



SUNDAY 12 JULY 2020
DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

Fifteenth Sunday of the Year (A): Matthew 13:1-23

We were brought up on stories. Family stories, wartime stories, funny and tragic stories, but our histories are wrapped in the tales handed on to us.

We don't talk like Government or business reports, heavy with statistics, analysis and forecasts. We talk about Debbie and Jack Public, what they looked like, what they did and said and what happened after. But things don't end there. The stories change. Bits get left out and other bits are exaggerated. We don't reliably hand on what actually happened, but we focus on what it means to us and describe it in our way.

Jesus' stories are brilliant - just try and craft one as good. My teacher pals sweat over lesson plans. The Lord's parables betray careful planning and delivery. We don't have his stories first hand. They come to us through the versions that stuck in the memories of those who heard and how they repeated them. The 40-odd parables we still have are a penetrating insight into a brilliant teacher. We're still talking about him.

But it's what he taught that's the point. His style is to be admired and copied, but the stories were and are vehicles carrying a way of seeing that we're asked to take on. For want of a soundbite, Jesus called it 'Kingdom'. It's a different place to live.

Today's Gospel story of the Sower is a classic. Jesus is the Sower. His stories are the seeds he sows and the various results of where the stories land and what happens to them become an unflattering daily portrait of you and me.

The stories are seeds. The pictures memorable. They sit inside us and can germinate - or wait their time - or not, as the case may be. The amazing Sower doesn't stop putting the seeds out there - indiscriminately, even knowing how well or minimally they'll be received. He has no illusions about us, but has an astonishing belief in the enduring power of his words and the niggling potential of what they can do to us.

This Gospel story is about us, distracted and yet achievers both on bright summer's days and wet winter Fridays. Kingdom thinking is about how we love in an intolerant and selfish world. It's about care of the earth and of each other. It's from a God who never stops believing in us. Hear the story and tell it to yourself and others. It's a good day when we get the message.



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The Joy of the Gospel - Pope Francis

The new idolatry of money We have created new idols. The worship of the ancient golden calf has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose. The worldwide crisis affecting finance and the economy lays bare their imbalances and, above all, their lack of real concern for human beings; man is reduced to one of his needs alone: consumption. (*Para 55*)

While the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few. This imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation... To all this we can add widespread corruption and self-serving tax evasion, which have taken on worldwide dimensions. The thirst for power and possessions knows no limits. In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenceless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule. (*Para 56*)

Behind this attitude lurks a rejection of ethics and a rejection of God. Ethics has come to be viewed with a certain scornful derision. It is seen as counterproductive, too human, because it makes money and power relative. It is felt to be a threat, since it condemns the manipulation and debasement of the person. In effect, ethics leads to a God who calls for a committed response which is outside the categories of the marketplace. When these latter are absolutized, God can only be seen as uncontrollable, unmanageable, even dangerous, since he calls human beings to their full realisation and to freedom from all forms of enslavement. Ethics - a non ideological ethics - would make it possible to bring about balance and a more humane social order. With this in mind, I encourage financial experts and political leaders to ponder the words of one of the sages of antiquity (Saint John Chrysostom) "Not to share one's wealth with the poor is to steal from them and to take away their livelihood. It is not our own goods which we hold, but theirs". (*Para 57*)