

Reading: Matthew :11 16-19 & 25-30

¹⁶“To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

¹⁷“We played the pipe for you,
and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge,
and you did not mourn.’

¹⁸For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ ¹⁹The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.”

²⁵At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

²⁷“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Teaching

Good morning everyone hope you are all well, I'm excited to be here this morning with you and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Revd Johnny for inviting me to speak with you this morning.

Can you remember a time before the lockdown receiving an invitation in the post inviting you to a special event, there is something special about the act of opening a glossy envelope and discovering what exciting event you have been invited to, and who you will be bringing with you, and what you will be celebrating.

Unfortunately due to COVID-19 none of us will be able to celebrate a special occasion in large numbers due to the present circumstances, but there is one invitation we can all accept and do from the safety and comfort of our own homes and that is Jesus' invitation to come to him. The invitation from Jesus may not come enclosed in a glossy envelope but his invitations is more exciting than anything we would ever receive through the post, and that invitation is extended to everyone no matter what background or ethnic culture we may come from we are all invited to come to him.

I would like to begin by reflecting on our reading from this morning's Gospel from St Matthew chapter 11 verses 16-19 & 25-30 these verses describes Jesus' invitation of rest to all of us who are weary and burdened, to take his yoke and learn from Him. This invitation is a call to everyone to discipleship because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for our sins; we to can be reconciled to God. I believe that during these difficult days ahead dealing with covid-19 we have the opportunity to find comfort in the words of Jesus. In Matthew's Gospel, we are taken to the very centre of Jesus' call upon our lives.

The message of the Gospel is that Jesus personally invites us To Come to Him. He wants to journey with us day by day sharing the happy times as well as sharing our anxiety and grief; even as we face a changed future due to covid-19 Jesus wants us to give our anxiety and burdens to Him.

Like the first disciples who heard this message from the lips of Jesus, we to must recognise Jesus' invitation to rest and the need for Christ in our lives, to grow our faith, to reach out in humble fellowship, with the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Jesus in Matthew 11 verse 28 gives us all a wonderful promise of rest, but how do we get it? Well, this morning I am going to take us all on a spiritual journey in Matthew's Gospel, but first, we have to put verse 28 in its proper context. We need to consider the background of what comes before this verse if we are to understand the words from Jesus correctly. Our journey with Jesus begins at Matthew 11 verses 16-19 where Jesus had been speaking to the crowds about the ministry of John the Baptist and praising John's ministry.

In the context of these verses, Jesus is describing the generation in which he ministered, as being like children. He had seen children sitting around the market place playing games of weddings and funerals. He imagines them complaining about others that do not respond to them and play the game. In the same way, the Jews of that generation have not responded to John the Baptist who came “neither eating nor drinking” (V18) and whose ministry might, therefore, have been compared to a funeral.

They also did not respond to Jesus “the Son of Man”, who came to live a normal life “eating and drinking as if at a wedding feast, who was a friend of tax collectors and sinners”. Again these verses speak of the general rejection of the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus’ by the majority of the religious leaders of their time the Pharisees and Scribes.

The leaders would not listen to the word sent by God’s messengers. They did not want to accept the truth from God’s messengers; they laid down the law burdening the people with its strict code of conduct. They were blinded to the fact in their own prideful self-righteousness they had forgotten God’s love, mercy and forgivingness.

Then Jesus says in verse 19 “but wisdom is proved right by her actions”. Both ministries where an expression of the wisdom of God both had their place John was to prepare the way for the Lord preaching a message of repentance and throughout his ministry he had moved the people’s hearts to God as they had not been moved for centuries. In the ministry of Jesus, he was healing the sick, raising the dead, and bringing good news to the poor (Matt 4:5) the people were finding a new life, a new goodness, a new power, to live as they ought and a new access to God.

As well as seeing God’s wisdom in the Gospel we can also learn how this passage speaks to us today. God uses different kinds of people for different ministries and God can use all of us to make a difference. The difference we can make is to welcome everyone into the Kingdom. We can do this by not judging people or insulting them like the religious leaders did in Matthew’s Gospel because they did not understand the message from Jesus.

The message for all of us is to follow the example of Jesus' and be a friend to all people this includes "tax collectors and sinners". In 1 John chapter 11:8-9 we read, "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness".

Now throughout scripture, we read that God's love is transformational, through his resurrection power, his love will transform us, and it's about changing our hearts and minds to be more compassionate to speak out against social injustice and racism in our communities.

Jesus says in Matthew 22:37 "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments".

So far in the journey in Matthew's Gospel, we have read that the religious leaders and the wise rejected Jesus. The reason was they did not understand all the prophecies that the Old Testament revealed concerning the Messiah, (Deut 18:15, 18) but the humble and the meek accepted the teachings of Jesus (John 7:40).

In this text of Matthew Jesus gives us a life application to learn from about those who rejected him. He prays in verses 25 & 26. At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father for this was your good pleasure". From these two verses, we see the importance of prayer life. Jesus begins his prayer, "I praise you Father", and this opening statement teaches two important facts. Firstly praise to God is a beautiful beginning and secondly, Jesus is the son of God. It also speaks of how we need to maintain our fellowship through the power of the Holy Spirit, with God the Father, God the Son moment by moment living a life of devotional prayer time.

This morning I would like to share one of my favourite devotionals to God, it is a hymn called What a Friend we have in Jesus the hymn was written by Joseph Scriven who was born in Banbridge Co Down in 1819. Joseph in his life had experienced awful

tragedy; he lost the three women he loved in life in tragic accidents. Then he gets word that his mother had taken ill back in Ireland. Joseph sat down and wrote this hymn to comfort his mother.

The opening words from the hymn are “what a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and grief’s to bear and what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. The hymn speaks for me the Gospel truth, there have been times in all our lives when we have needed our friend Jesus our comforter, I believe in life we all often forfeit peace and bear much pain because we simply don’t turn to God in prayer. Prayer to God is our comfort, prayer to God is a time to unload our burdens, these moments spent with our heavenly Father the living God can change our present, our day, and our future.

Our journey in Matthew’s Gospel brings us to the closing promises of our Saviour Christ chapter 11 v 28-30, *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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”*.

These words that Jesus spoke 2000 years ago are the living Word of God today. This invitation is open to all who come to Christ in faith. He offers us rest, and also his yoke. When Jesus spoke these words he was using the metaphor of the yoke to describe the heavy burden of the law imposed on the people by the Religious leaders of the day. When Jesus speaks of His yoke by comparison, it is light, it is to love God and each other. And the good news is that Jesus offers to teach us, how to live by these two rules.

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me”. Learning from Jesus means to be in a relationship with him and this relationship with Jesus is one of the most important aspects in our lives. In order to feel close to Jesus, we have to know him. In order to know Jesus we must spend time with him through scripture and prayer. At some point in our lives, we will go through a difficult time of some description and this is where that invitation from Jesus, to come to Him, comes into play we go to him and unload all our burdens.

Few of us in life will never carry a burden equal to what Joseph Scriven had to live with. Joseph with all the tragedy in his life was weary and burdened. He poured out his heart in prayer to Christ and his burden was lifted. Joseph came from great darkness in his life to great light. What a humbling concept knowing each one of us can have a loving friendship in Christ. We can take all our burdens, our sins, our sorrows and our concerns to Jesus. Our friend who died on the cross for us and who invites us today to come to Him, just call out his name "Jesus" whose word and presence we proclaim and enjoy.

This day and forevermore Amen.