

Jesus says, “Take my yoke: it is easy and my burden is light”

A sermon given on the Fifth Sunday of Trinity, 9th July 2023 – by the Vicar, the Revd Canon Jonathan Baker, in Beverley Minster

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-end

"Well, come on in. Make yourself at home, put your feet up. You take a seat and let me get you a drink." They're wonderful words: music to the ear; words that assure us we are welcome; that we don't have to justify ourselves; and that it's okay just to stop; that there is someone willing to minister to us. There is something deeply refreshing in that kind of an invitation. And Jesus, in this morning's gospel reading, seems to be saying something similar: "*Come to me, all you that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" And that promise of rest is appealing. It speaks to us in our increasingly frantic 24/7 world, where the more technology saves us in terms of time and labour, the more activity we try to cram in; and the more complicated and stressful life becomes as we try to juggle more and more communication; with more and more people going to more and more places, doing more and more exciting things. Life is becoming increasingly frenzied and somehow it's becoming harder and harder just to stop.

But Jesus's invitation speaks to us. And it speaks to us not just in our busyness, but also in our inner turmoil. The rest Jesus promises isn't just the absence of labour, it's a promise of peace, of wholeness, of being at rest with ourselves. And often that is the most difficult kind of peace to achieve: the peace which reconciles us to ourselves and brings us to a point of acceptance; the peace which sets us free from frustration and guilt and dissatisfaction with ourselves. Jesus invites us to come and find that peace, that state of being at rest by coming to Him and entering his presence. "*Come to me,*" he says, "*and I will give you rest.*"

There is in that invitation a message of acceptance and welcome, of inclusion and the offer of sanctuary. Jesus wants to accept you, even if you find it difficult to accept yourself. So this invitation "*Come to me and I will give you rest*" it speaks of God's hospitality, of his generosity and grace, and of his love and his care - for you, for me, for everyone, whoever you are, wherever you're from, whatever you've done, whatever you believe or feel about the world or yourself.

And whenever we hear that message, we are hearing the gospel; we are hearing the good news of God's love. And we know that it has the power to revive us, to heal and to make new. And that healing has to do with being set free and being relieved of our burdens. I don't know what kind of things might be weighing you down this morning: maybe worries about your

children or your family; maybe worries about your job; or the cost of living; or some financial problem; maybe worries about your health; or some situation where you feel entangled and you can't work out which is the best way forward. Jesus's invitation to come to Him and find rest offers relief from some of these burdens and worries.

But it's an odd kind of relief. *"Take my yoke upon you"* he says, *"and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls."* I say it's odd because he invites us to take up his yoke - and the yoke is a sign of servitude. We associate yokes with milkmaids carrying pails of milk; labourers carrying great weights; and oxen pulling the plough. So there's a paradox here. The yoke is not an obvious symbol of rest. But Jesus's invitation to come to Him and find rest involves taking up his yoke. It involves taking on a new commitment and an additional responsibility. The invitation is to exchange one kind of yoke for another; to be set free from one kind of servitude only to take on another. But Jesus insists, *"My yoke is easy and my burden is light."* What this means is that there is a seriousness about Jesus's invitation which we need to hear and understand. He's not offering a temporary distraction. The 'rest' which Jesus is talking about isn't a weekend at a health spa or a week on the beach. It's not a superficial add-on, a cherry on the icing you can have if the fancy takes you, but which doesn't affect the contents of the cake. If we take up the yoke of Jesus, that means placing ourselves under his authority, making ourselves answerable to Him, responding to Him as our Lord.

True freedom is the freedom bestowed by love, but love only comes with commitment and faithfulness. In the same way, it's possible to talk about marriage as a kind of yoke. It's a bond that ties us - but it's a bond of love that paradoxically sets us free to be ourselves.

And in the same way, the yoke of Jesus isn't part time, and it's not just for Sundays. It implies a total commitment extending over the whole of life, our time, our money, our relationships. Taking up the yoke of Jesus requires an act of faith. You have to trust that he will keep his promise, that his yoke is easy and his burden is light, and that he will give rest to your soul. You have to suspend disbelief and live as though it is true before you can discover whether Jesus keeps his promise.

So I wonder what scares you most this morning? Keeping on going with the increasing burdens you are already carrying, or taking up the yoke of Christ. Whichever way you go will make its own demands. But Jesus says, *"My yoke is easy and my burden is light."* As the old collect puts it, 'His service is perfect freedom.' So why not swap one yoke for another and find that rest for which your soul so desperately yearns.

Reading Text

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-end

¹⁶ *'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,* ¹⁷ *"We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn."* ¹⁸ *For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon";* ¹⁹ *the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.'* Jesus Thanks His Father

²⁵ *At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants;* ²⁶ *yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.* ²⁷ *All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.* ²⁸ *'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.* ²⁹ *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* ³⁰ *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'*