

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.*

Our gospel reading today concludes with the words: ‘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.’

To us, reading this today, these verses may resonate. For many people, living in our world in these times, is a tiring and exhausting challenge. We long to find rest from some of the difficulties we are face, so who doesn’t want an easier life? There have been times in the last while when I stopped listening to the news because it was, and continues to be, so full of the wars and conflicts in the world. There have always been wars, but it seems to me that the world is more out of control than a few years ago, and everything is more expensive. I’m sure I’m not the only one who would like a return to better times.

So, the promise Jesus offers us today is very compelling. ‘for all of you who are weary, I will give you rest’ he says. ‘Just take my yoke upon you and learn from me. I’m gentle and humble, and in me your soul will find rest. Because my yoke is different from others – it’s easy and light.’

Of course, when Jesus originally said these words, the meaning was different. In their original context, these verses spoke specifically to those burdened by the Jewish law. God gave the law to guide the Jewish people through the moral dilemmas of life, but well-intentioned Jewish leaders embellished the law until it became its own problem. Religious leaders prided themselves on their observance of the law, but even they could not avoid infractions. The common person did not stand a chance of perfectly observing the law. The yokes they were forced to carry were unbearably heavy.

But the promise of Jesus to make our yoke easy comes with a catch. If we want to free ourselves from our yoke, we first need to give up our freedom and follow the way of Christ. This is not simply walking with him, but surrendering ourselves to him, so he may lead us, direct us and encourage us. At our baptism, others made the promises on our behalf to follow Christ. Now as adults, we can choose to submit ourselves to Christ’s just and gentle rule and to try to live-out the values of his Kingdom, calling others to share in the good news as we go.

So, if we want this freedom, this easy burden, this rest, what yokes currently bind us and make our lives more complicated than they ought? To what or whom are we yoked? To what or whom do we give ourselves? What or who takes priority in our lives, orienting how we live and relate to others, how we make decisions? We all harness our lives to something: another person, work, family, success, reputation. And sometimes our yokes are more inward like fear, anxiety, anger, particular beliefs and opinions, the losses and tragedies of our lives. Regardless, they are the relationships and attachments that we depend on for meaning and, for better or worse, they give us our life’s direction.

Think for a moment about what yokes you wear? Think about what yokes take your energy away from the most important things in your life. What would it mean for us if we aligned ourselves with Christ and wholeheartedly took on his yoke – not just placing it on when it is convenient, but making it more permanent? It means we take seriously our life of discipleship. Our daily prayer becomes more about intimacy with God and knowing God, than about asking for what we want. We work for justice and the dignity of every human being. We care for the poor, feed the hungry, and defend the oppressed. We love our enemies. We offer forgiveness before it is asked for. Our faithfulness should be evident by how we live and speak. We live each day praising God and giving

thanks for his gifts and blessings. We let go of anger. We don't live in fear, and we trust that daily bread will be provided.

But, when we are yoked to anything or anyone other than Christ, we are often left weary and burdened. This is a spiritual condition, a disease of the soul, as much, or maybe even more than it is a physical one. Our lives are frenzied and fragmented. We end up comparing, competing, and judging ourselves and each other. We act as one person in one situation and another person in a different situation. There is no internal integrity. The reserves run dry and we live exhausted with nothing of depth or substance to offer. Soon relationships become superficial and utilitarian.

Are we feeling weary and burdened? If so, maybe this means we are not fully wearing the yoke of Christ. Too often we treat our weariness and medicate our burdens with addictions, surfing the internet, busyness with things that are not urgent or important. Inward voids can't be filled by exterior things. Often we end up just as weary and just as burdened afterwards, as we were before. These are not the antidote to our exhaustion. The antidote to our exhaustion begins with wholeheartedness. That wholeheartedness is only found in sharing the yoke of Christ, the heart of God and the heart of humanity beating as one.

To take on the yoke of Jesus is to take on his life. “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,” he says. “Let your heart love like mine. Let your mind be filled with the same concerns as mine. Let your feet walk in step with mine. Let your hands touch the world like mine. Let your eyes see the Father like mine. Live and move in tandem with me, as one, and you will find rest for your soul.”

Today, we are invited to look with fresh eyes at our lives, and determine that which is important and that which is not; to choose a path that is different to that which the world offers.

Thanks be to God.