

Come to Me...

Song of Solomon 2:8-13; Matthew 11:28-29

Over these past days, as well as during these past months, the words Jesus speaks have had a particular resonance:

“Come to Me, all who are labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest...”

When tragic events happen across the world, we watch and listen to the news unfold on screen and radio and newspaper, and wonder about the hardness of life in our world. When tragic events happen on our doorstep, we clutch at our hearts, and realise that none of us lives in a completely safe environment, and that, though it does not happen often, thank God, suffering and pain and sadness can happen to anyone and at any time and anywhere.

Our hearts go out to everyone who has been affected by the tragic car accident on Morningside Road last week. The hurt and pain must be unimaginable. More than one home will be darkened by these events, and more than one heart broken. Add to this the families of those whose loved ones have died over these recent months, with restricted funeral services, and not being able at the time to offer close support and care and love to those who need it most in their time of sadness..

Jesus says: *“Come to Me, all who are labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest...”*

Speaking to friends across the country, and indeed world, it is clear that the ongoing effect of the pandemic will have massive implications for the economy and for jobs. More people live on a shoestring than we care to imagine. Not all are able to save for a rainy day. The travel, hospitality and entertainment industries, alongside many others, have been particularly badly hit. The full impact on the economy of our country has still to be felt as the necessary support that was given to support furloughing workers is eventually paid for over the next months, and maybe years. There is going to be a real struggle ahead, as there is already, for those who have the unenviable task of trying to balance the health welfare of our nation, with the economic needs of our nation. It is not an easy conundrum to solve.

Jesus says: *“Come to Me, all who are labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest...”*

Over these last months, many of us have had disturbed sleep patterns. Initially a lack of fresh air and exercise, more recently a lack of variety in life and purposeful things to do have left many feeling distracted, or weary, on top of all the other worries that these months have brought. Many have found sleep a challenge because of the emotional difficulties of daily life and the enormous pressures of working from home, or from no work. With job cuts, downsizing, and restructuring, those left behind are required to do the work of multiple people. Caught between doing too much in these extraordinary times, and not having enough to do in these extraordinary times, sleep for many has been disturbed, as we live and relive these groundhog days.

Jesus says: *“Come to Me, all who are labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest...”*

Throughout our lives each one of us is confronted by a variety of trials, challenges and temptations that far exceed our capacity to deal with them by ourselves. However, we are not meant to live as isolated individuals who are in complete control.ⁱ God through Jesus reaches out to offer support and help and presence. He’s ready, waiting, reaching out, to help each one of us carry our burdens.

The burden may not be removed, the weight of life may not be taken from us, but help comes. And that, for some, is also a burden. We think we can manage on our own; we think we don’t need help; it is hard for so many of us to accept help when it comes. But if we are to cope, we must. More than that, we will be helped to carry the burden of others in their time of need. That is what Jesus offers here. Gently, firmly, and compassionately. That is what lightens the heavy load. That is what refreshes our souls.

We don’t see many yokes these days – those wooden bars or frames that join two animals together so they can pull a heavy load. Yokes are normally meant for two, and also yokes were used by farmers to train inexperienced animals for their work. Less experienced beasts of burden would be teamed with more experienced ones so the new animal could learn how to pull the weight of a plough.

“The lesson of the yoke is learning how to get in sync with Jesus, whose presence balances the weight of our pressures. Through loving-kindness and gentleness, carrying the yoke of Jesus, we learn to navigate our challenges and walk in wisdom. The burdens we carry in our lives are not meant to crush us but to make us stronger. The purpose of the struggles in life is always to bring us into a deeper relationship (with a God and with others)...” and to show us, even when it hurts, especially when it hurts, that we are not on our own.

When what we are going through seems beyond our ability to carry, that is exactly the time when faith is calling us to surrender our way and trust God. God wants to work with us, God wants to help us, God will not abandon us.

That road is not easy, and I would never pretend it is, or diminish in any way the great burdens many people are carrying. Jesus would have those who follow Him to be under no illusion. But the road is ***with Him***; and on the way, wear disciples will find the rest they need, and more than mere rest – the encouragement, enlightenment, love and even laughter that comes from the company of the One Who has taken the way of gentle lowliness to lift the disciple high, and put a spring in their step for the road ahead.ⁱⁱ

There is a resilience in the gentleness of Jesus. There is a purposefulness in the work of Jesus. There is a presence in the offer of Jesus. He reaches out, to you, to all, today.

Jesus says: *“Come to Me, all who are labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest...”*

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
Amen**

ⁱ Shelley D Best, Feasting on the Gospels, Matthew, vol 1, p299

ⁱⁱ Leith Fisher, But I say to you, p150