

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 264

Sunday 14th July 2024

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

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

Scripture Passages

Amos 7: 7-15

This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. ⁸ And the LORD said to me, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A plumb line.”

Then the Lord said, “See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass them by; ⁹ the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”

¹⁰ Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, “Amos has conspired against you in the very centre of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. ¹¹ For thus Amos has said, ‘Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.’”

¹² And Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; ¹³ but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.”

¹⁴ Then Amos answered Amaziah, “I am no prophet, nor a prophet’s son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, ¹⁵ and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’”

Mark 6: 14-29

King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him."

¹⁵ But others said, "It is Elijah."

And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old."

¹⁶ But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

¹⁷ For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. ¹⁸ For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." ¹⁹ And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, ²⁰ for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him.

²¹ But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. ²² When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." ²³ And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom."

²⁴ She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?"

She replied, "The head of John the baptizer."

²⁵ Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

²⁶ The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷ Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, ²⁸ brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then

the girl gave it to her mother. ²⁹ When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Reflection

A good person dies in suspicious circumstances. Is it murder? Immediately we think of some cold blooded and calculated act performed by a monster whose motives we simply do not understand. Someone whom we might depict in fanciful terms as wearing a black hat, carrying a pitchfork and even if we looked closely enough having horns. Someone in short entirely unlike us.

But maybe the reality is rather more complex. Instead of a cold blooded decision we find mixed motives, indecision, unfortunate coincidences, complex choices to be made, vulnerabilities and temptations. Now this murderer begins to seem much more like us. This is a story which could be played out in any organisation, government or even family.

Yes, but surely not murder? Maybe not but there are other ways of making sure that awkward people disappear and do not trouble us again. Perhaps instead of murder, physically, we simply deprive them of any capacity for influence, treat them as if they had never existed. They are airbrushed out of history and we never need to think of them again.

In today's two passages two prophets bring unpopular messages. While John the Baptist is physically killed, Amos' life is spared. However, his opponents ruthlessly seek to silence him by demanding that he should confine his prophetic witness to another country.

Amaziah, the priest of Bethel advises the king of Israel that Amos has conspired against him. Amaziah then tells Amos to flee from Israel to the neighbouring land of Judah. He can continue prophesying there but he must never again prophesy at Bethel which is the king's sanctuary.

And yet, John the Baptist was indeed murdered. As we look at the events which lead up to his death, we find not a simple and cold blooded decision but all those complexities of real life in which we can all find ourselves.

The apparently powerful protagonist Herod seems to lose control over events. In the end he finds himself forced to do a terrible deed against his own wishes and his own better judgement.

And although Herod is a king, his story of succumbing to a series of vulnerabilities and temptations is one which could be echoed in the lives of all of us even though thankfully our actions seldom result in actual murder.

Herod for all his power feels the pangs of conscience. As people begin to wonder who Jesus really is, many different suggestions have been put forward. But Herod is only interested in one of these suggestions. His mind immediately alights on the possibility that Jesus is really John the Baptist who has been miraculously raised from the dead. It is a sign that the death of John the Baptist is very much on his mind and that he feels responsible for this, as indeed he is.

The sequence of events which culminates in John's death begins with John's courageous and prophetic challenge to Herod and his family and especially to his wife Herodias. John has told Herod that his marriage is unlawful because Herodias had previously been married to Herod's brother Philip.

But Herod himself has not been a direct enemy of John and indeed has not wished to put him to death. Rather, Herod has a divided attitude towards John. On the one hand, he finds John interesting and likes to hear what he has to say. Indeed, Herod recognises and respects the fact that John is a good and holy man. So, he extends his protection towards John, limiting his punishment for challenging the status of Herod's marriage to imprisonment.

On the other hand, however, he finds himself placed under pressure from his wife. This has initially resulted in John's imprisonment. But now his wife wants him to go further and to kill John. For the moment, Herod is able to stand firm. But, in the moment of crisis, he will find that his support for John is not unequivocal nor is it strong enough to withstand the pressure under which he finds himself placed.

So, his wife simply waits for her opportunity which she is confident will come. And it does come when their daughter dances for Herod on his birthday. This is an occasion for Herod to relax and take down his guard. It is a time for celebration and to give public recognition to the talents of his daughter. On the impulse of the moment, Herod makes a rash promise to his daughter in front of all his guests without thinking through what this might mean.

Herod says to his daughter 'Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it.' How unwise to make such an open ended promise! These are words spoken in the heat of the moment without any clear thought as to their consequences.

However, Herodias recognises the opportunity which has been given to her and ruthlessly seizes it. Her daughter relays Herod's promise to her and asks her what she should do. Her reply is simple and stark. Her daughter is to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter.

This request is then duly relayed to Herod in front of all his guests who have witnessed the promise that he has made to his daughter. Now he is placed in a dilemma and needs to make a decision. Who and what will he place first? What are his priorities in his life?

Yes, certainly he does recognise John's goodness and holiness. But then dare he displease his wife and daughter by making this his priority? And again, Herod asks himself how he would look in front of all his guests if he

failed to give his daughter what he had promised her. This also raises the question of the importance of promises and of keeping our word.

It must have been an agonising struggle for Herod. We are told that he was deeply grieved. But he needed to come to a decision. One or other of these competing considerations had to come first. And tragically, Herod decided that his respect and regard for John had to take second place. He did not want to refuse his daughter and this was for him the decisive factor.

So, the result was the murder of John the Baptist with his head being brought in on a platter. This was indeed a terrible action but it did not come either on the spur of the moment or as a result of a deeply planned and motivated hatred. Rather, it came at the end of a sequence of events in which Herod's various loyalties and priorities were tested to their limit. And in the end, we learn what matters most to Herod from the decision which he finally came to make.

As we reflect on Herod's role in the death of John the Baptist perhaps its foremost challenge to us concerns our own priorities and what we put first in moments of testing and of crisis.

Will our commitment to follow Jesus prove to be the deciding factor for us?

Will we recognise all the different and sometimes complex competing priorities in our lives and then prayerfully present these before God to seek God's will and then act in accordance with what we hear and know to be right? This can be a costly process and result in our disappointing the claims of other people, even those who are closest to us, who might like us to pursue a different course of action.

Herod listened with interest to what John the Baptist had to say. But we need to go further than that in our relationship with Jesus. We need to move from interest to commitment. For it is lack of commitment which

made Herod and will make us vulnerable to making wrong decisions and to succumbing to strong outside forces

So where do our priorities lie? When we know the answer to this question, we can ask for the wisdom to decide between competing claims on our lives and when we need to swim against the tide we can be given the strength to do so.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- Knowing our own priorities and finding the way of Christ in difficult decisions
- The new government and opposition of this country
- Assassination attempt on presidential candidate Trump in the USA
- 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 as they approach the end of term

Hymn

One hymn set for this Sunday is 'Lead us heavenly father lead us.'

Services for this week and next

Sunday 14th July

9.30 am Communion, Galhampton

Sunday 14 th July	9.30 am Communion, North Cheriton
Sunday 14 th July	9.30 am Matins, Blackford
Sunday 14 th July	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Holton
Sunday 21 st July	9.30 am Communion, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 21 st July	11.00 am Communion, Maperton
Sunday 21 st July	11.00 am Sunday Worship, North Cadbury
Sunday 21 st July	6.30 pm Evensong, Yarlington

Excalibur online

The July 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)