

Matthew 11: 28 – 30

Weary and Heavy Laden?

“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 light”

In a Peanuts cartoon, Lucy is running after Charlie Brown, shouting: ‘I’ll get you, Charlie Brown! I’ll get you. I’ll knock your block off! I’ll....Suddenly Charlie Brown stops dead in his tracks, turns around and confronts her, and says: “Wait a minute! Hold everything! We can’t carry on like this, we have no right to act this way. The world is filled with problems, people hurting other people. Now if we, as children, can’t solve our relatively, minor problems, how can we ever expect to And at that moment WHOP! Lucy gave him one, and he goes head over heels and flat on the ground. She turns to her friend and says, “I had to do that, because he was getting to my conscience.”

A story I read recently went like this: ‘Years ago, when our older son was 6 years old, my wife, Lois found him standing on a stool looking at himself in the bathroom mirror. There were great tears rolling down his cheeks. She, of course, alarmed asked, “What’s wrong? What’s the matter? Why are you crying?” and he sobbingly cried, “I just don’t like the way I turned out.”

Those two stories help to underscore the point of the words with which I began. That no matter who we are, how we view ourselves, or whether we are like Lucy full of anger, Jesus wants us to come to him.

At the time, Jesus was speaking to people who were desperately trying to find God, who were desperately trying to be good, who were finding the tasks impossible, and who were driven to weariness and despair. For the religious orthodox Jew religion was a thing of burdens. Jesus said of the Scribes and Pharisees: ‘They bind heavy burdens and lay them on people’s shoulders.’

In this day and age when it seems all of us have some sort of burden to bear, some sort of troubles and problems to carry with us, this passage brings us some assurance that we are not alone with these burdens. The word that Jesus used for burdened is a word that means feeling exhausted. What a great promise that our culture of stress and worry needs to hear!

It seems to me that St Matthew’s Gospel is giving us great comfort during this time of disruption and anxiety. As I speak to people in all sorts of contexts, currently I discover that all of them are worried about something, be it financial, or their family or work, or getting infected or not being able to see those they love, or how any of us are going to get through this at all. Sleep is being affected, days off are being displaced and the seemingly lack of control or disregard of others, or fear of a mass descent on the South West are all in the worry mix too. And that is just us!

There are other burdens too – worrying about our bodies getting older causing physical limitations; facing the prospect of living life alone after the death of a loved one. Others have the burden of broken relationships with either their children or their spouse or their relatives or their colleagues. Still others face a burden of having to make choices in this world, wondering what they should do with their lives, wondering when they do make a decision if

it is the right one, be they school leavers, after a period of unemployment or at retirement. There are other kinds of burdens also, burdens of sin, or temptation, burdens of guilt, burdens of conflicting loyalties. Whatever way we look life is filled with stress, with cares, with worries, with situations that call for us to make choices that sometimes are not pleasant to make. When Jesus spoke of rest for the burdened that word burdened in Greek means to load up the way an animal was loaded and that is how some of us can feel, with the stuff of life that we carry around with us.

In effect Jesus is saying “Come to me all who are struggling with life in any way and those of you who have burdens that you cannot carry alone, and I will help you with your struggles. “Jesus knew that all people have a difficult path to follow in life.

In our gospel passage Jesus uses an illustration from his day and age to explain his help in carrying loads. He says that the yoke that is used on the oxen is similar. The farmer puts the heavy part of the yoke on the stronger oxen, and the lighter part on the oxen that is not quite as strong. In a like manner, Jesus’ yoke is made after the same pattern, the heavy end is upon his shoulder and the lighter one is upon ours. Jesus bears most of the weight of our problems. He wants us to off-load them on to him.

‘My yoke is easy’ he says. The word ‘easy’ in Greek can mean ‘well fitting’. In Palestine ox-yokes were made of wood, the ox was brought in and the measurements taken. The yoke was then roughed out and then tried on the ox. The yoke was then carefully adjusted so it fitted well – it was what we would call today as bespoke!

Jesus is saying that life is not a burden to hurt us, or injure us, because our task, our life is made to, measure to fit us. Jesus says ‘My burden is light’ Jesus tells us here, loud and clear, that we do not have to live life alone, we do not have to live with all of our failures, with all our frustrations, with all our burdens – however we do need to act and to bring them to him. Then he will shoulder them with us, in fact, he will take most of the weight of our burdens upon himself. He will carry our burdens and lighten our loads if we let him.

When ever I post a letter, it’s an exercise of trust. When I write to a distant friend, it’s impossible to deliver the letter myself. I need the help of the postal service, but for them to do their part, I must drop my letter in the post box first. I can’t hang on to it. I must place it in the slot and let go. Then I must trust the postal service to take over until my letter is delivered to my friend’s home. Although I can’t see what happens to it, my faith in the postal service assures me that my letter will arrive.

Likewise, when we’re faced with a problem, our faith is challenged. Knowing that it’s impossible to resolve the difficulty ourselves, we recognise our need of God’s help. That means going to God in prayer. Until that moment we are still holding on to our problems. We know the situation won’t get resolved until we let go and commit it into God’s hands. Once we let go, we must then trust God to take over until the problem is resolved in his way. Although we can’t see what He’s doing, our faith is the assurance that His work is as good as done! Do we exercise trust in him like that?

That is the great thing about having our churches open once again for private prayer because they become accessible for people to come and bring their worries there, their burdens there and as they do so they can share them with Christ and walk out of the building knowing that God walks with them, taking a share of the load.

Sometimes though our burdens are not to be removed – for some reason or other, unbeknown to us, they are part of the life we bear. But that does not mean that we

should bear them alone. Jesus wants us to come, to place our burdens on him and we will be free to live life, to enjoy life, to take risks for others, to share Jesus' life with others. The Jews felt the burden of the law, but Jesus speaks of an alternative way that will not chafe and destroy. That yoke is bearable rather than oppressive. The yoke of Jesus is for the rhythm and routine of Christian living, that we may follow without fear and serve without strain.

The greatest thing is that Jesus promises to give rest to all who come. I wonder what that means for you? – a cosy bed with crisp sheets? Lying in a dressing gown on the sofa? Putting your feet up with a glass of wine at the end of a long day? Human rest is, however, limited. We can only sit there for so long whereas rest with Christ is lifelong. We can release our burdens and feel like they have been really lifted from us and there we shall find peace and joy and hope. That is what we call good news – The Good News!

At such a time like this then we have a gift to offer the world, a weary and a burdensome world. God who rolled away the stone, can lift the load. God who brings resurrection life can bring hope. God who came amongst us in Jesus Christ understands what it is like to be oppressed, misunderstood, weary, anxious, weighed down, concerned and he longs to set us free.

Jesus takes our heavy burdens of brokenness from us and replaces them with the burden of caring for someone out of love, and the amazing thing is that a burden carried out of love will seem much lighter than one that is carried because of all the brokenness of this world. Jesus helps us carry our burdens so that we can be an instrument of love to others.

I am reminded here of a song sung by the Hollies

The road is long, with many of winding turns
That lead us to (who knows) where, who knows where?
But I'm strong, strong enough to carry him - yeah
He ain't heavy - he's my brother

A closing prayer:

Give me a stout heart to bear by own burdens
Give me a willing heart to bear the burdens of others
Give me a believing heart to cast all burdens upon you, O Lord.

Jesus says 'Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your load. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'