



SUNDAY 9 MAY 2021

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

The Parishes of: Bishop Auckland || Newton Aycliffe & Shildon || Willington
Crook, Tow Law & Wolsingham || Tudhoe || Coundon, Ferryhill & Windlestone

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

6th Sunday of Easter (B) : John 15: 9-17

What was Jesus really like? What would you have seen and heard had you been there?

We have the Gospel accounts - attempts to pass on what we need to know in order to develop our friendship with him. But when he looked, smiled, laughed, sang, told stories, how do you think he came across?

It's important because he showed his love for people in many small and large ways and he asked us to love one another as he loved. So we need to study how he did it. Work it out. How was he? How is he now? And how do you and I make his style our own, draw him into ourselves in ways others will notice and get the message?

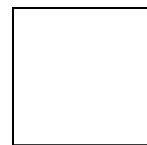
People have speculated about how he sounded. He spoke to crowds, so did he have a powerful voice? Being a Galilean, he had a rough northern accent, distinct from the Jerusalem twang. Jesus' care for people leaks out all over his well-crafted stories. God's ways are different, they describe what love looks and sounds like. Underdogs are supported, fraudulent ways are exposed and the vulnerable come to know genuine tenderness.

Love has a wide vocabulary of many voices and gestures. It gives time honestly and generously because it's the best gift of all. The simplest and the most powerful can spot the real thing a mile off. When we don't inhabit our words, when our actions and promises are shallow, when we seek to manipulate, then frankly we've lost the plot - and it probably shows.

Jesus embodies the total love of the Father. It may appear effortless or challenging but cannot be counterfeit. Making known to us everything he's learnt from his Father means translating for us who love is, what that looks like so we can spread it liberally everywhere. Jesus chose us. He knows what he's doing. We need to know it too even if it takes a lifetime.

Have you ever sat and enjoyed being loved by God? Try it. God intends us to engage with his love for us. Be warned - there's nothing like it. Love changes everything, as the song goes. It's powerful, delightful and oh, it makes demands.

So when Jesus reminds us 'I chose you and I commissioned you to bear fruit that will last', is there a smile in the eyes and warmth and trust in his voice? Don't let his words sit on the page. Accept them, wrestle with them, play or cry with them, but know you are loved from the dawn of time. So is everyone else. Our job is to prove it as best we can. It's a command. Be gentle with yourself.



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A message from Pope Francis

Personal accompaniment in helping others to grow.

In a culture paradoxically suffering from anonymity and at the same time obsessed with the details of other people's lives, shamelessly given over to morbid curiosity, the Church must look more closely and sympathetically at others whenever necessary. In our world, ordained ministers and other pastoral workers can make present Christ's closeness and his personal gaze. The Church will have to initiate everyone - priests, religious and laity - into this "art of accompaniment" which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Exodus 3:5). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life.

Although it sounds obvious, spiritual accompaniment must lead others ever closer to God, in whom we attain true freedom. Some people think they are free if they can avoid God; they fail to see that they remain existentially orphaned, helpless, homeless. They cease being pilgrims and become drifters, flitting around themselves and never getting anywhere. To accompany them would be counterproductive if it became a sort of therapy supporting their self-absorption and ceased to be a pilgrimage with Christ to the Father.

- *The Joy of the Gospel, paras 169-170*