



SUNDAY 2 MAY 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

5th Sunday of Easter (B) : John 15: 1-8

Benny's a photographer. He knows what makes a good picture. He sees pictures where others wouldn't. "I see pictures everywhere", he once told me.

He once did some work for a garden centre and raved for ages about flowers, bulbs, shoots, buds, colour and fruit. He picked up a lot of good tips that changed his own gardening skills.

But Benny's pictures tend to be about people - moments captured, postures and expressions telling stories in split-second clicks of a camera. He's never lost his sense of wonder. His graphic images portray life in its beauty and its casualty, growth and decline. Benny's an artist, a storyteller, whose images speak volumes without using a single word.

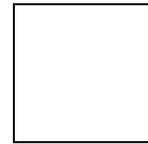
Jesus had no camera, but he gave us pictures, images to set us thinking. He came to tell us over and over that God shares his life with us. His pictures are about growth and health, enhancing what works and cutting back what doesn't. His hearers knew about pruning vines - they'd done it or seen it. The cutting is delicate - enough to increase life, to yield more. Unattached branches can't survive. Separation is fatal.

We carry the life of God - it runs within us. It's mindbending, crazy and true. We're also fragile - fruit grows on thin branches. Let's mix metaphors and turn to listen to St Paul. He reminds us that "We are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). So we must remain part of the vine. It's our lifeblood, our identity. To do otherwise, to go AWOL, is to shrivel and drop. It doesn't work. A no-brainer.

At this time of the year blossoms are stunning, buds and new green shoots abound, spring and new life is shouting at us. We'd be foolish to miss the message. What we see works because the new growth is connected, fed by life-giving sap. Listen to the Teacher: "Make your home in me as I make mine in you. Whoever remains in me, with me in him/her, bears fruit in plenty. Cut off from me you can do nothing". (John 15:4-5 in today's Gospel).

Far from neglecting the one whose life we're carrying, can we allow ourselves to be pruned by Jesus' words and give glory to the Father by producing much fruit - in fact, it's why we're here.

To Benny you'd be a great picture.



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ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

Pope Francis speaks

The Christian ideal will always be a summons to overcome suspicion, habitual mistrust, fear of losing our privacy, all the defensive attitudes which today's world imposes on us. Many try to escape from others to take refuge in the comfort of their privacy or in a small circle of close friends, renouncing the realism of the social aspect of the Gospel. For just as some people want a purely spiritual Christ, without flesh and without the cross, they also want their interpersonal relationships provided by sophisticated equipment, by screens and systems which can be turned on and off on command. Meanwhile, the Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction. True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others. The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness.

One important challenge is to show that the solution will never be found in fleeing from a personal and committed relationship with God which at the same time commits us to serving others. This happens frequently nowadays, as believers seek to hide or keep apart from others, or quietly flit from one place to another or from one task to another, without creating deep and stable bonds.

This is a false remedy which cripples the heart and at times the body as well. We need to help others with the right attitude, which is to accept and esteem them as companions along the way, without interior resistance. Better yet, it means learning to find Jesus in the face of others, in their voices, in their pleas. And learning to suffer in the embrace of the crucified Jesus whenever we are unjustly attacked or meet with ingratitude, never tiring of our decision to live in fraternity.

- The Joy of the Gospel, paras 88 and 91