

Coach House Church **BEACONS**

T U R N T H E T I D E

23RD SEPTEMBER 2020

For a few years, during October half term, we rented a flat in St Ives and enjoyed a week in Beautiful Cornwall. It was great looking out across the harbour, eating Cornish cream teas and pasties, and generally enjoying exploring the little streets and beaches of this once fishing village.

One of the things we enjoyed doing was digging a hole near the shoreline, surrounding it with sand walls, then sitting in it waiting for the tide to reach us. It was easy to defend this structure at first, with tiny waves lapping at the edges of our defences. However, it was soon a case of shoring up the multiple breaks in the walls, digging furiously, thinking we were doing well, until that one wave was a bit too powerful and the walls could not withstand any more. It was fun and we knew the outcome before we even started. The excitement was in the challenge of how long could we last before the tide washed us away.

In the year 1016, Canute became the King of England. At first he was a harsh leader, resorting to executions and exile for those who were against him but later when his rule was more stable his attitude generally changed, although not perfect as he kept two wives and did not accept opposition well. However, he converted to Christianity and keenly protected the church.

He ruled for 19 years and successfully kept the Vikings raiders away – because he also ruled over them. Canute became King of Denmark in 1019 and King of Norway in 1028 making him the ruler of a massive empire surrounding the North Sea.

Most are familiar with the beginning of the story: King Canute, being an arrogant ruler, had his throne placed on the banks of the Thames, waiting for the tide to come in. As the tide rose, Canute stood and held out his hand, demanding that the waves recede. One historian wrote:

“With the greatest vigor he commanded that his chair should be set on the shore, when the tide began to rise. And then he spoke to the rising sea saying “You are part of my dominion, and the ground that I am seated upon is mine, nor has anyone disobeyed my orders with impunity. Therefore, I order you not to rise onto my land, nor to wet the clothes or body of your Lord.”

(Henry of Huntingdon, Historia Anglorum)

However there's more to the story.

“But the sea carried on rising as usual without any reverence for his person, and soaked his feet and legs. Then he moving away said: “All the inhabitants of the world should know that the power of kings is vain and trivial, and that none is worthy of the name of king but He whose command the heaven, earth and sea obey by eternal laws”.

(Henry of Huntingdon, Historia Anglorum)

So this story actually celebrates Canute's acknowledgement of God as Sovereign over all, not of his own control of the tide.

These two stories tell us what should happen according to the laws of nature, determined by creator God – the incoming tide cannot be stopped because it was designed and created at the beginning of time to ebb and flow. What happens is inevitable and can't be changed, no matter how much we try or will it to happen. In contrast, events that happened 80 years ago, demonstrate that events that appear to be inevitable, that appear to be certain because of the chain of events, can be transformed through supernatural intervention.

One of our church members, Mary, told us during a home group discussion, about what happened when she was a young girl, growing up in the war years. King George VI called the nation to prayer. Many countries of the world were engaged in war and there was a real threat of invasion of our shoreline as the enemy frontline advanced. Rather like King Canute, King George knew the only solution to this immense and seemingly immovable problem was to call upon Almighty God to intervene, to turn the tide and imminent disaster.

His Majesty King George VI requested that Sunday, 26 May should be observed as a National Day of Prayer. In a stirring broadcast, he called the people of Britain and of the Empire to commit their cause to God. He said:

'At this historic moment surely not one of us is too busy, too young, or too old to play a part in a nation-wide, perchance a world-wide, vigil of prayer as the great crusade sets forth. If from every place of worship, from home and factory, from men and women of all ages and many races and occupations, our intercessions rise, then, please God, both now and in a future not remote the predictions of an ancient Psalm may be fulfilled: "The Lord will give strength unto his people: the Lord will give his people the blessing of peace."

In its hour of deep distress a heart-cry from both monarch and people alike was going up to God in prayer. And that cry did not go unanswered. For very soon, at least three miracles were seen to happen.

Inexplicably, the advancing enemy was ordered to halt by their own generals, and they were only 20 miles away from their destination – Dunkirk.

A furious storm broke out which stopped any chance of the enemy aircraft taking to the skies. Despite the turbulent storm, the seas of the English Channel were calm allowing a vast armada of every type of floating device to carry soldiers back to the English shores.

One of the Generals of the enemy forces recorded: 'Bad weather has grounded the [airforce], and now we must stand by and watch countless thousands of the enemy getting away to England right under our noses.'

Prayer turned the tide and changed the course of history: it took the inevitable, the immovable, the certain and turned it 180 degrees. A miracle happened because the people prayed and turned to God for help.

Prayer is so important that even Jesus prayed to his father. He pleaded with God about the coming events- his impending death. Yet he also yielded to the Sovereignty of Almighty God saying 'not my will but yours'

The prophet Isaiah reminds us that God is Sovereign as he records in chapter 55: "My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the Lord.

"And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.

9 For just as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so my ways are higher than your ways
and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

This gives us hope that we can bring our prayers, our pleas before a Sovereign God.

James 5:16 says The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. And in Philippians 4 we read:

6 Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. 7 Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

No matter how difficult the circumstances, or impossible the situation the bible tells us to bring it before Almighty God in the name of Jesus. God listens to our pleas and prayers and by his will he can turn the tide, making the impossible, possible.



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