



SUNDAY 17 SEPTEMBER 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

24th Sunday of the Year (A): Matthew 18: 21-35

When you're driving, you may have been given an indication to join a line of traffic by a kindly motorist who lets you in, rather than having you wait at a busy junction until things clear. Do you show a similar kindness to someone further down the road or deny or refuse because your attention is elsewhere? Does one good turn deserve another?

Courtesy in driving offers a simple example. We've all been stuck at times and been relieved to give a wave of thanks when others have helped us to escape the problem and shown an understanding that frees us. But there are major issues afloat in today's Gospel story. Jesus rehearses for us the learnings inherent in the mindbending kindness shown to us by the Lord and the consequences of our blindness and lack of awareness to help others.

Jesus' stories illustrate graphically where volumes of academic print don't. Forgiveness and mercy are religious terms needing unpacking. To explain things to others we have to have grasped them first ourselves.

Today's Gospel is a classical sting. The horrible guy in the tale turns out to be me, to be you. This individual could have lost everything. His relief is enormous, his understanding is non-existent. No way did he allow the message of mercy to enter his heart. His behaviour shows he learnt nothing from his master's compassion. If he had, he couldn't have treated his mate in such a brutal fashion. He's an cruel opportunist who doesn't even allow a second chance.

The story comes home to roost in you and me when we lack awareness of the immensity of what God has done in forgiving us, especially if we withhold forgiveness from someone else. The villain in the piece doesn't do compassion, ignores his own inadequacy and has scant appreciation of kindness having consequences.

God entered humanity to show us what being made in his image requires of us. Far from being perfect ourselves, we can override any understanding of the faults of others - especially if we've been there too. Jesus' story is designed to kick us hard, to see how we have become dulled into accepting mercy but oblivious to our not learning from it. Confessing and accepting forgiveness but not changing our behaviour, having a firm purpose of amendment but making no amends.

Kyrie eleison, Lord have mercy. He does. Do we? The story asks that we recognise ourselves and our insensitivity. It requires thought, making the story personal, and being grateful we're loved so much.



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In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters.

Laudato Si, paragraph 158

What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? The question not only concerns the environment in isolation; the issue cannot be approached piecemeal.... It is no longer enough simply to state that we should be concerned for future generations. We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity. Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is, first and foremost, up to us. The issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn.

Laudato Si, paragraph 160