



SUNDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2023

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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

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## ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

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### **25th Sunday of the Year (A): Matthew 20: 1-16**

The man's name was Benny. I'd met him a couple of times before it became clear that he needed help. We sorted out some immediate practical things and made some plans for later that we hoped he'd find agreeable.

"Why are you doing this?" he asked. I'd heard this question before. It comes from streetwise experience where generous help is rare and even at times suspect. What's behind such unusual kindness? It's welcome, but are there strings attached? When statutory help is overstretched and in short supply and voluntary supports limited, anything beyond minimum provision is sadly unusual.

So Jesus' story in today's Gospel takes not a few people by surprise. Lines of workers standing around hoping to get taken on for even a small recompense is a disheartening sight, the unknown consequences hiding tragic, hand-to-mouth stories. Jesus knew people like these. They weren't unusual. As a worker himself did he ever stand in lines like this? Workplace chat made him familiar with desperate households on the breadline and below it.

Jesus doesn't see potential workers. He sees the look on their faces, the need to feed their families, the striving to make ends meet. Moving around with his disciples, where did their next meal come from? How reliable was the kindness of strangers? The people whose sense of sharing a common humanity and regarding others as brothers and sisters, unknowingly fed the Son of God.

We're the Lord's followers today. The worried faces of individuals needing patient understanding and support can be seen at our foodbanks, surgeries and church doors. Receiving people well is the essential hallmark of all ministry. Some foodbank contributors, helpers in the SVP and various quiet donors have sometimes known the anxieties of managing somehow on little or nothing. They may still live a stringent lifestyle but help because they've been there themselves. They're an unspoken challenge to us all.

In Jesus, the feeder of 5000, the provider of copious wedding wine, we see the extravagance of God. To make life possible for an hour or a day sends a message to the receiver about their own dignity and importance. They've been noticed and respected. We call it appreciation. It's a quality born of God.

Being givers and receivers underwrites our dependence. No one gets through alone. We need one another, an admittance of a need that only God can satisfy. In this Gospel story Jesus does just that.



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Yet all is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning. We are able to take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge our deep dissatisfaction, and to embark on new paths to authentic freedom. No system can completely suppress our openness to what is good, true and beautiful, or our God-given ability to respond to his grace at work deep in our hearts. I appeal to everyone in the world not to forget this dignity which is ours. No one has the right to take it from us.

***Laudato Si, paragraph 205***

In those countries which should be making the greatest changes in consumer habits, young people have a new ecological sensitivity and a generous spirit, and some of them are making admirable efforts to protect the environment. At the same time, they have grown up in a milieu of extreme consumerism and affluence which makes it difficult to develop other habits. We are faced with an educational challenge.

***Laudato Si, paragraph 209***