

Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30

We all know how difficult it is to dig the soil to get ready to plant crops.

Imagine how much easier it would be to use a plough.. especially one powered by an animal.

So strong, and hard working - together - man and beast can turn an entire field.

Suddenly I've gone from having enough food for my family, for enough food for a village, and maybe enough food to trade for other goods, or to keep us lasting through the winter.

And then.. like some modern version of Moore's law - my computer has doubled its power! What if I could tie 2 animals together - I can do twice the size of field, or do it twice as quickly.

The yoke - which ties the two animals together was an amazing invention - a technical leap forward for the people of 1000BC or so. Now there is the strength of two.

Except - the yoke is not just a bit of wood - its collar is specially moulded to fit the animal - the better farmer would have a yoke made which would be comfortable and not rub or be too loose fitting.

And, here's the clever bit. The yoke could be made uneven. Each side is purpose made for each animal, and so it was common to have a lead ox - one that was good at going straight, one that kept going, and maybe it was also the strongest one. It would teach the weaker animal what to do - it would take the strain, keep it going in the right direction, set a steady pace.

So when Jesus invites the weary and burdened to come to him for rest - its very interesting. He's not saying - stop work and rest a while, and then when you feel better you can get back to it. (he does say that to the disciples earlier on, and we all need a sabbath, a holy day or a holiday - just to stop and recharge) But this is not what he's saying here.

He's not saying - come and stay at my health spa and I'll give you some super vitamins and special drink and you'll be buzzing with energy and get up and go to get back to work.

He says - come and learn my way of living

Let me teach you how to live. Share my yolk. All the jobs that need doing will still need doing - but we'll do them together. At a pace you can manage - don't worry about the things you can't change - I'm the lead animal, let me worry about that stuff. Don't over work or try to do it all so quickly. Stay close to me - feel my strength, let me lead you in the straight path, to place you need to go.

Its an image of join working - us and God - I'm not sure if its God helping out with our stuff, or us helping out with him! But the point is - if you're in the family of God, you're not supposed to do it alone.

Elsewhere Jesus uses the image of the vine - and he says "abide in me" like the branches are joined to the vine. Personally I find it easier to imagine being an oxen than a vine - but you can take your choice.

If we are living in God's kingdom, we need to remember that we are chosen by him, called by name.

That we have been adopted in God's family.

That we need to welcome others into the family - no matter how challenging, and invite others, to receive what we have been given.

And we need to remember that we don't do this alone - we should never try to work alone - we have Christ himself helping us - not just in a rescue me I've crashed again - way, but of course he does that (just like Peter sinking in the waves) - but what we need to remember is that there may not be enough time in the day to do all the jobs I want to do but there is enough time in the day to do everything God wants me to do!

That God has a plan, and if I trust him to lead me - then it will work out, even if I can't see where we're going yet.

And that his mighty strength is right there beside me - every moment - whenever I need it.

For his yoke is easy, and his burden is light, we will find rest deep down in our souls.