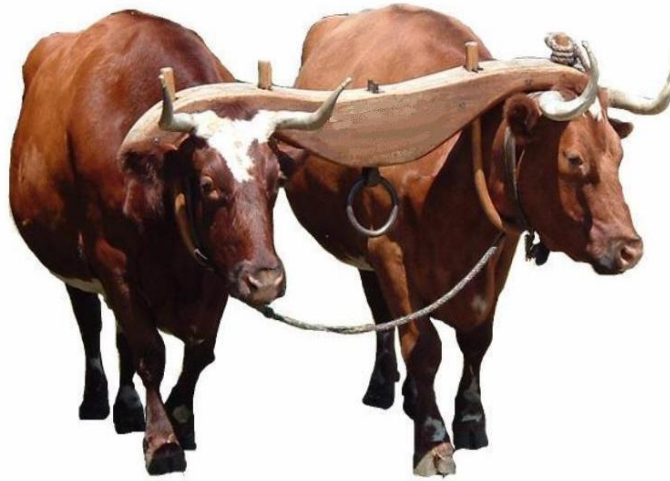


Worship at Tamworth City Uniting Church

Sunday 5th July, 2000



Acknowledgement of Country

As you enter this time of worship please acknowledge the custodianship of this land by the Gamilaroi peoples - the traditional owners of this land and pay respect to their elders - past, present and emerging.

Call to Worship

Come to me, all you that are weary and 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 is light.
(Matthew 11:28-30)

Song *All the hungry, all the thirsty*

All the hungry, all the thirsty, all who look for strength may come,
all the needy, all the lonely, all who long to find a home.

Here's a door that's always open, here a table spread for all,
here a welcome, here a family, here your heart can heed God's call.

All the gifted, all the joyful, all whose hope is strong, come too;
come with overflowing blessings come with treasures old and new.
Here's a task that needs those riches, here good news is always heard,
here a living faith grows bolder, here your voice can speak God's word.

All the gifts of all God's people, all the struggles, all the pain,
all the Spirit-sent abundance, all the grief and loss and gain –
brought together in one Body, burdens lighten, joys increase,
and together we can ask for Jesus' strength and Jesus' peace.

All God's people, praise your Maker, praise the one who called you here.
all disciples, praise your teacher, loving, leading, always near.
All you faithful, praise the Spirit, lifting every heart to pray.
Praise the Holy One, who give us grace along the travellers' way.

Tune: TiS 93 Elizabeth J Smith. Copied under CCLI Worship Licence No. 604439

Prayers

God of abundance and generosity, we give thanks to you
for mercy that reaches out,
for patience that waits our returning,
for the willingness to shoulder our burdens,
and for your love that is ever ready to welcome us home.

We praise you that in Christ Jesus
you meet us with grace, embrace us in acceptance,
and affirm us as citizens of a forgiven universe.

We give thanks that by your Holy Spirit you move us
to change direction, receive your love,
and become what we most truly are.

In darkness and light, in trouble and in joy,
help us then, generous God,
to accept your forgiveness,
to believe your love, and to trust your purpose.

We pray these prayers in and through the name of Jesus Christ our Lord
who walks with us: sharing our lives, easing our pains and encouraging us
as we travel the way of discipleship. Amen.

The Epistle

Romans 7:15-25a

¹⁵ I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, ²³ but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

The Gospel

Matthew 11:16-19; 25-30

¹⁶ "But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

¹⁷ 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we wailed, and you did not mourn.'

¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; ¹⁹ the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, “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; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸ “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Message

‘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 is light.’

These are some of the most familiar words in the Bible. We hear them at funerals. We might remember them when we are feeling worn down and tired out. If you’re like me, you learnt them at Sunday School. For me, they are amongst my favourite Bible verses.

They come in the middle of a section in Matthew which is largely devoted to the rejection of Jesus and his message. In verses 25 – 30, Matthew presents a group of sayings that highlight the revelation that Jesus brings, and the kinds of people who accept it. The revelation is all about Jesus and his Father and the people who accept it are those which the text calls infants: those who are not part of the establishment, those who are unwise in the ways of the world, those who have been pushed to the edges – just as children were in Jesus’ day. The revelation that Jesus brings about God, is to these people – not those who have a high IQ or who have had an education.

In these verses Jesus is making it quite clear that humans have no capacity of their own to fathom out who God is. Rather, God is known only as a gift of incredible grace. Even our efforts to know Jesus – God’s son, generally end up in images fashioned after ourselves. A full understanding – even a partial understand of, God simply eludes the human grasp.

The verses about coming to Jesus and taking up his yoke can help us to understand, in some measure, what it is that Jesus was on about.

Let’s have a closer look at them.

Firstly, they could be said to be a definite call to discipleship.

Jesus says, **come** to me **take** my yoke ... **learn** from me.

These are words which have an element of call about them.

More than that, they are words of invitation.

(Pause)

They are also words which offer comfort and help.

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

They are not the challenging and strident call of ‘follow me’ which the disciples heard when they first encountered Jesus. Rather, they are words of understanding, of compassion, of empathy.

Those first disciples would have found the going tough at times. Perhaps they sometimes wondered, ‘What on earth am I doing following this man?’

I imagine they might have often felt like giving up because things became too much for them.

They would have had their personal problems: arguments with their wives, too little time with their children, questions about where Jesus was taking them, and questions about whether it was all worthwhile. They also would have experienced times of grief, of doubt, of hardship.

In fact, they would have been just like us.

For we too ask these sorts of questions.

We too, often come up against seemingly insurmountable problems that seem to weigh us down and threaten to overwhelm us.

