



SUNDAY 26 JULY 2020

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

17th Sunday of the Year (A): Matthew 13:44-52

It was a delight to listen to her. She was only eleven, but talk about self-assured and fluent! "You can't fool God", she said, emphatically. "He's seen it all. He's pretty streetwise".

Debbie was her name. Her family moved away later and I wondered how she got on in life. The teen years probably turned her certainty into doubt - though teenagers can be very definite - but hopefully she remains ready to discuss, to argue and to listen to a God bigger than her or anyone else's favourite description. If she's keeping in touch with Jesus, she's a force to be reckoned with.

Getting into his stories is a good start to keeping in touch - he knew what he was doing. With stories we make our own pictures. So someone has found a treasure in a field. How? Was he looking for it? How big was it? What difference would it make? He's more than a bit secretive. He buries the treasure, says nowt, blows everything he's got and buys the field.

So what happens next? Jesus tells us discovering the Kingdom is worth every penny. But keep the engine running, write the next bit of the story. What's the Kingdom like and how does the man's life change? Would you like a share in his discovery? If we engage with the story we're being pulled into the plot.

The stories keep coming. Buying and selling pearls leads to the ultimate investment - the merchant sells up so he can have the best pearl for keeps. What will he do? Will he lock it away? Gaze at it every day? Will he tire of it and succumb to another offer? Remember, this is about the Kingdom. Nothing less satisfies. And possession only triggers more wonder.

And from a Messiah who knocked about with fishermen, he describes landing a mixed catch of fish, raising decisions about what's worth keeping and what isn't. He's still talking about the Kingdom - a treasure, a jewel, a great catch - only if you let go of what doesn't compare. So keep interrogating the stories. Wise folks know stories don't end. Speaker and listener, writer and reader know that stories hide away in our minds and our memories. They can knock on our door at any time and seek another hearing.

How many times have you seen new significance in something previously unimportant? Times when religious jargon becomes shorthand for something momentous? So what do you make of Jesus' favourite catchphrase - the Kingdom of heaven? Libraries are written on this. Jesus' stories invite a personal response. If we described the Kingdom as an enduring mindset, thinking and seeing like Jesus thinks and sees and living it out, it still falls short but it's a start. Young Debbie would take you up on that. You'd enjoy the conversation - but mind, when I knew her she took no prisoners!



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Pope Francis speaking

Today's economics promote inordinate consumption, yet it is evident that unbridled consumerism combined with inequality proves doubly damaging to the social fabric. Inequality eventually engenders a violence which recourse to arms cannot and never will be able to resolve. It serves only to offer false hopes to those clamouring for heightened security, even though nowadays we know that weapons and violence, rather than providing solutions, create new and more serious conflicts. Some simply content themselves with blaming the poor and the poorer countries themselves for their troubles; indulging in unwarranted generalisations, they claim that the solution is an 'education' that would tranquilise them, making them tame and harmless. All this becomes even more exasperating for the marginalized in the light of the widespread and deeply rooted corruption found in many countries - in their governments, businesses and institutions - whatever the political ideology of their leaders.

We also spread the Gospel when we attempt to confront the various challenges which can arise. On occasion these may take the form of real attacks on religious freedom or new persecutions directed against Christians, in some countries these have reached alarming levels of hatred and violence. In many places, the problem is more that of widespread indifference and relativism, linked to disillusionment. This not only harms the Church but the fabric of society as a whole. We should recognise how in a culture where each person wants to be bearer of his or her own subjective truth, it becomes difficult for citizens to devise a common plan which transcends individual gain and personal ambitions.

In the prevailing culture, priority is given to the outward, the immediate, the visible, the quick, the superficial and the provisional. What is real gives way to appearances.

(Paragraphs 60 - 62 from 'The Joy of the Gospel')