



SUNDAY 21 JUNE 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

12th Sunday of the Year (A): Matthew 10: 26-33

My friend Frank's grandmother cleans her house before the cleaner comes. You'll know the type. You may have met someone like her - you may be a bit the same yourself.

Standards and preferences can be clung to so fiercely that you might ask whether the person has the habit or the habit has the person. Driven people are not so rare.

Our foibles - Frank's grandmother's and ours are understood. We wouldn't be the first to make God laugh. But Jesus is talking serious stuff here. It's about witnessing to the values of the Kingdom and the sacred worth of every person. Black lives matter because every life matters. Prejudice, inherited bias, personal likes, dislikes and fears abound.

One of our difficulties is that we're good at fooling ourselves. Self knowledge is not easy because we don't stand outside ourselves. Our knowledge is subjective. We filter everything through inadequate self awareness and don't see our faults and bias as we should. We read newspapers and websites that feed us others' selective views and create a worldview that can only ever be partial. We may often read only views that agree with our own.

It would be good if we discussed the Gospel as frequently as we discussed how we feel about what's happening in the world or in national or local politics. Getting a grip on Jesus' teaching is a lifetime's task. Applying it to ourselves and living out the message is a requirement - the Lord doesn't expect us to be armchair Christians.

Today's Gospel reminds us, if we need it, just what a superb teacher Jesus was and remains. Three times in this short passage he tells us not to be afraid. Three times. Be open, be up front, don't pretend. You will be opposed and persecuted. Don't be afraid. One day all will be revealed.

Jesus opens up about our all powerful Father, the only one really worth fearing. Yet this Father holds us in a love so detailed that he doesn't have to count - he knows how many hairs sprout from our heads. It's a graphic way of describing intimacy. No need to be frightened of him then.

The message of God's love and forgiveness must be spread and lived. Standing up for justice, recognising and alleviating poverty, confronting greed and exploitation means we'll be criticised, ridiculed and variously attacked. Active Christian values are a threat to those requiring or expecting collusion with their vested interests, personal power or money making.

Jesus warns us of opposition. He met it so his followers will. He assures us he'll stand up for us if we stand up for him. It's no surprise that we're worth more than hundreds of sparrows, but a mature following of Jesus requires an honesty and readiness to learn and to act on what we learn. He might have said, 'Get real'.

Put the kettle on, make a cuppa and sit with today's Gospel for the duration of your drink. But read from Matthew chapter 10 verse 16 and talk to someone else about it. It does help. Thanks.



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ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

STATEMENT ON RACIAL JUSTICE

I am sure you have all been appalled by the killing of George Floyd and the violence that has followed this terrible event, both in our own country and throughout the world. The Black Lives Matter protests within England and Wales highlighted important issues within our own region. Our Bishops' Conference has issued a statement on this, which I would like to share with you. Within our own ministry, we should always endeavour to express the Church's rejection of racism, as clean contrary to the values of the Gospel. I would encourage you to share this statement in your Parish Newsletter:

We stand in solidarity with our sisters and brothers in the USA as they challenge the evil of racism and the brutal killing of George Floyd. As the US Bishops made clear: 'we cannot turn a blind eye to these atrocities and yet still try to profess to respect every human life. We serve a God of love, mercy, and justice.'

Systemic racism is embedded in our own society. The disproportionate harm suffered by BAME people throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted profound inequalities, marginalisation and injustice here in the UK. The peaceful Black Lives Matter protests taking place in our towns and cities this week reflect the understandable anger that so many people feel about this.

As Catholics we recognise that racism is an evil which must be opposed; we all have a responsibility for actively promoting racial justice. Whenever we ignore racism or dismiss BAME people's experience of it, we are complicit in violations of human dignity. We pray for God's help to overcome racism in all its forms and that we might protect everyone who suffers its consequences. We are all made in God's image.

Bishop Declan Lang Lead Bishop for International Affairs

Bishop Paul McAleenan Lead Bishop for Racial Justice

With every good wish and blessing,

Robert Byrne, C.O.

Bishop of Hexham & Newcastle