



SUNDAY 10 MARCH 2024

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

4th Sunday of Lent (B) : John 3: 14-21

Billy was usually composed and calm but football and politics lit his fire - especially after a few drinks. Two weeks ago and without swearing, he let fly about what he called 'the death of truth and honesty' in some named individuals in the public eye. 'They'd tell a lie when the truth would do', he said. 'For these people, it's all about expediency. You can't rely on a thing they say'.

Not being able to trust people genuinely worried Billy and we all agreed with his outburst. You knew where you stood with him. He was open and transparent. He'd tell the truth even when it hurt him. His vocal fervor would, I imagine, find a ready assent from lots of folks bemoaning a dearth of real leadership in the world today. Our Gospel passage notes how wrongdoers are wary of being found out. Words and promises can be used to disguise what's really happening. The old story of the emperor's new clothes comes to mind - often there's nowt there.

Attitudes and choice of words have also affected styles of preaching over our history. The fire and brimstone sermon may be more than a folklore image in the experience of some. I wonder at times if it was a means of control, an over-emphasis on avoiding wrongdoing. Supporting the wish to frighten people usually has unforeseen consequences; many people just walked away.

Our Gospel today, alongside the caution mentioned above, carries the superb message that our God so loved the world that he gave his only Son - not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved. The world continues, in all its mess and wonder, to be loved by God who the Scriptures describe as full of compassion. God understands our complex, screwed-up selves and why we are the way we are. His love brings insight, not the rhetoric of condemnation.

We need loving through and beyond our formative years. Our God loves because love is who God is, the source of all life. He creates because love expresses itself, gives and gives—it's what love does. We are loved more than we'll ever understand until we know first hand when we're living with God forever. We can't earn it. It's God's free gift of himself.

Perhaps our best or most helpful understanding or meditation comes couched in the words of consecration at Mass. Effectively saying 'This is me, my whole self, my body, my life blood. I give myself to you, yes you. Receive my love. Receive me into yourself. Live with my life, learn from me. Love one another as I have loved you. This is salvation. It's love's own portrait.'



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ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP

Pope Francis on seeing God in his creation

Jesus was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world because he himself was in constant touch with nature, lending it an attraction full of fondness and wonder. As he made his way throughout the land, he often stopped to contemplate the beauty sown by his Father, and invited his disciples to perceive a divine message in things.

Hence, the creatures of this world no longer appear to us under merely natural guise, because the risen One is mysteriously holding them to himself and directing them towards fulness as their end. The very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence. If the universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The world sings of an infinite Love; how can we fail to care for it?

God has united us to all his creatures. Nonetheless, the technocratic model can isolate us from the world that surrounds us and deceives us by making us forget that the entire world is a 'contact zone'.

- *Laudate Deum paras 64-66*