



SUNDAY 6 DECEMBER 2020

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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### 2nd Sunday of Advent (B): Mark 1: 1-8

Some things need to be shouted about. They're too important to be shared in whispered huddles - folks need to be alerted whether they want to be or not.

John the Baptist comes to us in today's Gospel. Described by Isaiah the prophet in the first reading as a joyful messenger, and in God's name he tells him to go up a high mountain and shout with a loud voice 'Here is your God' - that's worth shouting about. John is the warm-up man for Jesus, getting folks into the mood, to be open to a God who chooses to come among us, crossing a distance we couldn't manage.

Isaiah's contemporaries were in a forced exile, away from their own country. The changes in people's lives were many and difficult. Change can be hard when we choose it - when it's forced it's painful and even shattering. We're witnessing some of that now with Covid regulations. Refugees, asylum seekers, redundant workers, financial crises and relationship breakdowns know big-time change as a daily experience. Isaiah promises a God who comes as a gentle, caring shepherd. Do you hear a description of Jesus before his time?

John the Baptist's job was to create a climate for Jesus' arrival. Recognising how folks needed to get a grip, appreciate how easy it has been to let things slide, begin to seek reconciliation and initiate a change of outlook and behaviour. His message is timeless. We each will hear it in personal ways of course, but thinking it doesn't apply to us is a mistake. There's a celebrated quotation that suggests if any of us has not changed a significant personal opinion in the last five years, we should check our pulse - we might be dead! There is no progress or growth without change.

So what changes could we each make this Advent time? Imagine having a conversation with John the Baptist. He'd be asking many questions and won't take woolly answers. "What are you going to do?" If I don't have a thoughtful reply, I imagine he'll expect me to go off and give the matter serious consideration. Doing nothing is not taking God seriously, and he takes us seriously. He expects a mature response.

Today is a new day. It won't happen again. The only time we have is right now. The past is over, the future unavailable yet. Embrace the gift of now and welcome the Lord.



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### Pope Francis on nuclear weapons

Rules by themselves will not suffice if we continue to think that the solution to current problems is deterrence through fear or the threat of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. Indeed, if we take into consideration the principal threats to peace and security with their many dimensions in this multipolar world of the 21st century as, for example, terrorism, asymmetrical conflicts, cybersecurity, environmental problems, poverty, not a few doubts arise regarding the inadequacy of nuclear deterrence as an effective response to challenges. These concerns are even greater when we consider the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences that would follow from any use of nuclear weapons, with devastating indiscriminate and uncontrollable effects, over time and space. We need also to ask ourselves how sustainable is a stability based on fear, when it actually increases fear and undermines relationships of trust between peoples. International peace and stability cannot be based on a false sense of security, on the threat of mutual destruction or total annihilation, or on simply maintaining a balance of power. In this context, the ultimate goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons becomes both a challenge and a moral and humanitarian imperative. Growing interdependence and globalisation mean that any response to the threat of nuclear weapons should be collective and concerted, based on mutual trust. This trust can be built only through dialogue that is truly directed to the common good and not to the protection of veiled or particular interests. With the money spent on weapons and other military expenditures, let us establish a global fund that can finally put an end to hunger and favour development in the most impoverished countries, so that their citizens will not resort to violent or illusory solutions, or have to leave their countries in order to seek a more dignified life.

*Fratelli Tutti para 262*