

SERMON - SUN 5th July 26 - 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings:

Gen 24:34-38,42-49,58-67

Ps 45:10-17

Rom 7:15-25a

Matt 11:16-19,25-30

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, I invite Your presence to be with us as we look more closely at Your Word. Fill this place with Your Spirit, that all who hear may be touched by Your love and Your grace. May Your presence be felt and our hearts drawn closer to You. Amen.

This morning's reading from Matthew's Gospel seems at first to be something of a tale of two halves. It starts with what feels like a rebuke from Jesus

– ah, you can't win !

– we are like kids who will taunt no matter what you do. It's not easy to hear, is it?

But Jesus goes on to say that it is to these child-like people that God's hidden things are being revealed through him.

As is so often the case, it's a perfect lead-in to what comes next. That so-familiar passage, a favourite, I'm sure, of so many of us...

28 "Come to me, all you who 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."

Now, I **DID** have a cracking sermon prepared for you it was about ...

1. The Provision of Relief, Rest, and Strength
2. Divine Compassion, Mercy, and Forgiveness

And

3. The Contrast Between Inexhaustible Divine Power and Human Frailty

I think it would have scored me some good points in an essay for college.

But then, in a bit of divine intervention on behalf of all of us, I thought, no, I can't lay that heavy yoke on you good people. Give them a break (and yourself too Derry).

My mind wandered amongst those beautiful words of Jesus reported to us by Matthew ...

I let those words just blow through my soul, and I invite you to take a moment to do the same, ...

Weary
Burdens
Rest
Learn
Gentle
Humble
Easy
Light

Eugene Peterson, in The Message Bible, uses what I think is some truly inspired PARA-phrasing in his take on this passage ... (let me read it to you) ...

*“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn **the unforced rhythms of grace**. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”*

“the unforced rhythms of grace”

Wow, I recall the first time I heard that I was blown away. It is a phrase that has stayed with me, and one the Spirit sometimes wafts through my mind as a reminder that I am perhaps getting a bit too frenetic. A reminder to chill. To rest my soul. To live more freely and lightly.

I think that Eugene’s take on Jesus’ teaching here gets right to the heart of my (and perhaps your) inclination to try to deal with everything in my own strength. To feel that “busy” somehow equates to “good”.

All the struggle and strain we put ourselves through. This is a real contrast to the ease and enjoyment of walking in God’s grace. It flows, naturally, like a rhythm of life, and it buoys us up and carries us along with it.

Trying to fix ourselves is an exhausting business. But Jesus offers us something wholly different: a chance to know Him and to be changed by that encounter. It’s an encounter in which we exchange crippling legalism for real life; we exchange endless striving for real rest.

This is the Jesus whom I want to keep company with, the Jesus who invites me to experience a life lived “freely and lightly.”

“Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it.”

Our job as Christians, put very simply, is this: - to keep company with Jesus.

- In prayer.
- In God's life-giving words.
- With other Christians.

Our own assessment of how we're doing — or not doing — is less important than simply *being* with Him and letting Him lift the unhealthy yokes we hoist onto our own shoulders.

We are, after all, human *beings*, no human *doings* :-)

There is definitely a place for effort and intentionality in our lives, of course. It is, let's be honest, an effort to make space in our lives to be with Jesus. It doesn't happen magically or automatically. It's an active choice, and one we have to keep making every day. A discipline, if I might use such a scary word.

But when we struggle, and we do, hear Jesus' words whispering to you –

“Come. Be with Me. Lay down your burdens. Walk with Me.”

That sounds good to me.

That sounds like something I'm prepared to put some effort into. Not because I feel guilty, or because I “should”, but because I *want to*.

I hope you do too.

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy God,

We long for your peace, and trust in your promise;

we hear your call to turn toward you,

to change our lives and welcome you in.

Meet us here and fill our minds with your wisdom

and our hearts with your peace,

that our worship together may open us to the challenge

of your dream of wholeness for all.

We pray in the Name of Jesus, the One who was and is, and is to come.

Amen!