

Sunday 5th July 2020

Sunday Worship

Bible Reading Matthew 11.16-19, 25-30

"Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit; and you will find rest. For the yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light." Matt. 11.28-30

Reflection

Following in the way of Jesus is not always easy. Sometimes it is hard work, wearying at times and even frustrating. Thankfully, the one who calls us to serve also cares for us.

The passage begins with Jesus being saddened by peoples' reactions to him and his forerunner, John the Baptist. They thought John who was ascetic had a demon; they thought Jesus who was friendly and sociable, was a drunkard. We hear Jesus' disappointment, and we are left to wonder, 'How does our generation compare?' Why is our society so divided? Increasingly secular? What happened to our Christian values of mercy, justice, and peace? Have we failed in our attempts to witness to God's love and faithfulness by serving our neighbours in the community? Are people any more perceptive today than they were in Jesus' time? Sometimes we can feel misunderstood and dismissed. Yes, it may in part be due to our failures, but it may also be due to other people's mistaken understandings. Perhaps we should not be focussed so much on the results of our efforts, but rather on the process of following. Of course, we should do our best, and learn from our mistakes, but ultimately it is God's spirit who works in people's lives and changes their hearts. Yet we are called to bear witness to the God who loves the world.

Holding the demands and the blessings of discipleship in balance can be tiring. 'Doing' and 'being' are tricky to do together - even more so when the pandemic has us staying in, while the call for racial justice urges us to get up, get out and march. We are to be peacemakers, but also stand up for the weak and oppressed. We want to open our church building to be a presence in our neighbourhood once again, but we also want to keep people safe. There are not always simple straightforward answers to our dilemmas yet being a follower of Jesus means that we need to continue to ask God for wisdom and trust the Spirit's leading. Some people may not understand, but others will see that we are trying to show God's love in what we do and say. Perhaps Jesus knew how we would struggle with these things. Perhaps that is why he ends his teaching with a gracious invitation: "Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

It is the ongoing invitation of God, who is always reaching out, always welcoming with open arms. Come. It is the word spoken by God throughout Scriptures, 'Let everyone who is thirsty come . . . (Revelation 22:17). Whoever we are, wherever we are, come. Come,

even as we seek to discern the signs of the time. Come, even as we try to live responsibly in this moment. Come, even as we admit our limitations. Come, even though at times we will fail. God will honour our faithfulness.

Jesus's welcome is extended to all, not just some. Not just the qualified or the capable or the knowledgeable. But all. Those who have issues, those with questions; those with doubts; those with fears. Everyone is invited. Everyone is welcome. It is the open invitation of the gospel. So, we are to be tolerant and respectful of those with differing views from us. And ready to speak up for those whose voices are often not heard.

Then Jesus will give us rest. One of my favourite verses in the Scriptures is Isaiah 30.15: God says, 'Come back and trust in me and you will find rest.' Peace even in the midst of stress, as we endure the difficulties, the hardships and the trying circumstances that are before us every day. Here is someone who seeks our good, who comforts our weariness and bears our burdens, who gives us shelter and safety. Jesus does not offer us an exemption from pain and struggle. But he does offer us himself, he offers us his presence, guiding and leading us step by step. In him we can rest, knowing that through Christ God achieved what we could not, overcoming evil and death. We can rest, knowing that God is able to accomplish far more than we can ask or imagine. Who knows, perhaps God can even bring some good, renewal and revitalisation to the Church out of this dreadful pandemic.

Prayer

Loving God,

Sometimes we get worked up about things and need simply to pause and turn to you. Help and guide us as we seek to do your will.

We pray for the Church during this lockdown, we thank you that we can continue to support and care for each other. We thank you that some people beyond our fellowship are looking for meaning and purpose, and some are linking to churches on-line.

We pray for all those who are bereaved, those who are suffering with this illness and all other illnesses. We pray for your comfort and your peace which is beyond our understanding.

For Further Thought

1 How has your journey of faith changed over your life? When has it been easy? When difficult?

2 Reflect on the end of Matthew 11:19: "God's wisdom is shown to be true by its results." How do you hear that verse? Have you found it to be true?

3 Jesus seems to suggest that sometimes those who are considered intelligent in society can miss out on the fullness of the gospel. What are the ways that some people reason themselves away from faith? How can we offer a different perspective?

4 How do you hear Jesus' invitation to seek rest in him? What forms might that rest take? What might we gain from resting in Jesus?