

ST STEPHEN'S HOME SERVICE – SUNDAY 5th JULY 2020

INTRODUCTION

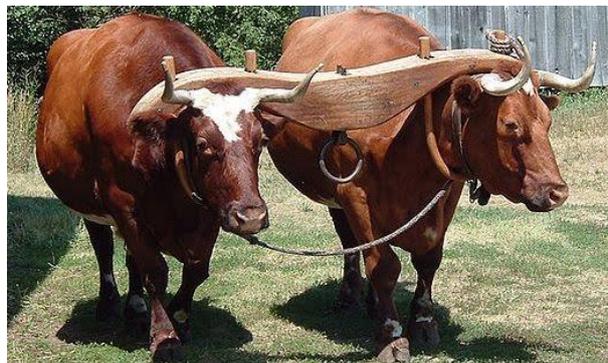


We seem to spend so much of our lives carrying heavy burdens! Others' expectations of us; our own expectations of ourselves; the weight of past failures or disasters; sometimes our sense of being unable to live up to God's standards. Much of the time we do not even realise we are carrying these loads!

Hear what Jesus has to say: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me ... and you will find rest for your souls."

The picture is of animals 'yoked' together, sharing the load. They say a burden shared is a burden halved. But Jesus' promise is far more wonderful: a burden shared with him is a burden – transformed! No longer a burden!

Pause for a moment to become aware of the loads you are carrying. Hear Jesus' promise of rest if you will only come to him. And allow a sense of thankfulness to well up for God's gift of freedom from the need to carry those heavy burdens.



CALL TO WORSHIP

In the beginning – before time, before people, before the world began,
God was.

Here and now – among us, beside us, enlisting the people of earth for the purposes of heaven,

God is.

In the future – when our earthly lives have run their course, and all that we know has found its fulfilment

God will be.

Not denying the world, but delighting in it,
Not condemning the world, but redeeming it,
Through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit,

God was,

God is,

God will be,

And we worship Him now.

TURNING AGAIN TO GOD

Jesus says, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

In you, gracious God,
The rejected find a comforter,
The abandoned find a carer,
And the fearful find a friend.

In you,
The wounded find a healer,
The penitent find a pardoner,
The burdened find a resting-place.

In you, loving God,
We meet our Creator,
Our Redeemer,
And our Sanctifier.

And if any need to say, 'Help me'
And if any need to say, 'Save me'
And if any need to say, 'Hold me'
And if any need to say, 'Forgive me,
Then let us say it now,
In full confidence of God's loving-kindness.

Silence

**O Christ, in whose heart is both welcome and warning,
Say to us, do to us, reveal in us
The things which will make us whole.**

**And we will wait;
And we will praise you. Amen**

NEW TESTAMENT READING (Romans 7:15-25a, New Living Translation)

I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is - Jesus Christ our Lord!



Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING (Matthew 11:16-19,25-30 NRSV)

"But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we wailed, and you did not mourn.'

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; 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."

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; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 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.



"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION (by Tobias Thornes)

One of the most encouraging pieces of scripture used in liturgy is, for me, the quote from Proverbs chapter 3 used at Morning and Evening Prayer on a Monday, placed right at the beginning of the working week. 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and be not wise in your own sight.'

Christ has something to say about those who think themselves 'wise' in this world – wise at making money, perhaps, or gathering goods, achieving 'success' or getting their own way. Christ tells us that these people aren't really being wise at all – true wisdom is to love God. If you read the apocryphal Book of Wisdom, you'll find the same argument in there, in greater detail. But it's Jesus who puts it most powerfully, in this passage from Matthew's Gospel.

God's wisdom, he tells us, is something 'revealed to babes': those of us willing to learn, to listen, and – like children – to surrender our own sense of importance and set our hearts on God's will. But this wisdom, the very meaning and joy of life, is hidden from the supposedly 'wise': those of us who think we know it all, won't admit our own frailty, won't put our faith in God.

Paul was certainly somebody willing to admit his failings – and to recognise that even the best-intentioned of us get it wrong. ‘In my mind I serve the will of God’, he says, ‘but in my flesh is nothing good and I serve the will of sin. What I want to do, I don’t do; and what I hate, I do.’

We all know what he means, for it happens to all of us. Like Peter, we say we’re following Christ and will serve him through thick and thin, loving all our neighbours as ourselves as he commanded and taught us. But in the heat of the moment, we find out all too quickly that we are merely human after all. We find ourselves denying Christ, and doing what we hate and know we ought not to do – harsh words, selfish deeds, missed opportunities to do good that we allow to slip by.

‘Who will save me from this body of death, wretched man that I am!’ says Paul – and this is the man whose epistles form a bedrock on which the modern church is built, the ‘expert’ on Christianity second only to Christ himself!

Last Monday, we celebrated the feast day of Peter and Paul, who are both remembered as saints. But it’s clear to anyone who reads the Gospels or the letter to the Romans that they aren’t commemorated because they were perfect people. In fact, we remember them because they were imperfect – like the rest of us. We’ve already got a model for a perfect human being, in Christ himself. But by looking to saints like Peter and Paul, we can get some reassurance about what it’s like to be a mere imperfect human being, following Christ with more meagre footsteps.

