



SUNDAY 23 OCTOBER 2022

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

29th Sunday of the Year (C) : Luke 7-14

“If they’d only put their money where their mouth is, we might get somewhere!” It was a heartfelt shout from one of my relatives, a marching crusader, passionate about poverty and injustice and well known to not a few elected Members of Parliament.

He gets incensed about politicians who don’t answer questions. He tackles head-on evasive replies from local councillors and is a formidable debater who does his homework. An admirer of busy, hard-grafters, but first he wants to know what they’re busy about. He gets behind the headlines, tears the guts out of propaganda carefully knitted by spin-doctors, and looks for what is not being said as much as he scrutinises what’s on offer. You get the picture.

Today’s Gospel paints a picture from our storytelling God. Jesus was a fund of well-crafted stories. We know nothing about his working life prior to his going public with news of the Kingdom of God and the values it invites. But scholars suggest those earlier years would be spent working shoulder to shoulder with other tradespeople, hearing their strengths and struggles and being sensitive to the telling issues of making ends meet. He heard first-hand of what works and what doesn’t and his love for the down to earth ordinary folk fuelled his distrust of unsympathetic leaders who felt superior.

The God who walked this earth as one of us has no illusions about us but he has a wonderful vision. He’s compassion on legs, patient with unpopular tax collectors working for the Romans and pocketing a profit from their own people. Not unlike my relative at his best, he supports the underdog—even though in this case the tax collector is vilified by the people. But the man has the honesty to know he’s a sinner, barely feeling he has the right to slip into the back of the temple—and maybe nipping out sharp before people see him.

In contrast the Pharisee is generous but judgemental. He looks down on the tax collector, making comparisons and despising what he sees. The tax collector knows he’s a sinner, the pharisee can’t see his own faults. He’s so high in his own legend that he’s not praying to God, but polishing his self-absorbed ego. I know who’s company I’d like to share over a pint. God does too.

We still have miles to go in really understanding that the last shall be first and the humbled will be exalted. Jesus came to call sinners. Own up and he’s here for us. It’s a slap in the face for the good guys— Jesus is astonishingly at ease with criminals and hoodlums. The Lord gives us the welcome story of the prodigal son, the high regard for Mary Magdalen, the forgiveness of the triple denying Peter and the constant attempts to show the entrenched Pharisees that there are other ways to use power and influence.

Where do we each stand in this Gospel story today? Look again, perhaps?



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ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP

Pope Francis on Dialogue
and transparency in decision making

Environmental impact assessment should not come after the drawing up of a business proposition or the proposal of a particular policy, plan or programme. It should be part of the process from the beginning, and be carried out in a way which is interdisciplinary, transparent and free of all economic or political pressure.

It should be linked to a study of working conditions and possible effects on people's physical and mental health, on the local economy and on public safety. Economic returns can thus be forecast more realistically, taking into account potential scenarios and the eventual need for further investment to correct possible undesired effects.

A consensus should always be reached between the different stakeholders, who can offer a variety of approaches, solutions and alternatives. The local population should have a special place at the table; they are concerned about their own future and that of their children, and can consider goals transcending immediate economic interest.

We need to stop thinking in terms of 'interventions' to save the environment in favour of policies developed and debated by all interested parties. The participation of the latter also entails being fully informed about such projects and their different risks and possibilities; this includes not just preliminary decisions but various follow-up activities and continued monitoring. Honesty and truth are needed in scientific and political discussions: these should not be limited to the issue of whether or not a particular project is permitted by law.

- Laudato Si—para 183