



SUNDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 2022

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

24th Sunday of the Year (C) : Luke 15: 1-32

I'm starting to write this note as I'm waiting to get through on the phone to hopefully help decipher official letters on behalf of someone unable to manage it himself. My call is important - and the constant holding message agrees. Dogged patience has to outlast the 57 minutes I'm informed is the current response time.

I admire the people who have to answer these calls. Do they ever get a break? They do get an earful of caller's frustrations. What is the accumulated effect on those serving the public by answering phones, signposting individuals to various departments and being more than a sorting office for stressed individuals longing to hear a human voice when online stuff doesn't hack it?

We need to know someone cares. Jesus tells us three stories today to demonstrate we have a God who is bothered to be there when others regard it as not their problem. This is Jesus' strong and challenging response to demeaning comments from officials about his welcoming sinners and even sitting down to eat with them. Shocking!

In God's world every individual matters. Each is sacred, none should be lost or rejected, all need loving like you and me. Dismissive official soundbites are insulting. They betray a punitive outlook from those feeling superior. The teacher now has something to say. He says it also to my face and yours as well as to scribes and pharisees. God goes the extra mile.

No one would leave 99 sheep to go looking for one stray. God does. No one would turn the house upside down for a coin. God does and rejoices in it. Jesus hearers would send the prodigal son on his way after squandering the inheritance and having the nerve to come grovelling back. But God throws a party. Pay attention here, we're being taught a priceless lesson. Our teacher's skills go madly over the top in the hope we might even glimpse something of the identikit pictures of God here.

Flashy mottoes may not always be thought through. Beware. The Lord tells us the last shall be first, and the first last. Where do you see yourself in the pecking order? Are we the outrageous tender father in this story? Are we the tearaway, messing up and coming back out of self interest? Are we the dutiful son, resentful about others' preferential treatment?

This is not bedtime reading. It's a penetrating indictment of officialdom and the sinister values that influence us all if we're not careful. Stories like these ultimately signed Jesus' death warrant—God's world asks too much of selfish values and lifestyles - it's too upsetting, dangerous and crazy. We defend our vulnerability by not wanting to think through these stories because they invite change and that's uncomfortable. If we seek first the kingdom, all else will be given to us. It's a no-brainer.



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A word from the Pope

Complacency is seductive; it tells us that there is no point in trying to change things, that there is nothing we can do, because this is the way things have always been and yet we always manage to survive. By force of habit we no longer stand up to evil. We 'let things be', or as others have decided they ought to be. Yet let us allow the Lord to rouse us from our torpor, to free us from our inertia. Let us rethink our usual way of doing things; let us open our eyes and ears, and above all our hearts, so as not to be complacent about things as they are, but unsettled by the living and effective word of the risen Lord.

We are inspired to act by the example of those priests, religious, and laity who devote themselves to proclamation and to serving others with great fidelity, often at the risk of their lives and certainly at the cost of their comfort. Their testimony reminds us that, more than bureaucrats and functionaries, the Church needs passionate missionaries, enthusiastic about sharing true life. The saints surprise us, they confound us, because by their lives they urge us to abandon a dull and dreary mediocrity.

- Rejoice and Be Glad paras 137-8