



SUNDAY 24 JANUARY 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

3rd Sunday of the Year (B): Mark 1:14-20

A good friend tells the story of a character who firmly stressed that he was a Catholic. He protested when asked if he went to Mass regularly, "Oh hey, I'm not a fanatic, man!"

Church allegiance is a moving target for many, but we include all in the household of the faith. We're quite a varied family. We don't keep an attendance register. As the popular phrase goes - we're a broad church. Not everyone's had the same breaks.

Over the years we've been guilty of stressing attendance and obligations as benchmarks of credible membership, perhaps to the detriment of forming and deepening personal and communal relationships with Jesus. 'The Church' can mean many things. Today's Gospel reminds us we are the community of the followers of Jesus. Are we people of the Gospel or people of the institution? It's a useful and important question.

Our shorthand and technical terms need unpacking if we are to inhabit our words. Churchspeak can be miles off ordinary life and way over our heads. Jargon-busting questions are good even if awkward.

Mark's Gospel today talks of Jesus recruiting four fishermen, tough lads eking out an uncertain livelihood. Familiar with success and failure, needing to put bread on the table, feed families and work together, they were also fascinated enough to follow Jesus who put things in a way no one else did. They probably enjoyed his humour - 'You'll be catching people from now on' - to realise a few short years later how true that had become.

Every person's life story is a goldmine of experience, of cause and effect, of response to events and a network of relationships, formative, healthy and unhealthy. 'Who bumps into who' sometimes has enduring consequences. The lives of Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John changed radically from meeting the Lord. It's why we might hesitate - we like to be in control.

They had to re-invent themselves with the power of the Spirit. Our Scriptures and our baptism service call it becoming a new creation. It takes time. The Lord works within and without the community of the Church. But ponder on lives once limited by fishing in the Sea of Galilee becoming world teachers of a humanity shared by the Son of God. He lived among us and invites us yet to follow and discover an immensity of love and compassion sorely needed by our beautiful endangered world.

"Repent and believe the good news from God" What an invitation!



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Pope Francis on Care for the Vulnerable

Jesus, the evangelizer par excellence and the Gospel in person, identifies especially with the little ones (*cf. Matthew 25:40*). This reminds us Christians that we are called to care for the vulnerable of the earth. But the current model, with its emphasis on success and self-reliance, does not appear to favour an investment in efforts to help the slow, the weak or the less talented to find opportunities in life.

It is essential to draw near to new forms of poverty and vulnerability, in which we are called to recognise the suffering Christ, even if this appears to bring us no tangible and immediate benefits. I think of the homeless, the addicted, refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly who are increasingly isolated and abandoned, and many others. Migrants present a particular challenge for me, since I am a pastor of a Church without frontiers, a Church which considers herself mother to all. For this reason, I exhort all countries to a generous openness which, rather than fearing the loss of local identity, will prove capable of creating new forms of cultural synthesis. How beautiful are those cities which overcome paralysing mistrust, integrate those who are different and make this very integration a new factor of development! How attractive are those cities, which, even to their architectural design, are full of spaces which connect, relate and favour the recognition of others!

Doubly poor are those women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence, since they are frequently less able to defend their rights. Even so, we constantly witness among them impressive examples of daily heroism in defending and protecting their vulnerable families.

- *The Joy of the Gospel* - paras 209-13