

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 265

Sunday 21st July 2024

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

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

Scripture Passages

Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;

³ he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths
for his name’s sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;

for you are with me;
your rod and your staff –
they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long.

Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.

³² And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴ As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. ⁵⁴ When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, ⁵⁵ and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Reflection

Rest is a commodity which can be in short supply. Our culture can be one which encourages and promotes the value of productivity and being active and busy.

For those in work, periods of rest can be difficult to arrange and people may even feel guilty for doing this. And even if our diaries tell us that we have a time of rest, true rest can still be hard to find. We can find our inner thoughts plagued with the anxieties that come with all the activities that we have been involved with.

We need to find true rest. The kind of rest which refreshes and renews not simply our bodies but also our heart, minds and souls.

This is the kind of rest which Jesus promises us. Jesus says, 'Come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11: 28).

Psalm 23, our first reading this morning reminds us that the first task of the shepherd is not to get the sheep moving but rather to get them to lie down, 'The LORD is my shepherd... He makes me lie down in green pastures'.

Even when the sheep do begin to move and are led by the shepherd, the first priority is to bring them to places of refreshment where they can experience inner restoration, 'he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.'

So, too, Jesus the Good Shepherd is concerned that His apostles should have the time and space which they need to be spiritually refreshed and to renew their relationship with God. The context of our gospel passage is that the apostles have been sent out to preach the gospel, teach and heal the sick. They return from their mission and tell Jesus all that they have taught and done.

Continuing ministry is draining. As the apostles have been faithful to the mission which Jesus has given them, they have given of themselves. They have served and helped others. However now they themselves need to be renewed and refreshed. This is an important pattern because if they or we just continue giving out to others without receiving back from God and other people the result will be spiritual exhaustion and even breakdown.

So, Jesus instructs His disciples to come away to a deserted place all by themselves and simply to rest for a while. They need to get away from other people and their incessant demands which give them no time even to eat.

They need to come close again to God. And so the apostles go away in a boat with Jesus to a deserted place by themselves.

However, we discover that, from the outset, this plan does not work. Rather, Jesus and His apostles have to adapt their plans in the light of the demands of the crowds which constantly follow them.

As Jesus and the apostles hurry away to reach their deserted destination, they find that the crowds have anticipated their arrival and are there to greet them. At this point, we might wonder whether Jesus will prioritise His and His apostles' need for rest. But He does not do this. Rather Jesus looks at the crowds with compassion and sees them as sheep without a shepherd. Once more He resumes His teaching ministry.

And this pattern continues. When Jesus and His disciples next cross the lake, again when they get out of the boat they are recognised and people immediately begin to bring the sick on mats to Jesus so that He can heal them.

In the end, perhaps the only periods of rest that are left are when Jesus and the disciples are in the boat crossing the lake of Galilee. But even that was hardly uneventful as on the second boat journey Jesus, having left His disciples to go on in the boat alone, interrupts their journey by walking on water to provide reassurance in the time of a strong storm!

In Psalm 23, we also find that the spiritual life is not simply one of rest but is also one of movement and dynamic activity. The shepherd guides and leads his flock. They are not totally static.

The sheep are first of all led in paths of righteousness, given guidance so that in each decision of life which they need to make, they can find wisdom and choose the right way forward.

And the sheep under the guidance of God as shepherd are also led through all the inescapable dangers of life. The shepherd accompanies us as we face the extremes of the perils of life, even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Even in that darkest place we are to fear no evil. Why? Because God, the Good Shepherd is with us.

We cannot avoid challenges and dangers in life. But what our faith does give us is this simple assurance and comfort of God's presence whatever those challenges and dangers might be. The psalm then changes its metaphor from God as shepherd to God as generous host. A rich table and overflowing cup are placed before us. However, these are not removed from our enemies at a safe distance. Rather we enjoy God's goodness even those enemies are also unmistakably present.

So the psalm does not downplay or neglect the realities and challenges of life. But in the end, after we have been led by God through all the adventures and challenges of life, we return to the same promise of rest with which the psalm begins. Our eternal destiny is simply to be with God for ever,

'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.'

As we reflect on these passages, perhaps we need to balance different aspects of their message. First of all, rest is indeed essential and when our lives are busy, we need to make a conscious effort to schedule in times of rest just as Jesus did with His disciples.

However, we cannot be too inflexible in doing so. The call of compassion remains paramount on our lives and we never know when it will come or in what form. And our lives, both physical and spiritual, cannot be static. Rather, inescapably they are ones of movement.

So rest, movement and the call of compassion all need to be balanced with one another. But in practical terms how do we do this? I have found over the course of my ministry the wisdom of a set day off. This does, after all, reflect the pattern of creation where God rested from the work of creation on the seventh day.

A colleague of mine when asked when her day off was replied that this was flexible. I do not know how she managed this but I think there are dangers here. We and others need to know that there are regular times when we are not on duty.

On the other hand, there are dangers in being too inflexible. Emergencies will arise from time to time where immediate action is required. Think, for instance, of the covid lockdown which at a stroke reshaped all our diaries. There will also sometimes be legitimate and urgent demands from people for which time and space needs to be made.

When this happens, I try to find another day or time for rest. Perhaps after all their adventures, Jesus and His disciples rescheduled that period of rest that they were going to have. But we are not told!

As I approach the end of my ministry in these parishes, it is helpful to reflect on this pattern of rest and movement. Soon, however, I will be faced with very different challenges of how to shape my days. And for you also life will be different. Extra demands will inevitably fall on other people particularly those who have positions of responsibility.

So, there will be an added need for you to work out how to protect yourself from the pressures that will come your way. When is it right to respond to them with compassion and when it is right simply but firmly to say 'No', to safeguard your own personal needs and those of your families? Should I, for instance, interrupt lunch in order to inspect a family grave as I was once asked to do? There are no hard and fast rules here but I pray that each one

of us will be guided by Jesus the Good Shepherd to find the right balance of rest and activity.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- Finding the right balance of rest and activity through asking Jesus our Good Shepherd
- The recent worldwide breakdown in computers and IT and its consequences
- 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 'The king of love my shepherd is.'

Services for this week and next

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
Sunday 28 th July	8.00 am Communion, Blackford

Sunday 28 th July	9.30 am Communion, South Cadbury
Sunday 28 th July	9.30 am Matins, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 28 th July	9.30 am Morning Worship, North Cheriton
Sunday 28 th July	11.00 am Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 28 th July	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Yarlinton
Sunday 28 th July	6.30 pm Evening Service, Galhampton

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)