



SUNDAY 21 APRIL 2024
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 (B) John 10:11-18

Who's voice do you love to hear? Who is it who when you see them you know simply and beyond question that you are loved? Is there anyone you feel is with you even when you are apart?

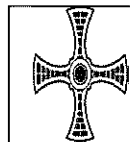
Do these questions give you some inkling, some glimpse of how it is between you and Jesus? We're invited to think, to daydream and ponder. Whether we feel love for Jesus or not, he loves us - totally and always - and we can't stop that. We can, however, delight in how it really is between us and him and give thanks.

We are known very well - today's Gospel reminds us. Jesus has no illusions about us, but the intimate knowledge is from an attentive lover. We are cherished. But before we bask in such privilege, this is a two-way relationship. We are to develop a corresponding closeness with him. He even compares our bonding with that of himself and the Father!

We may not be too keen on Jesus referring to us as sheep, but he gives us the image of himself as the Good Shepherd, caring for us as a shepherd does with his flock. The image was more familiar to the people of his time than to us now. But wait. Shepherding is about leadership and care. It requires that the sheep follow even when they're unsure where they're going. That can and does apply to you and me.

We describe ourselves as Jesus' followers. He's the leader, making sure we're protected, cared for and fed. He comes to us in many disguises, working through all those who look out for us and help us in a whole range of ways. You may well also be in a position where you in your turn lead, care for, protect and help others. Jesus is our model to talk to and study. This is Good Shepherd Sunday. We need to see the Church's picture language as a kind of shorthand and break down the imagery so that we know personally what it means and how it applies to us. You may want to read the Gospel again.

It's also Vocations Sunday. We don't only pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life, but for our vocation as Jesus' followers in whatever life asks of us - married or single - so that he can care for others through each of us. Thank you for all your shepherding.



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Pope Francis, talking about parishes

The parish is not an outdated institution: precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community.

While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters. This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few.

The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach. We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented.

- The Joy of the Gospel para 28