

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 223

Sunday 24th September 2023

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

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

Scripture Passages

Philippians 1:21-30

²¹ For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.

²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which I prefer.

²³ I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better;

²⁴ but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.

²⁵ Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith,

²⁶ so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

²⁷ Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel,

²⁸ and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing.

²⁹ For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well--

³⁰ since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Matthew 20:1-16

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard.

² After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard.

³ When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace;

⁴ and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went.

⁵ When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same.

⁶ And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?'

⁷ They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.'

⁸ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.'

⁹ When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage.

¹⁰ Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage.

¹¹ And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner,

¹² saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.'

¹³ But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?'

¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you.

¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Reflection

It is good to be able to try the Sunday reading out in advance on a variety of different congregations, especially when it is such a provocative one as the parable of the labourers in the vineyard.

In the parable, different groups of labourers are hired to work in a vineyard throughout the day and yet at the end of the day, they each receive the same wage for their labour from the landowner. However, no account is taken of the fact that each group of labourers have worked for different periods of time. Some have only worked for one hour while others have worked for the whole day.

On this occasion I was able to discuss this parable with a number of different groups- two small midweek congregations together with a school Collective Worship.

The variety of different responses that I encountered was fascinating. The youngest age group seemed least troubled or surprised by the parable. Without exception, the children agreed that the landowner did the right thing in giving equal pay to everyone however long or short a period they worked for. Furthermore, they did not think that the labourers who worked longest had any right to grumble. This seemed quite clear and obvious to them.

However, in general the adults found this parable more puzzling and difficult. How, after all, would any business survive if equal pay was given to those who worked unequal hours ? We might even respond with ‘ Really ?’ when confidently proclaiming that the reading was God’s word. And what did Jesus mean by telling us such a strange parable ?

However, as well as challenging them, the adults also appreciated the central connection between this parable and God’s generosity and grace.

At a human level, the landowner emerges as a good and decent employer who wants to do the right thing, to go beyond what is strictly necessary and to respond to his employees with generosity and compassion.

So, in his encounter with the first set of labourers, he agrees a wage that is appropriate and right, the usual daily wage. And at the end of the day, he behaves with complete integrity in honouring this agreement.

However, when it comes to the second set of labourers, he simply says that he will give them what is right. But at that stage he does not specify what that means.

As the day goes on, he continues to meet groups of potential labourers in the marketplace who are looking for work. And right towards the very end of the working day, at five o'clock he finds yet another group in the marketplace. On asking why they are there, they reply very simply and plaintively 'Because no-one has hired us.'

It is here that the landowner's generosity and compassion come to the fore. For these unemployed workers are day labourers who live at subsistence level from day to day. If they do not receive a full day's wage they will quite simply not have enough to feed their families or for other essentials of daily life. Their need is desperate and urgent.

So, in response to this immediate economic need, he takes the step of giving each group of labourers the full day's wage regardless of how long they have worked. He is under no obligation to do this. It is an act of pure generosity and compassion so far as the landowner is concerned.

But as so often happens, generosity can evoke a negative response. For light, as well as being life giving and attractive, also shows up the dark and negative attitudes of those who are not willing to join in its spirit. In this case, as the landowner tells the first group of labourers, their grumbling is based on jealousy and envy. When we start comparing our lot with that of others the result is almost always a negative one. Instead of being grateful for what we have been given, we look for what we do not have and which we believe to be given to others. And so the grumbling begins.

And yet the response of the landowner is perfectly appropriate and straightforward, 'I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

But the landowner, of course, is not simply a generous and good employer. Jesus' parable is introduced with the words 'the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner'. So, Jesus intends us to relate the landowner's actions and responses to those of God.

And Christ's ministry too exemplifies the grace and generosity of God. Our reading from Philippians speaks of the impact that this had on the apostle Paul and the way that it changed the entire way that he looked at life.

He sums up the new perspective that Christ has given him with the powerful and succinct saying, 'For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.' In other words, Christ stands at the very centre of his purpose in life and even death holds no fear for him because he knows that death means departing and being with Christ. How many of us can say that we have reached that point of single minded abandonment to Christ ? Perhaps we would like to add some supplementary words like, 'for me to live is Christ and...' Here we might insert whatever is most precious to us, perhaps our family or the work that we wish to accomplish or have already accomplished.

But Paul does not add any such words. For him, the purpose of his life is simply Christ. And although this does involve 'fruitful labour', this is simply the working out of his relationship with Christ in this life. He is not looking for any payment for these labours commensurate with his years of service.

Rather his heart is governed by his desire for Christ and his reward consists entirely of being with and enjoying Christ for ever.

Both passages present us with a similar challenge. Jesus told us that the kingdom of God belongs to those who are like little children and indeed children can have a more intuitive grasp of the way that God works than adults. We can lose something of this understanding as we grow up.

For we can all be tempted to compare our lot with that of other people and fall into jealousy and grumbling. And if we have 'worked' for God for a long time we can be tempted to think that this should earn us a greater standing in God's sight than the person who has only just come to faith.

But such thinking is entirely foreign to the way that the kingdom of God works. For, just like Paul, we need to reach the point where we can say 'living is Christ and dying is gain'. A challenge indeed but when we come to that point all thoughts of any other gain and any comparisons with other people just fade into insignificance.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- Living with single mindedness for God and not comparing ourselves to other people
- Giving thanks for the harvest
- Ongoing war in the Ukraine
- 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

A well known hymn set for this Sunday is 'Guide me, O thou great Redeemer.'

Services for this week and next

Sunday 24 th September	8 am Communion, Blackford
Sunday 24 th September	9.30 am Communion, South Cadbury
Sunday 24 th September	9.30 am Harvest Service, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 24 th September	9.30 am Morning Worship, North Cheriton
Sunday 24 th September	11 am Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 24 th September	11 am Communion, Holton
Sunday 24 th September	11 am Sunday Worship, Yarlington
Sunday 24 th September	6.30 pm Evening Service, Galhampton
Sunday 1 st October	9 am Communion, Yarlington
Sunday 1 st October	9.30 am Harvest Service, Blackford
Sunday 1 st October	9.30 am Harvest Service, North Cheriton
Sunday 1 st October	11 am Communion, North Cadbury

Excalibur

Excalibur is back in paper form. It contains details of Camelot people, a record of baptisms, weddings and funerals undertaken through the church

in the Camelot Parishes. The August edition of Excalibur has now been published online at camelotparishes.co.uk.

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)