



SUNDAY 29 JANUARY 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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### 4th Sunday of the Year (A): Matthew 5:1-12

We're indebted to the Gospel writers who've pulled together for us a wealth of information about Jesus and the teaching he has given us.

Matthew was writing for a Jewish community of believers and others at a time when Christians especially teachers were under serious threat. They could be flogged and forced to flee to other towns to protect themselves. Matthew is a clever and wonderful writer, his Gospel planned carefully under clear sections. One of these we call the Sermon on the Mount. Today's Gospel passage comes from this collection of Jesus' teachings.

This is an instruction manual for the way of life asked of Jesus' followers. Jesus is the gift of God to us, introducing us to the Kingdom or reign of God - what it's like for us to think like Jesus thinks, to behave as God would have his people behave. The Beatitudes listed in today's Gospel don't make for comfortable reading. They challenge much of accepted practice in the world. We're more than invited to check how much we easily collude with casual values and practice. God's way is different.

Jesus' teaching makes radical demands of us. Being poor in spirit requires that we examine our possessions and how we think of them in a society bombarded by 'must have' advertising. Possessions can easily possess us. We don't need much of what we acquire. Dare we think this one out honestly? Even the ability to mourn is blessed - we must not deny the pain and the loss we experience. It sharpens our priorities.

The Lord describes himself as gentle and humble (Matthew 11:29). It's a requirement of style in the way we love. It's far from being soft. Being passionate about justice is in Jesus' list - it means challenging values and decisions in standing up for what's right. As you and I rely on God's mercy, we're asked in our turn to show mercy - the very life of God.

Notice he demands we be peacemakers. He doesn't say peace-keepers - that's different. It's a tough one. Add to that being pure in heart - looking people in the eye and knowing they, like me, are made in God's image and likeness. Persecution was a daily experience in the early Christian community. Be blessed for not giving in, some things we have to take the flack for. And don't expect the world to speak well of you if you live out these principles. You'll be hurt, misrepresented and harmed by alternative, guarded and defended positions taken by others.

Being 'blessed' or 'happy', as today's translation describes it, is a mature and thorough journey beyond comfort. I believe many ordinary Christians make it but would never think of themselves this way.



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### **Pope Francis talking of holiness**

*I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God's people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile. In their daily perseverance I see the holiness of the Church militant. Very often it is a holiness found in our next door neighbours, those who, living in our midst, reflect God's presence. We might call them "the middle class of holiness".*

*Let us be spurred on by the signs of holiness that the Lord shows us through the humblest members of that people which shares also in Christ's prophetic office, spreading abroad a living witness to him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity. We should consider the fact that, as Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross suggests, real history is made by so many of them. As she writes: "The greatest figures of prophecy and sanctity step fourth out of the darkest night. But for the most part, the formative stream of the mystical life remains invisible. Certainly the most decisive turning points in world history are substantially co-determined by souls whom no history book ever mentions. And we will only find out about those souls to whom we owe the decisive turning points in our personal lives on the day when all that is hidden is revealed.*

**- Fratelli tutti paras 7 & 8**