



SUNDAY 17 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

3rd Sunday of Advent (B): John 1: 6-8, 19-28

Who are you? What do you do? What's your authority? We like to know these things when the man from the Gas, the Electric or the Water Company comes to read the meters, have they got ID, a badge, some proof they're trustworthy? Why should I accept you without some validation? Who sent you, before I give you my trust, before I let you into my home, into my life?

Questions, questions. But they're important. People rightly gave John the Baptist the third degree. He was probably interrogated by many people. Some individuals we accept because of who they are - they have a personal presence. Others we admit because of the office they hold. We assess them all. If they're found wanting, we don't give our trust.

Without trust much of life is not possible. Trust guides our choices, the decisions we make, what we allow others to do that will affect us. There are too many scams we need to protect ourselves from, wolves dressed as lambs and you can't be too careful. There are more and cleverer spin doctors, snake oil merchants and individuals in public life who promise the earth but fail to deliver. We like to think we know the real thing when we see it and so we rightly ask questions.

John the Baptist is up-front, no pretence. 'I'm not the Number One, I'm not the re-appearance of any of the big hitters of the past. I'm a messenger, preparing the ground, alerting you to be ready for the one who will follow'. I remember many years ago meeting an American working for NASA and I asked about astronauts, only to be told 'We're just the spear-carriers for those guys'. The invaluable work that is done by service personnel makes so much else possible.

John gave voice to the need we all have, to be open to what's new, to grow, to change and develop. There are some things he can do, can talk to us about. There are others things that only we can do for ourselves, to embrace with trust the one John has come to preach about, and to light a fire under us. John wants to help. His message is as relevant now as it was then. You prepare in various ways for external events, what about inside change, continuing growth, the stuff people might notice in you and be inspired by? John's forthright presence is a challenge. He dares us to admit it.

He's already committed. His job is to point, to direct us onwards. He's ready to back off if we get the message. He sees himself as a servant, not in the same league even as those who take off the master's footwear and wash his feet. Are you intrigued? Excited? Curious? He wants us to be. His life's job was about grabbing our attention, looking us in the eye and inviting changes that don't happen by accident but by our deliberate choice. You and I are not the same people as we were this time last year. Are we any better, have we listened, have we followed through? There's time. We must use it well.



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Pope Francis on Technology dangers

A healthy ecology is also the result of interaction between human beings and the environment, as occurs in the indigenous cultures and has occurred for centuries in different regions of the earth. Human groupings have often 'created' an environment, reshaping it in some way without destroying it or endangering it. The great present-day problem is that technocratic progress has destroyed that healthy and harmonious relationship. In any event, the indispensable need to move beyond that progress, so damaging and destructive, will not be found in a denial of the human being, but include the interaction of natural system with social systems.

We need to rethink among other things the question of human power, its meaning and its limits. For our power has frenetically increased in a few decades. We have made impressive and awesome technological advances, and we have not realised that at the same time we have turned into highly dangerous beings, capable of threatening the lives of many beings and our own survival. Today it is worth repeating the ironic comment of Solovyov about an age which was so advanced as to be actually the last one. We need lucidity and honesty in order to recognise in time that our power and the progress we are producing are turning against us.

- Laudate Deum paras 27 and 28