



SUNDAY 23 JULY 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

16th Sunday of the year (A): Matthew 13: 24-43

One of my friends doesn't care for collections of short stories, she's an avid reader of long and intriguing mysteries and thrillers. The same longer blockbusters however contain umpteen shorter stories woven together to keep the pot boiling before tying up the ends to bring everything to a head.

Matthew the Gospel writer who we listen to today, gathers a raft of Jesus' stories about the Kingdom in this part of the overall Gospel saga. The Lord wouldn't have told them all the same time, but different images get through to different people. It's interesting that so many of Jesus' images were remembered. No doubt the way he told stories made a claim on his hearers different to how they come across to us today. The way we tell a story is about more than just the words.

The Lord's stories of the Kingdom are about things growing, about harvests, seeds sprouting, bread rising, treasures found, fish being caught— they talk of increase and promise, they call us in, attract us onwards and call us together.

When we think our message is not being picked up or understood we repeat, tell it a different way, change the approach, back up the message with facial expressions, clear body language and perhaps the likely consequences of ignoring the message. None of us are strangers to denials, to minimizing the importance of the story, of thinking it applies to other people not us, and justifying why we don't have to do anything about it. Jesus wants to catch us one way or another.

He's familiar with resistance, like any teachers. Indifference is often registered by looks devoid of interest, giving signals of boredom and even hostility. Today's stories tell of interference, of downright opposition, attempts to thwart the mystery of growth and healthy outcomes. We're called and reminded that we take responsibility for our actions or the lack of them. Judgement comes later. Better to appreciate the teaching now.

We're created in God's image and likeness. Living by the blueprint keeps things as they should be. Jesus' teaching helps us maintain our true identity if we feed on his stories, his living example, his encouragement and his undefeatable love for us. What do you remember of today's Gospel? Do you get why he told so many stories?



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ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP

Pope Francis talking of conflict

Conflict cannot be ignored or concealed. It has to be faced. But if we remain trapped in conflict, we lose our perspective, our horizons shrink and reality itself begins to fall apart. In the midst of conflict, we lose our sense of the profound unity of reality.

When conflict arises, some people simply look at it and go their way as if nothing happened; they wash their hands of it and get on with their lives. Others embrace it in such a way that they become its prisoners; they lose their bearings, project onto institutions their own confusion and dissatisfaction and thus make unity impossible. But there is also a third way, and it is the best way to deal with conflict. It is the willingness to face conflict head on, to resolve it and to make it a link in the chain of a new process. “Blessed are the peacemakers!” (Mt 5:9).

In this way it becomes possible to build communion amid disagreement, but this can only be achieved by those great persons who are willing to go beyond the surface of the conflict and to see others in their deepest dignity. This requires acknowledging a principle indispensable to the building of friendship in society: namely, that unity is greater than conflict. Solidarity, in its deepest and most challenging sense, thus becomes a way of making history in a life setting where conflicts, tensions and oppositions can achieve a diversified and life-giving unity. This is not to opt for a kind of amalgamation of differences, or for the absorption of one into the other, but rather for a resolution which takes place on a higher plane and preserves what is valid and useful on both sides.

- *The Joy of the Gospel—paras 226-228*