They kept getting it wrong, like we do. They kept slipping up. But they also kept their faith in Christ, and it’s his spirit that perfected their work in spite of their weaknesses. If Christianity was a religion about rules, Peter and Paul would have been thrown out long ago. But it’s not about rules, not about earning your way in by proving you are the wisest – and thank God for that! Rather, it is the childlike who are able to enter in to Christianity, who inherit the Promise of God, and it’s God who makes us wise in doing good once we acknowledge our own stupidity.

Christ has released us from the need to be perfect, the need to rush around keeping up with the Jones’s or accumulating wealth and prestige. Instead, he says, we can lay down all this effort to appear wise in the eyes of the world. ‘Come to me, all you who are heavy laden,’ he tells us, ‘and I will give you rest for your souls.’

All we need to do is to lay down the heavy weight of the worries of this world, and take up the cross of Christ-like, child-like obedience instead, knowing full well that we are too weak to carry it on our own. Christ will share that burden with us, he says, so that it is not too heavy to bear. 'For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

PAUSE FOR REFLECTION.... *(words by Horatius Bonar)*

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Come unto me and rest;
Lay down, O weary one, lay down
Your head upon my breast."
I came to Jesus as I was,
So weary, worn, and sad;
I found him in a resting place,
And he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold, I freely give
The living water, thirsty one,
Stoop down and drink and live."
I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am this dark world's light;
Look unto me; your morn shall rise,
And all your day be bright."
I looked to Jesus, and I found
In him my star, my sun;
And in that light of life I'll walk
Till traveling days are done.

PRAYERS

Our loving God is here, attentive to his children.
Let us pray to him now.
Father, we pray that your Church
May always be open to receive your love;

Keep us swept clear of complacency and self-righteousness;
Free us from the burdens we do not need to carry;
Let us come humbly and simply into your presence
And wait on you with childlike trust,
Knowing our dependence on you,
And rejoicing in it.

Silence

As you have called us:

Lord, we come to you.

Father, we pray for all world leaders
And their governments;
For the strength of authority
That comes not through force and domination
But through co-operation and mutual respect;
We pray for greater consideration
Of the needs of one another and of our planet,
And a desire to right past wrongs and injustices.

Silence

As you have called us:

Lord, we come to you.

Father, we pray for a growing maturity
In our thinking and loving
That enables us to be childlike;
We pray for healing from all the damage
That prevents us from growing up;
We pray that the children in our families, this church family, and our
communities may be helped to grow strong,
And we thank you for all that we can learn from them.

Silence

As you have called us:

Lord, we come to you.

Father, we pray for all who cry out for rest and relief,
All who are carrying terrible burdens that weigh them down,
All struggling with illness, and their carers;
All whose poverty denies them the chance of healing;
All whose wealth gets in the way of realising their need of you.

Silence

As you have called us:

Lord, we come to you.

Father, we pray for those who have recently died,
Both those well known to us
And those dying unknown and unnoticed
All over the world.
Have mercy on them, and all who mourn their loss,
And may they find rest in you.

We give thanks for the life of Bryan Pardoe, and Stuart Foster.
And among those whose anniversaries fall at this time, we remember with love
and gratitude Richard Wickham, Linda Hampton, Simon Bowen, William
Layton, Betty Wake, Evelyn King, and Freda Keightley.

Silence

As you have called us:

Lord, we come to you.

*Take a few moments to remember before God other people and situations on
your heart now. We have been asked to remember especially Doreen Pritchard,
and Margaret Burfitt.*

Father, we thank you for your gentleness and humility,
Which puts our pride and vanity to shame.
Teach us to trust more and more in your truth,
Discarding what the world considers essential
And rejoicing in your freedom.

Merciful Father

Accept these prayers

**For the sake of your Son,
Our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

We pray as Jesus taught us, saying:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin
against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass
against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory, for ever
and ever.
Amen.**

CLOSING PRAYER *(words by Bryn Austin Rees)*

Have faith in God, my heart,
Trust and be unafraid;
God will fulfil in every part
Each promise He has made.

Have faith in God, my mind,
Though oft your light burns low;
God's mercy holds a wiser plan
Than you can fully know.

Have faith in God, my soul,
His cross for ever stands;
And neither life nor death can pluck
His children from His hands.

Lord Jesus, make me whole;
Grant me no resting place,
Until I rest, heart, mind, and soul,
The captive of your grace.

ENDING

For all that God can do within us,
And for all that God can do without us,
Thanks be to God.

For Christ's gift of rest to the weary,
And understanding to the childlike,
Thanks be to God.

For all the Spirit wants to bring us,
And for where the Spirit wants to lead us,
Thanks be to God.

Listen – Christ has promised to be with us,
In the world as in our worship.
Amen. We go to serve him.

**And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
The love of God,
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
Be with us all evermore.
Amen.**

