



SUNDAY 27 MARCH 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

4th Sunday of Lent (C) - Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32

Maybe the world is full of them - self approved critics sitting in judgement about the apparent values of others. It was no different in Jesus' time. Individuals were broadly labelled as acceptable or rejected, banned from the temple or pressured to conform to powerful interest groups.

They didn't like the company Jesus kept. The welcome he gave to everyone - criminals, supposed prostitutes, tax collectors and others generally called sinners, suggested to the Pharisees and scribes that he was mixing in the wrong circles. They'd rather he was on their side. They didn't like his popular appeal and his teaching of a compassionate and forgiving God.

The tax collectors and dodgy individuals who were all seeking Jesus' company were finding a welcome and acceptance denied them in official circles. Jesus' vision was different. 'It's not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick (Mark 2:17). You want my company, my embrace? Then begin to look in the mirror. Admit your mistakes, your faults, and know that your honesty and frailty finds acceptance and understanding. Living as if you're perfect, fools no one but yourself. Come as you are. It's OK.

Ever the teacher, Jesus tells three powerful stories as a response to his critics - the lost sheep, the lost coin and today's Gospel story of the lost son - except there are two lads who are lost here.

The story of the prodigal son is one of the world's best. Among Christians this parable beats the dictionary in describing wasteful and excessive spending big time. Behind it is a lamentable disregard for self and others and a serious short-sightedness that will eventually trip him up. The beauty of the story lies in the tearaway's coming to his senses. Some have to hit the bottom before they hopefully can believe the only way now is up.

The rejected father's gaze has checked the road home many times. When his youngest appears in the distance his heart must have leapt, the tears flowed and the welcome given speaks of an extravagance equal to the son's excess.

But the other son. Resentful, bitter, self punishing and uncaring, can't find it in his heart to join the welcome home party. Expecting thanks for doing his duty, believing he's never done wrong but narrow and hard, he's a walking lesson for the Pharisees and scribes. Which of these lads is you? Or are you the father? Perhaps we play all three parts. Be honest. The Master is teaching here and we're hopefully taking notes.



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Pope Francis speaking

Sometimes it is a matter of hearing the cry of entire peoples, the poorest of peoples of the earth, since peace is founded not only on respect for human rights, but also on respect for the rights of peoples. Sadly, even human rights can be used as a justification for an inordinate defence of individual rights or the rights of the richer peoples. With due respect for the autonomy and culture of every nation, we must never forget that the planet belongs to all mankind and is meant for all mankind. The mere fact that some people are born in places with fewer resources or less development does not justify the fact that they are living with less dignity. It must be reiterated that the more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others. To speak properly of our own rights, we need to broaden our perspective and to hear the plea of other peoples and other regions than those of our own country. We need to grow in a solidarity which would allow all peoples to become the artisans of their destiny, since every person is called to self-fulfilment.

- The Joy of the Gospel - para 190