



SUNDAY 3 MAY 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

4th Sunday of Easter (A): John 10: 1-10

Ben is a shepherd. He's unlike those Jesus was familiar with in Galilee. Ben works from a quadbike and has a dog that's streets ahead of you and me. He deals with big numbers and lambing this year has been exceptionally busy.

But the main tasks of a shepherd haven't changed even if the knowhow has - feeding, protecting, being bothered about the individual, attending the sick, seeing to the new born. Given today's numbers, knowing each one individually can't be as it used to be. Forget the homely imagery. Shepherding is messy. Pope Francis' phrase about having the smell of the sheep is very apt but the fragrances and the mess take some getting used to. And it's 24/7, difficult to timetable and involves sacrifice.

In Jesus' time, shepherds had a street reputation for thieving and being generally disreputable. God's whacky choices made them the first to hear of Jesus' birth. Fascinating.

In our internet age even the technology-savvy folks get chewed up by the pace of life. Many can't keep up and many don't want to. Statutory and voluntary agencies are increasingly underfunded and overworked. Staff and those they serve can be exploited. Many outfits exist on the goodwill of those who regularly go the extra mile and give over the odds in unpaid work beyond contracted hours. The Gospel picture of overbearing officials hasn't lost its relevance. If you saw Ken Loach's film 'I Daniel Blake', you'll recognise the syndrome. When caring loses its heart, people become numbers.

Jesus plays with multiple images in today's Gospel in the hope we'll get the message. He's the shepherd, the gate of the sheepfold, he knows his sheep, they know his voice, he leads freely, in and out, and he finds pasture. He's talking trust and familiarity here. He's the Good shepherd. He inhabits his words. He describes his job but his job describes him. You and I have to work out what entering the fold through him means for us personally.

Because today is Vocations Sunday. We all have vocations - calls from God for ways of life that involve shepherding. Study the one who is Good and those who by their care and style have got the message. He came so that we may have life, not just a bit, but life to the full. Rejoice and strive to copy - and remember - shepherds need shepherding too. Go gently.



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ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

Diocesan Daily Vocations Prayer

Lord Jesus, you come to us
in each day's blessings and demands;
guide and encourage us.
In our changing world help us
not only to respect and learn from the past,
but to be ever more open to your Spirit
as we face the needs of today.
Give us the courage to live out
what you ask of us now.
Call from among us the people and priests
necessary for our times
and for the world of tomorrow.
Give us the leaders we need,
the courage to lead others
and the ability to work together.
Teach us to see possibilities in every challenge,
to know afresh the power of your grace
and to realise deeply
that you are with us always. Amen.