



SUNDAY 17 JANUARY 2021

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

Second Sunday of the Year (B) : John 1: 35-42

Some of our hymns are frankly dangerous. They're also a great way of teaching and praying. You want kids to learn the green cross code? Or anything else that needs to become part of the hard-wiring that drives their behaviour? - then wrap up the message in a song and you're probably home. Even better if the tune is good.

So what about "Here I am, Lord"? We're putting ourselves at God's disposal. It's based on chapter 6 of the book of the prophet Isaiah with echoes of Samuel in today's first reading. The Lord needs someone to listen to people's pain, look after the poor, those with disabilities, people who's lives are bleak and dark. Look no further - I'm your man. Send me. Really? Do we know what we've just sung? What if he takes us at our word? I'd look and feel shameful if I had to say Lord, I didn't really mean it.

Start with our hesitancy. We learn by doing and we're asking the Lord to lead us. It sounds OK but we do like to be in control, some days wanting to direct God rather than genuinely seeking his guidance. Our God loves this messy world - that's why he sent his Son to save us from doing ourselves in. We're offering to help. It's why we're here.

In a nutshell, we're given to the world, to those crushed by injustice, sickness, loneliness and a heavy catalogue of hardship. Our job description as Jesus' students is increasingly to serve, to stand up for honesty and fairness, to offer practical support where we can, certainly not to get in God's way. Alongside the exploitation and neglect we witness, we'll understand how partial and self-inflicted some of the world's problems are if we have more than an ounce of self-awareness. If we're in touch with our own wounded humanity, it's a head start in caring for others.

Here I am, Lord, means taking calculated risks. Like Andrew and his pal, disciples of John the Baptist, we need to spend time with the Lord. Notice Andrew first addressed Jesus as 'Rabbi' or 'Teacher'. By the next day he was telling Simon Peter, his brother, 'We've found The Messiah'. That's a big jump. They sat and talked - the rest is history. They told others, who told more others, and they told yet more others and the others told me, told you, and we must tell others too.

At the end of each day, check out what you did with the Lord, what worked, what was OK, and ask him about tomorrow. Just talk to him. Thanks.



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A word from Pope Francis

In these difficult times, I take hope from the last words of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel: "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). We are not alone. That is why we need not be afraid to go down into the dark nights of problems and suffering. We know that we don't have the answers all ready and neatly packaged, yet we trust that the Lord will open for us doors we had no idea were there.

Of course, we hesitate. Faced with so much suffering, who does not balk? It is fine to tremble a little. Fear of the mission can, in fact, be a sign of the Holy Spirit. We feel, at once, both inadequate to the task and called to it. There is a warmth in our hearts that reassures us the Lord is asking us to follow Him.

When we face choices and contradictions, asking what God's will is opens us to unexpected possibilities. I describe these new possibilities as "overflow," because they often burst the banks of our thinking. Overflow happens when we humbly set before God the challenge we face, and ask for help. We call this "discernment of spirits," because it involves learning what is of God and what is seeking to frustrate His will.

To enter into discernment is to resist the urge to seek the apparent relief of an immediate decision, and instead be willing to hold different options before the Lord, waiting on that overflow. You consider reasons for and against, knowing Jesus is with you and for you. You feel inside yourself the gentle pull of the Spirit, and its opposite. And over time, in prayer and patience, in dialogue with others, you reach a solution, which is not a compromise but something else altogether.

From 'Let us Dream - the Path to a Better Future' - pages 20-21