



SUNDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 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

26th Sunday of the Year (C) : Luke 16: 19-31

It all began with a phone call. The start of the call was pleasant and friendly. It disguised an annoyance that emerged as the real reason for the contact. He was getting fed up of the Gospel message to help the poor. I was making him feel guilty.

After some discussion it led to our meeting to listen carefully to one another and to what we each felt the Gospel was saying. In fact we were in agreement that the words of Jesus are not easy and can leave us uncomfortable. The compassionate God is attractive and warm when the message is uplifting and supportive, when we feel loved and cherished. But it can't be always like that. Jesus deliberately gets under our skin.

Being inspired is affirming. Being challenged is unpleasant and we can become defensive. We're not alone if we tend to edit the Gospel and find ourselves selective of what appeals to us but hard of hearing when we feel got at. If we're honest, we all probably move on and become forgetful of the hard bits - but there are many of them.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells the story of the nameless rich man and the begging Lazarus at his gate. Notice he's talking here to the Pharisees. He engaged them often in discussion or argument over their interpretation of God's law. It's tempting for us to applaud from the back seats, imagining the message doesn't apply to us. When the teaching story isn't immediately about us, we can carry on regardless. In fact it's always about us but maybe we don't want to know.

If we go back to the story, we may not think the rich man who feasts magnificently every day and dresses in fine linen describes us. But ignoring the man begging at the gate might make a connection. How are you with people begging, with those sleeping in shop doorways, with sellers of The Big Issue? It is a big issue. We justify ignoring people in need. Various newspaper articles may caution us to see beyond appearances, but can too easily justify our doing nothing.

When we generalise about 'the poor' we feel we ought to help. If it's about people far away its easier to keep them far away. The acid test is what we do for the people on our doorstep. We have to be challenged by the Gospel. To "seek first the Kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33) means it's the priority. Foodbanks and people begging are an invitation to enter the mind of Jesus. He fed people.

The Gospel today invites us to listen to Moses and the prophets and to the one who has come back from the grave to tell us. When we attend to our discomfort about Jesus' stories, we give the Holy Spirit an opening to enter and help us see the mind of the God who became vulnerable - to live our life and speak our language to show us how to live. We believe we are on God's side. God is on the side of the poor.



DIOCESE OF **Hexham & Newcastle**

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP

Words from Pope Francis

When considering the effect of religion on public life, one must distinguish the different ways in which it is practised. Intellectuals and serious journalists frequently descend to crude and superficial generalizations in speaking of the shortcomings of religion, and often prove incapable of realising that not all believers—or religious leaders—are the same. Some politicians take advantage of this confusion to justify acts of discrimination. At other times, contempt is shown for writings which reflect religious convictions, overlooking the fact that religious classics can prove meaningful in every age; they have an enduring power to open new horizons, to stimulate thought, to expand the mind and heart. This contempt is due to the myopia of a certain rationalism. Is it reasonable and enlightened to dismiss certain writings simply because they arose in a context of religious belief? These writings include principles which are profoundly humanistic and, albeit tinged with religious symbols and teachings, they have a certain value for reason.

As believers, we also feel close to those who do not consider themselves part of any religious tradition, yet sincerely seek the truth, goodness and beauty which we believe have their highest expression and source in God. We consider them as precious allies in the commitment of defending human dignity, in building peaceful coexistence between people and in protecting creation. A special place of encounter is offered where believers and non-believers are able to engage in dialogue about fundamental issues of ethics, art and science, and about the search for transcendence. This too is a path to peace in our troubled world.

Starting from certain social issues of great importance for the future of humanity, I have tried to make explicit once again the inescapable social dimension of the Gospel message and to encourage all Christians to demonstrate it by their words, attitudes and deeds.

- *The Joy of the Gospel* paras 256-8