Into these times of doubting.

Into these times of questioning.

Into these times when life just gets all too much, Jesus speaks these words:

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

A few weeks back I happened to be looking at a news report of a woman who was travelling, with her camels, from one side of Australia to the other. I think there were six camels and some of them were laden with luggage and provisions. As they walked their loads swayed and jolted. Some of the loads looked extremely heavy.

They reminded me of the things we carry with us on our journeys: sadness, grief, anger, jealousy, strained relationships, an emptiness inside, hurt and sometimes hopelessness.

As I was thinking about these words of Jesus I was reminded of those camels’ loads, for in the report, the woman said how she had to ensure that her camels were well looked after – they had to be watered, fed and rested. Just like that woman looks after her camels so Jesus seeks to look after us: ‘Come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.’

(Pause)

With these words Jesus is not just offering an invitation to unburden ourselves, he is also offering us an invitation to walk with him.

He is offering us an invitation to be yoked with him.

The picture that springs to mind when I think of yoked animals is one which I saw in a book when I was about ten years old. Mum had a series of books called ‘Countries of the World’ and I would often get them down from the shelves and look at the pictures – pictures from all around the world.

One of them was of two oxen pulling a plough in a rice paddy - they were joined together around their necks. Being of a somewhat inquisitive nature I asked Dad what the thing was that joined them together. He explained to me that it was called a yoke - a piece of equipment designed to keep the animals together so that they could work as a team.

I got the book out last night and looked again at the very poor colour reproduction of the scene and, as I looked, it didn’t seem to matter that the picture was a bit out of focus. It didn’t seem to matter that the colours were poor. What I saw was a picture of myself and Jesus joined together and working as a team. What I saw was a yoke which made my life easier because I was joined with a person who said, ‘Take my yoke upon you and learn of me. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.’

The yoke which Jesus places upon me, one of his disciples, is not designed to burden me down. It is not designed to make life difficult for me. It is designed so that, alongside Jesus, I can learn about life and how to live my life in a way that is fruitful and fulfilling. It is designed so that, alongside Jesus, I can learn from him about how to be gentle – with myself and with others.

I don’t know about you, but I find that the person I am hardest on is myself. I set myself impossible standards sometimes. At other times I get annoyed with myself for failing to do certain things, and at other times I am cross with myself for not doing what I think I should.

I was talking with a friend a couple of weeks ago and she said – ‘Betty, just be gentle with yourself.’ This verse reminds me that Christ is able to teach me to be gentle with both myself and with others.

Jesus calls us to place ourselves alongside him under his yoke. A yoke which sits easily and does not rub or bruise.

One of the reasons that these are favourite verses of mine is that they remind me that Jesus will not call me to do things that I am unable to do. He will not give me things to do which will burden me down and break me. But above all they remind me that I do not journey on my own. A yoke by its very nature joins two or more beasts together. The verses remind me that I am yoked to one who will journey with me – through all things, in everything. This week may we experience the love, care, support and grace that Christ offers us. Now let’s read a poem by the late Rev Bruce Prewer.

*The old timer chuckled, remembering bullocks harnessed to pull a plough;
one powerful beast and one weak runt, together yoked somehow.
The small one strained and did its best to make a useful team,
the big one bore without complaint the weight of that crossbeam.
The old timer said that’s how it was with him and his best mate,
he did his bit as best he could, but Christ took all the weight. (Bruce Prewer)*

Song *I heard the voice of Jesus say*

I heard the voice of Jesus say, ‘Come unto me and rest;
lay down, O weary one, lay down your head upon my breast.’
I came to Jesus as I was, so weary and worn and sad;
I found in him a resting place, and he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say, ‘Behold, I freely give
the living water; thirsty one, stoop down and drink and live.’
I came to Jesus, and I drank of that life-giving stream;
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say, ‘I am this dark world’s light;
look unto me, your morn shall rise and all your day be bright.’
I looked to Jesus, and I found in him my star, my sun;
and in that light of life I’ll walk till travelling days are done.

TiS 585 Horatius Bonar. Public Domain

Prayers of the People

Generous God, we give you thanks for prayers answered this week – both within our own
lives and in the life of the world:

for people who have become reconciled;
for people who have experienced joy once again;
for those for whom life has become whole and good;
for those who have felt the touch of a caring person;
for those who have felt your presence in their lives.

But even as we celebrate your love that has been shown in so many places we know that
there are still those who suffer, there is still a creation that is bleeding and torn in so many
ways.

Your Son calls us to pray for the coming of your Kingdom and so, once again, we do this.

(As we continue in prayer there are times of silence to remember those people and places who are on your mind and in your hearts this day)

O God, into the pain of the tortured: breathe stillness

(Silence)

Into the hunger of the very poor: breathe fullness.

(Silence)

Into those who seek justice: breathe hope and persistence.

(Silence)

Into the wounds of our planet: breathe well-being.

(Silence)

Into the deaths of your creatures: breathe life.

(Silence)

Into those who long for you: breathe yourself.

(Silence)

God we, Jesus' disciples, are his hands, eyes, ears, feet and heart in our world today. May the things for which we have prayed become a reality as your Spirit works within us – transforming, encouraging and empowering us to show your love, compassion, acceptance and justice to those whom we meet and for whom we pray. Amen.

Song *Brother, sister, let me serve you*

Brother, sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you, speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping; when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant to.

TiS 650 Richard Gillard. Copied under CCLI Worship Licence No. 604439

Blessing

Go in peace.

And may the Holy God surprise you on the way,
Christ Jesus be your company
and the Spirit lift up your life.

Amen.