t broke, as they say, don’t try and fix it.

Jesus said, *I give you a new commandment*. Wow - a *new* commandment. Can you imagine the Jewish people’s excitement when Jesus made that announcement? A thousand years we’d had the ten old ones, and they’ve stood us in good stead. Since Moses brought the tablets down from Mount Sinai, nobody got murdered or robbed, adultery became the stuff of fiction, oxen went uncoveted, and everybody worshipped God in a state of bliss. Seriously though - did fewer people get killed? Was there less adultery? And did the thieves die out like dodos? Not measurably. And did anybody get to heaven for keeping them all? No. All the old commandments could ever do was make you aware that you were bad, and feel a complete failure. So a *new* commandment? For his friends, coming from Jesus, that was surely worth a punt!

Change of subject. I’ve always enjoyed *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*. I read it again before Christmas. Hughes describes how Tom’s father, about to put

him on the coach to Rugby sits up late pondering over what he might say to his son, about to go away from home for the first time, only nine years old, to a school where the prefects have beards. Some last words of advice, father to son. What would you say in the same circumstances? What would you say to someone if you thought you might never see them again? I thought hard about what to write in my last vicar's letter to my old parish. Eventually I wrote, *don't ever say, "We've always done it this way", be good, and don't play with the matches.*

In today's Gospel, we meet Jesus in a somewhat similar situation. He's had a last meal with his friends, and Judas, significantly, has left the room. Time, like Judas, is running out on him. What he says to them now might be the last thing he ever says to them. And he says, *Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.* And this isn't a suggestion. Jesus says it's a commandment. A new one.

John, who wrote this Gospel, took it to heart, and remembered it for the rest of his life. Over ninety years old, living in Ephesus, John would be carried on a litter to the worship. And because he was John *the* Apostle, the last alive of the original twelve, he would be asked to speak. *Little children*, he would say, *love one another.* And somebody once asked him, *Father John, why do you always say the same thing?* And he answered, *because it's the most important thing.*

And yet we need, maybe, to look at what that might mean, because love has become such a debased word. True, I love my sons, and my granddaughter, who has been a teenager for a fortnight now, but I also love chilli con carne, the Simpsons and walking on hills. And come lunchtime, I'd love a beer. What is this love Jesus commands us to have for one another? I mean, there are people, not many I'll grant you, I find it impossible to like, let alone love. There is a clue, because Jesus tells us to love one another *as he has loved us.* There was always something distinctive about Jesus' love. He didn't only love good people. He might not have had many friends if he did.

He went to parties with the people that others would have shunned. Tax-collectors, who were collaborators with the occupying forces, as well as being dishonest on their own account; lepers, prostitutes, beggars, the disabled; Jesus was a great one for accepting people, just as they were, with all their faults. And healing them, and saying, *come and join me*. Whoever the smart set might have looked down on as “not our sort of people,” were special to him. Remember Zacchaeus the Jericho tax collector? He invited himself round to Zach’s place, and he never said a word about him cleaning up his act, or giving to the poor or anything. It was Zacchaeus who brought it up, after he’d been accepted by Jesus. With all sorts of people, Jesus accepted them as they were, good bad and ugly. He didn’t wait until they were good, or just a bit better, or promising to mend their ways before he loved them. Jesus accepts us just as we are, and loves us just as we are. Maybe that’s the next clue, that love has to do with acceptance. *Accept one another. As I have accepted you, so you must accept one another.*

That’s a great comfort to us, for two reasons. First, because it gets over my objection about not liking people. Jesus doesn’t command us to like, he commands us to love. I take it that means treating people you don’t like as if you did like them. And second, because it means that this is the way Jesus loves me and you. Very few of us haven’t done something in our past, either deliberately, or by accident, that hurt someone else. Whether it was malicious, or just plain thoughtless, we hide it from other people, because we think they wouldn’t love us if they knew. We might hide it from ourselves, because it makes us feel guilty and uncomfortable. We don’t mention what we’ve done when we pray to God, because we imagine he’d find us unacceptable if he knew. Now where do we get off, thinking there’s even one little thing about us God doesn’t know? We can’t fool God. This is the God who spends quiet moments counting the hairs on my head. Takes him less time every week. He’s seen you in the bath!

Jesus spoke repeatedly about God’s forgiveness, to show us that God accepts us just as we are, loves us, and so helps us to change. And that’s

how the Son of God loves us, with love that is acceptance. And that's got to be good news. He doesn't condemn us, or punish us; he takes us as he finds us, and helps us to change. And maybe we might find that loving the people we don't like will help us to like them.

So, if that's how we're loved, that's how we ought to love other people: accepting them with all their faults, and loving them unconditionally, as Jesus loved us. It's no good looking for a get-out clause - who is it alright not to love? It doesn't glorify God to let yourself become a doormat.

It's actually harder, as well, because today the church is seen very much as part of the Establishment. For the moment, at least, there's bishops in the House of Lords. Yet Jesus challenged his society from the edges. We're right in the middle of it. To challenge ourselves is a bit difficult, but we have to, because a church that doesn't accept, or love, with Jesus' sort of acceptance and love isn't a proper church.

It's no good waiting until people deserve our love, 'cos they never will, any more than we could ever be worthy of the love Jesus pours out on us. It's no use trying to punish them, or to seek revenge for the harm people have done us. Jesus told us to forgive others as we've been forgiven by God- fully and unconditionally. That's the only condition for being a Christian: we must want to love and forgive others as Jesus loves and forgives us, though we'll never reach his level. *By this, says Jesus, everyone will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*

But we also have to learn to accept ourselves. It isn't easy, living with the knowledge that I'm a sinner. But *all have sinned, and fallen short of God's glory*. So there's the comfort- you're no worse than anybody else. We're all forgiven sinners, and we're all loved by God. If God accepts us, we can accept each other. Love is acceptance.

Ron

Points for Prayers

- Accepting and responding to Christ's love and His new commandment
- 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 based on this gospel passage is 'A new commandment I give unto you.'

Ascension Day

The Deanery Ascension Day service is at St John's Milborne Port, Thursday 9th May starting at 7.00 pm.

Services for this week and next

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
Sunday 12 th May	9.30 am Communion, Galhampton
Sunday 12 th May	9.30 am Communion, North Cheriton
Sunday 12 th May	9.30 am Matins, Blackford
Sunday 12 th May	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Holton

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)