



SUNDAY 27 AUGUST 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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### **21st Sunday of the Year (A): Matthew 16: 13-20**

No names, no hints either, but someone I know very well has a habit of asking very direct questions.

It can be uncomfortable. On the spot without warning. No preliminary niceties, then simple uncomplicated and blunt challenge - harder still if its something you'd prefer not to talk about. And yet seeking the truth is so important. We're annoyed and should be more than that, when government individuals lie to us, feed us with misinformation, make an art out of spin and see avoiding answers to legitimate questions as a desirable skill. Does shrugging our shoulders because it's not an uncommon practice indicate acquiescence, helplessness or maybe both? What does it say about us? It also raises questions for the Church, its organisations, personnel and power.

Jesus would have none of it. He wasn't always comfortable company. He could and did tell people off, confront dishonesty and challenge authority. His love and regard for vulnerable individuals translated into fighting cruelty, abuse and manipulation. This is what 'the Way, the Truth and the Life' looks like in action. (John 14:6)

Questions are crucial. Teachers, preachers and many others wonder if they're getting their message across. Asking questions at any rate is a start. Watching faces as well as hearing or not hearing replies may provide the answers we seek. But not to ask questions and failure to be specific leaves too many unknowns and imponderables when attempting to measure understanding.

We like personal answers, not what the book says. We prefer to know how individuals distil the correct stuff through their life experience. Talking creates opportunity. Deep inside us our minds are making connections that surface in answer to questions. What has been forming within us can emerge when we're put on the spot. We hear ourselves giving voice to what we think.

That appeared to happen to Simon Peter when the Lord pointedly asked the twelve about himself. Was Simon's reply a quiet considered response or an impromptu and impulsive answer to break an uncomfortable silence? Jesus recognised it as an insight given by the Father who can tip into words the mix of feelings playing in Simon's mind and heart. His answer meant such a lot to Jesus. A question did it.

When the truth is out, when what was unsaid now becomes clear, it offers the opportunity to lay hold of what is revealed and aspire to live with the consequences. Yes, it can be dangerous to ask for feedback. Unfiltered feelings can be very uncomfortable. They can also put in a nutshell something profound that we need to hear. Jesus leaves us with the same question - 'Who do you say I am?' Be personal. Be honest. The truth will set us free.



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### **Pope Francis : Everything is connected**

St Francis is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly concerned for God's creation and for the poor and outcast. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.

#### ***Laudato Si, para 10***

We all know that it is not possible to sustain the present level of consumption in developed countries and wealthier sectors of society, where the habit of wasting and discarding has reached unprecedented levels. The exploitation of the planet has already exceeded acceptable limits and we still have not solved the problem of poverty.

#### ***Laudato Si, para 27***