



SUNDAY 10 DECEMBER 2023

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

The Parishes of: Bishop Auckland || Newton Aycliffe & Shildon || Willington
Crook, Tow Law & Wolsingham || Tudhoe || Coundon, Ferryhill & Windlestone

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

2nd Sunday of Advent (B): Mark 1: 1-8

He was an unlikely figure. Off-beat, a bit wild looking. People told unusually stories about him and his parents. But he could tell a great story. Words poured out of him. His gestures and voice were energetic and the look on his face held us spellbound. This was the Baptist, John by name, and we met him - or more accurately were accosted by him.

Charisma is an overused word but he had it. His was a compelling presence. Not from around here, he came out from somewhere else. You couldn't ignore him. His invitations to be immersed in the water attracted lots of people. We knew some of them. They motioned us to join them and we beckoned others we knew. John was a magnet, an invisible force that draws migrating birds and iron filings pulling us to journey within ourselves and find our true home.

It was one of those moments when things come together and it seems so beautifully right. There was an urgency in his voice, an opportunity to get sorted, to be ready. He didn't seek the spotlight, shunned the applause. A man who pointed to someone else, creating expectancy, the warm-up man for the one who was to follow.

He challenged us. Wanted deliberate and intentional action, not mindless collusion. In the language of the prophets, he created movement. Fill in what's missing, do something about what blocks your way. Iron out the creases, name your faults, be specific, no short cuts. He was brutally real, cautioning us against nostalgic times, avoiding more of the same. This was a new song and it made demands.

We've not forgotten the meeting - or the soaking we got in the water, no bit of us escaped. I have to ask myself if this man has made any difference? Has the lapse of time diminished the impact of his message? Did we get the hint that we need to break new ground like he did? Do we worry if our job is less clear - his was created in the doing of it, ours must emerge likewise. He prepared the way, ploughed a new furrow, and set us an example to point to the God who shares our smell and sends us to wash feet and minister to the weak and vulnerable.

John was different and so was the Jesus he pointed out. No one expected a Messiah who was a hands-on labourer, respecting the wood and stone of his own creation, to be fashioned like you and I with a skillful love. John continues to prepare the way of the Lord but the job is ours now. See him as a mentor, an accompanying friend. We're walking through the waters of baptism all our lives.



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ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP

Pope Francis on re-thinking our use of power

It is chilling to realise that the capacities expanded by technology have given those with the knowledge and especially the economic resources to use them, an impressive dominance over the whole of humanity and the entire world. Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely, particularly when we consider how it is currently being used. In whose hands does all this power lie, or will it eventually end up? It is extremely risky for a small part of humanity to have it.

Not every increase in power represents progress for humanity. We need only think of the 'admirable' technologies that were employed to decimate populations, drop atomic bombs and annihilate ethnic groups. There were historical moments where our admiration at progress blinded us to the horror of its consequences. But that risk is always present, because our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience. We stand naked and exposed in the face of our ever-increasing power, lacking the wherewithal to control it. We have certain superficial mechanisms, but we cannot claim to have a sound ethics, a culture and spirituality genuinely capable of setting limits and teaching clear-minded self restraint. It is not strange that so great a power in such hands is capable of destroying life, while the mentality proper to the technocratic mindset blinds us and does not permit us to see this extremely grave problem of present-day humanity.

-Laudate Deum paras 23 and 24