

*Heavenly Father, may these spoken words be faithful to the written word and lead us to the Living Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

One of the most frustrating experiences in life, at least for me, is discovering that knowing the right thing to do is not the same as doing it. Most of us have had that experience. We resolve to be more patient, but we lose our temper. We decide to forgive, but keep replaying the hurt. We promise ourselves that tomorrow will be different, only to find ourselves repeating yesterday's mistakes.

Paul gives voice to this inner struggle in today's reading from Romans. He writes, "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do."

These are not words of despair. Nor are they words of someone who does not care about goodness. Rather, Paul's words are those of someone who longs to please God and but finds another power at work within. His cry is not of guilt but of helplessness: "Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" This is a question that resonates through every human heart.

And then, when we turn to the Gospel passage, we hear the gentle, caring voice of Jesus inviting us: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Jesus calls to the weary, and he calls to us, and says simply, "Come."

The gospel passage begins with Jesus lamenting his generation. He compares the people of his time with children in the marketplace who complain no matter which game is offered: "We played the flute, and you did not dance. We sang a dirge, and you did not mourn." Nothing satisfied

them. John the Baptist lived an austere life. He fasted and lived in the wilderness, and people said he had a demon. Jesus came. He shared meals with ordinary people, attended weddings, healed the sick, blessed children, and people called him a glutton and a drunkard.

The problem did not lie with either John or Jesus. The problem was hearts that refused to receive what God was offering. There is a warning here for us. Sometimes we become so convinced that God must act in a particular way that we fail to recognise his presence. We expect dramatic signs, overwhelming certainty, or perfect answers, while God quietly comes through the ordinary means of grace – through Scripture or through a hymn, in prayer, through the sacraments, in the kindness of another person, through the still small voice that calls us back to himself.

Jesus offers a remarkable prayer of thanksgiving. He says, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.”

In his prayer, Jesus is not praising ignorance. He is praising humility. The kingdom is not understood by those who think they have mastered God, but it is received by those willing to admit their need. And this brings us back to Paul’s confession.

There is a temptation to hear Romans 7 as simply a catalogue of defeat. But that is not what it is. Paul is describing himself. He is not lost because he admits his weakness. He’s actually nearest to grace because he has stopped pretending. Thinking “I can manage this myself” is far more dangerous than crying “Lord, help me.”

Christian maturity is not about misguidedly thinking or pretending that we have no struggles. It's learning where to take those struggles. As long as we imagine ourselves strong enough, wise enough, or righteous enough, we have little room for Christ. But when we recognize our weakness, we also recognize our need of our Saviour.

The Christian life is not built upon our ability to conquer sin through sheer determination. It is built upon Christ's determination never to let us go. That is why Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you... for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

This may sound strange at first. A yoke is a piece of farming equipment placed upon working animals. It does not remove labour. Jesus doesn't promise a life without responsibility or suffering. Instead, he promises that we will no longer carry life's burdens alone.

A yoke joins two together. The image reminds us that Christ himself bears the greater weight. He walks beside us, sharing the load that would otherwise crush us. The burden becomes lighter not because life becomes easier but because we no longer bear it by ourselves.

There is an old Christian paradox that says that the closer we come to Christ, the more honestly we see our sin. But the closer we come to Christ, the less we need to fear what we see.

Paul cries out, "Who will rescue me from this body of death"? And immediately he responds with, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Saviour." The answer is not stronger will power. The answer is a stronger Saviour. A Saviour who carries what we cannot. A Saviour who gives rest,

and not just at the end of life, but here and now, in the midst of all our struggles.

The yoke of Christ is life-giving because it is carried in love. Every Sunday we probably come to church carrying something. Some carry sorrow, some disappointment, some carry secret shame, some carry anxiety about the future, some simply carry exhaustion.

The invitation of Jesus to each one of us remains unchanged. "Come ... to ... me". And when we come, we discover that the God who knows us completely also loves us completely.

So today, if you are carrying a burden, no matter what it is, hear again the gracious invitation of Christ. Come. Lay down your weariness. Receive his mercy. Take his yoke upon you. For the One who calls you is gentle and humble in heart. And in him, you will find rest for your souls.

Amen.