

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 225

Sunday 8th October 2023

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

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

Scripture Passage

Isaiah 5:1-7

Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.

² He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

³ And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.

⁴ What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

⁵ And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

⁶ I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briers and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

⁷ For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!

Matthew 21:33-46

³³ "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country.

³⁴ When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce.

³⁵ But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another.

³⁶ Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way.

³⁷ Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.'

³⁹ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

⁴⁰ Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

⁴¹ They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time."

⁴² Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'?"

⁴³ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.

⁴⁴ The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls."

⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them.

⁴⁶ They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

Reflection

Trust is essential if a relationship is to grow and develop. Without trust, we can never relax. We will continually check up on the other person to see that they are doing what they have agreed to do. And within ourselves, we may be plagued with doubts and suspicions about their motives and what they might or might not do. We may seek to place rigid limitations on what they can do through written agreements. And so life becomes quite unnecessarily stressful and complicated.

This is not the kind of relationship which God wants with us. Trust is foundational in our relationship with God. We find this demonstrated supremely in the way that God invites us to entrust ourselves completely to Jesus, whose love for us knows no limits.

But there are times when our trust is tested. For instance, in a human relationship where two people are planning to get married and one or other of them is sent for a period to work abroad.

This is often a testing and challenging time when the absence of the person to whom we are close is felt very keenly. How will we behave when the other person is absent and cannot see what we are doing ?

In our relationship with God, many of us have experienced an initial 'honeymoon' phase. Here we feel that God is particularly close to us, attentive to our every movement and feeling. But then as our relationship with God grows this initial closeness often seems to disappear. Where is God we ask ? Does God still care about us even when we can no longer sense the immediate signs of His presence ?

Perhaps we can see an analogy with the relationship between a mother and her newborn child. At first, the mother is unequivocally and at all times available. But, over time and as the child grows up this presence is no longer so constant. Although there may be important points of transition such as the first day at nursery school, generally this process tends to happen gradually and over time. And what is happening ? Does the mother no longer care for her child ?

Surely not, but this withdrawal is a necessary part of enabling the child to grow up. The same is true of us spiritually. The apparent withdrawal of God's presence can present an opportunity for our faith to be stretched and tested.

The parable this morning is of wicked tenants who are given the care of a vineyard. The vineyard is a motif which recurs regularly in the Bible.

So, when telling this parable, Jesus may well have had in mind our first reading, a passage from Isaiah which speaks of God preparing and planting a vineyard.

The care with which this is done makes the contrast with the lack of care and violence of those who are asked to look after the vineyard even more shocking than it would otherwise be.

For God does everything to ensure that the vineyard will be fruitful. The ground in which it is planted is fertile. This natural advantage is then enhanced by the land being dug and cleared of stones and by the vines which are planted being carefully chosen. Protection is provided in the form of a watchtower and a wine vat is dug to store the produce of the vineyard. What more could possibly have been done to ensure the success of the vineyard ?

And yet all this care and love on the part of God is betrayed when the vineyard only yields wild grapes. God's sadness, shock and disappointment at this failure are all encapsulated at the end of the passage in the Hebrew pun which occurs. God expects righteousness, *sedaqa*, but instead finds cries of distress, *se'afa*, at all the injustice and bloodshed which has filled the vineyard which has been planned with such love and care.

In Jesus' parable, God's absence is depicted through the behaviour of the landowner. This man has invested time and money in his vineyard but then he goes away to another country leaving his tenants in charge.

We find this same theme of God's absence echoed in another parable, the parable of the talents. In that parable, the master also goes on a journey.

But before he does so, he entrusts his servants with different quantities of talents to look after.

In both parables, the spiritual purpose of this period of absence is to test the faith and relationship between landowner and tenant or master and servant.

In the parable of the talents there is a positive and successful outcome to this testing in the case of two out of the three servants. During their master's absence they faithfully use the talents that have been entrusted and when the master returns, he finds that what he has originally given them has been multiplied in his absence through their faithful work.

Sadly, however, the parable also tells us of a different outcome in the case of the third servant who, through fear, has simply buried his talent in the ground.

When we turn to the parable of the tenants in the vineyard, sadly their conduct reminds us of this and of the behaviour of those who were entrusted with the care of God's vineyard in Isaiah. Indeed, these tenants intentionally turn against the landowner and the various emissaries which he sends to them during his absence.

The parable depicts a growing pattern of violence and rebelliousness on the part of the tenants. In their belief that there is no-one around to watch over them and to see what they are doing, their defiance and cruelty simply grows. It begins with their rejection of the first set of ambassadors who come to collect the produce which is rightfully due to the landowner. They are seized, beaten, stoned and killed. Undeterred, the landowner sends another more numerous group of servants to his tenants. But the same pattern is repeated, only on a larger scale.

Finally, the confrontation between the tenants and the landowner comes to a shocking climax. The landowner decides to send to the tenants not a group of servants but his own son. Surely this time they will respect his son despite treating his servants so badly.

But far from respecting his son, the tenants take his arrival as their cue to seize control of the vineyard. The heir has come so if they murder him, they can take over his inheritance. Their plot becomes reality as they seize the son, throw him out of the vineyard and kill him.

The parable is a shocking demonstration of how faithless and abusive behaviour, when left unchecked, ends up by growing to truly monstrous proportions. Eventually the landowner punishes the tenants for the way that they have behaved by executing them and replacing them by other, more faithful tenants.

So why we might ask does God not intervene at an earlier stage in the process ? This could have avoided a great deal of violence and suffering.

However, God does not micromanage us and would we really wish this ? Very few of us welcome having our actions and work checked at frequent intervals. Rather God gives us genuine freedom and responsibility. God gives us space in which to breathe without constant intervention.

But there is a risk in this. The master's absence on a long journey can result in our faith being stretched and its fruits multiplied as is the case with the first two servants in the parable of the talents. And yet, sadly, it is also possible for us to abuse this trust as we see in the parable of the wicked tenants and also in the parallel story of the vineyard in Isaiah.

This causes us to ask how we respond and behave when we believe that no-one is watching us. Publicly and in church we may present ourselves as an exemplary Christian. But is this a true reflection of who we are in private ? Perhaps none of us can pass this test completely. We all tend to try and behave slightly differently when we know we are being watched. I was reminded of this recently when asked to present a school assembly believing that this was being observed by Ofsted !

Nevertheless, surely we would wish our private and public selves to be consistent. For if this is the case then when God or other people seem to have gone away on a long journey this, rather than causing our relationship to break down, will be a time when our faith and trust will grow and develop.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- Growing in our relationship of faith and trust in God and other people during periods of perceived absence
- Giving thanks for the harvest
- Ongoing war in the Ukraine
- Relationships and peace in the Middle East
- 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 hymn set for this Sunday is 'And can it be that I should gain'.

Services for this week and next

Sunday 8 th October	9.30 am Communion, Galhampton
Sunday 8 th October	9.30 am Communion, North Cheriton
Sunday 8 th October	9.30 am Matins, Blackford
Sunday 8 th October	11 am Harvest Service, South Cadbury
Sunday 8 th October	11 am Harvest Service, Holton
Sunday 15 th October	9.30 am Communion, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 15 th October	11 am Sunday Worship, North Cadbury
Sunday 15 th October	11 am Morning Service (with baptism), Maperton
Sunday 15 th October	6.30 pm Evensong, Yarlinton

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)