

(2) Matthew 11.16-19, 25-30 REST

Come to me.. and I will give you rest, take my yoke upon you for my yoke is easy and my burden light..

It is ironic – that preparing to talk about coming to Jesus and welcoming God’s rest – has been a far from restful experience! In fact – I come to you today feeling rather weary - and yet right there in that weariness – sensing a fresh truth that I need to grasp.. it is so often the way with the privilege of having a bit more time to look at this passage – than those of you with me here reading it for the first time in a while!

Secondly – Jesus’ invitation is all the more powerful – when he invites the crowds to come to him and find REST – because he is speaking in the midst of turbulence and contrariness. Tension and contention is mounting around this figure – together with his cousin John the Baptist. The Jewish people of 1st century Palestine are longing for the Messiah – God’s chosen one to rescue them and restore Israel to greatness – for the sake of God’s Name. BUT – the two characters who have appeared on the scene of late – are not what they were expecting.. John is far too funereal – full of judgment and calling everyone to turn back to God and ask for forgiveness. Jesus, on the other hand has come proclaiming that the Kingdom of heaven is near – with partying – mixing with all sorts of riff-raff – those who seem to be undone – not sorted!

Today is a day of controversy.. here at La Côte Church – as we as a council have been trying to work out – how to begin physical church gatherings safely. I myself have felt a bit torn between John – and his call to repentance and purity and Jesus – urging us to celebrate kingdom life! Both have their place in the God’s economy.. and we will continue to “find our way” together through this Covid crisis – asking for God’s leading and grace for us all..

Into all these growing tensions around Jesus ministry – we are invited into a moment of intimacy and REST – invited to return to the CORE of our faith – closeness with God our Maker – as Christians – revealed in the Son.

Jesus responds to the grumbling generation with an invitation:

“Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

You may have noticed that this is the verse on the homepage of the new website that James Burrows has built for us – with Diantha’s support.

I asked James why he had chosen this verse.. he gave me permission to share his answer:

“To be completely honest, it's the only bible quote I could remember 😊”

Cheers

James

Well – what a verse to hold on to!

At the end of a strange and unstable first half of 2020 what burdens are you carrying? What sort of rest do you long for? How can Jesus’ invitation to those first century Palestinians ring true for us today?

I’d like us to look at this enticing word: REST – as it develops in Matthew’s narrative.

REST AS REFRESHMENT..

Firstly – the Greek word for “rest” that Jesus promises conjures up a **refreshing break** that travellers across a desert who find a welcome oasis. In the biblical tradition it also has to do with **Sabbath rest** – of taking time to rest with God on the seventh day, the space to bring us closer to God as we quieten our lives to focus on God. Jesus is saying – come to me – and I will lead you to greater communion with God, as I usher in the kingdom of God in me. Note too – that it is Jesus taking the initiative, extending the invitation to all who are weary and heavy laden, drawing us to himself.

REST AS GIFT – THE LIFTING OF BURDENS

Secondly – the rest which Jesus offers, will lift unnecessary burdens off the backs of those who come to him. Just as when you have been on a long walk, carrying a heavy rucksack, and you finally reach your destination and take it off – and stand up tall – feeling a weight lifted, a new freedom. Jesus is addressing crowds of Jews who are weighed down by the rigorous interpretation of the Torah, the Jewish Law – with countless rules to keep and always a weight of guilt that they were not good enough. Those burdened and weary – were likely to be the ordinary people, the unlettered, as opposed to the highly educated religious leaders.

God’s rest, offered through Jesus, was and is GIFT: the gift of revelation. God’s rest is entrusted to “infants” – to the little ones – those normally overlooked, the ones with whom he enjoyed a good party - the tax collectors and outcasts.

We are given a glimpse of the intimacy between God the Father and God the Son in Jesus' prayer – 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." We only come to know God when we are like infants ourselves, who make no pretence of knowledge – but are open to receive what they are given. The invitation still stands for us – to come to Jesus and receive his rest – but not because we have earned it through a high IQ – or a privileged education – but as **GIFT**.

This is freeing.. as I discovered just last week when I was heading to an interfaith forum in Lausanne. On the train in preparation, I read the different articles people had written talking about how to "live in peace" during Covid-19. I have to say – these writings were extremely high level – and as I approached my destination I began to feel intimidated. Then I remembered this passage and was reminded of the "little ones" to whom God's grace is revealed.. So I prayed – Well Lord – I accept that I am not Rowan Williams.. so help me to find my security in You – as one of your little ones – and not in how well I can articulate high flown theology! It ended up being a delightful exchange – and I held in mind – that I was there not needing to impress – but to share and learn – a burden had been lifted. In Jesus' invitation to come to his rest – we are all invited to be the "little ones".

REST AS TAKING JESUS' YOKE UPON US

The rest Jesus promises is not a passive, lying down sort of rest – but an invitation to take upon ourselves the yoke of Christ. True to form, Jesus uses a local picture of oxen working the land – yoked together and pulling the plough. Take my yoke upon you – Walk in step with me. God's rest is about the presence of God with us. When Moses was worrying about continuing the journey with the people of Israel in the desert – he asked God for reassurance. Yahweh replied: "My presence will go with you and I will give you rest". Here we have the picture of being yoked with Christ, side by side as we make our way through life – WITH God.

Jesus goes on to say that his yoke is "easy" – his burden "light". The Greek word for easy – also means "a good fit". As Augustine wrote, our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you, O God. Being yoked to Christ is a good fit for our lives – what we were created for. What is more, we are invited to learn as we go with the master, day by day, discovering that God is gentle and humble in heart.. not about to come down heavy on his followers for behaving

badly! He reveals something of the Father heart of God – with whom we long to walk – who is gentle and humble in heart..

As we take this yoke on ourselves we will be freed to love and serve others, freed to not only have our burdens lifted, but to share in lifting the burdens of others.. in fact this REST that Jesus promised is there in the blessings of the Sermon on the mount.. and so I would like to end with a reminder that our **rest, or refreshment is found as we walk with Christ as little ones, with other little ones who are so often overlooked** – and yet so precious in the sight of God:

Here are just a few of the people Jesus invites into his REST – along with us..
From Nadia Bolzweber
Come to me – all you little ones - who are burdened.. AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST..

“ Blessed are you – who no one else notices. The children who sit alone at the school lunch table. The cleaning staff at the hospital washing down Covid-ridden beds. The sex-workers and the night-shift sweepers. Come to me and I will give you rest..

Blessed are the losers and the babies and the parts of ourselves that are so small, the parts of ourselves that don't want to make eye contact with a world that loves only the winners. – Come to me and I will give you rest..

Blessed are the teenagers who have to find ways to hide the new cuts on their arms...

Blessed are those without permits and passports.. the ones making terrible business decisions for the sake of people.. the ones stepping between the bullies and the weak..

The ones who are underrepresented... in our institutions..

I will give you REST.. take my yoke, the gift of myself, my presence, and walk with me in the Way of love.

AMEN..

Well done James – I like your choice of verse for La Côte Church.. now let's live in the Rest that Jesus offers us..

