



SUNDAY 25 APRIL 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

4th Sunday of Easter (B) : John 10: 11-18

Thankfully, the numbers in the statistics and graphs recording the awesome tally of COVID casualties are reducing. Tragically we have lost in excess of 127,000 people in the UK to this frightening virus.

The numbers we are given daily of infections, hospital admissions and deaths are a cruel summary. Every single individual is a world of relationships, stories and achievements. To see the figures as a tsunami of illness, upheaval and loss, robs any viewer or listener of the individual backstories, volumes of personal details, sacred in family memories, joys and heartache.

When hospital patients are labelled as a disease - 'the stomach cancer in bed 4' - or we tend to use titles and positions rather than abilities, we reduce individuality, narrow our understanding and possibly fail the person we are sent to serve. When we treat people simply as consumers, when life is about shopping and acquiring becomes retail therapy, we harm our humanity and become less sensitive to the intriguing wonder of each living soul. "Life is more than food and the body more than clothing" (Matthew 6:25).

Our Good Shepherd in today's Gospel reading knows his sheep individually. I was struck in the spread of foot and mouth disease in the UK in 2001 how many farmers and owners of livestock spoke of named animals with individual personalities and known qualities. Their contact with them was specific and heartfelt. Our Good Shepherd tells us each of us is important, known and loved to the point that he willingly died for every individual one of us.

Shepherding is personal and we all do it. We take our cue from the one who knows us each by name and has done since before we were born. We are intended and loved by God. He goes after the one in a hundred when others wouldn't have bothered, caring for the sick and the wounded, giving personal time because it's needed and it radiates affirmation.

Individuality is crucial. So many today spend so much time trying to be like someone else or fit into other's expectations. It's Vocation Sunday and the call is unique and personal. We need to be ourselves, bringing our talents and qualities to the service of others. Treating every person as we'd like to be treated is the golden rule that achieves much and honours human dignity. Learning from the Good Shepherd challenges us to care generally - but always in particular.



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Pope Francis on caring for the earth

We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us. This allows us to respond to the charge that Judaeo-Christian thinking, on the basis of the Genesis account which grants man "dominion" over the earth (*Genesis 1:28*), has encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting him as domineering and destructive by nature. This is not a correct interpretation of the Bible as understood by the Church. Although it is true that we Christians have at times, incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures. The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate understanding recognising that they tell us to "till and keep" the garden of the world (*cf Genesis 2:15*). "Tilling" refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while "keeping" means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. "The earth is the Lord's" (*Psalms 24:1*); to him belongs 'the earth with all that is within it' (*Deuteronomy 10:14*). Thus God rejects every claim to absolute ownership: "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me" (*Leviticus 25:23*).

- *Laudato Si para 67*