

## **Sermon preached on 5 July 2020**

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### **BIBLE READING: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**

Let us pray: Gracious God, may the words of my mouth, the imaginings of our minds, and the inspiration of our hearts be for the uplifting and celebration of life; in Jesus' name. Amen.

I wonder how you are travelling with the ambiguities of these times? For over three months, we have been living with the constraints brought on us by COVID-19. The initial lockdown was:

- “Unless you need to leave your home, stay at home;
- no more than two people together when you leave your home; and
- maintain a minimum of 1.5 metres of separation.”

Then, for a time, restrictions were eased. Families could gather. We could see our children and grand children. We could begin to stretch our wings.

Then, a bit over a week ago, the number of infections in Victoria started to rise; and, now suburbs are back in lockdown: with the threat, if more infections happen in our locality, so, too, will we be in lockdown.

And, with this, a growing frustration in some people. “I did what I was asked to do, but here we are: the virus is still with us – multiplying – and will be with us until a vaccine is discovered and made available.”... The sense of control over their lives has been limited. Protest is rising in many communities around Melbourne. A growing number of people are refusing to be tested as part of their protest.

And today, we hear these words from Jesus, “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.” It is a text that calls us to pause, to consider where our centre is: to know where we belong, where is refreshment, where is life.

When Jesus says this “come to me ...,” he is offering a relationship with the source of life. It's as though he were saying, “Because of the relationship I offer, you have a place to be, to live: where you can live out of a place of rest, of peace, of connection, of humility, of belonging, of love.” Friends, even in our physical separation, through our connection with him, we can experience a sense of community. We have it here – as we gather for worship, separated, yet together.

Living in a COVID-19 world is a burden; and, alongside that burden, there are other burdens: our own personal burdens which continue – probably more than any of us can imagine. Jesus' call is to live out of a place, out of a relationship, an experience of peace. Be willing to trust the presence and promise of God. Be willing to be vulnerable, be willing to be peaceful, be willing to forgive: rather than allowing frustration, stress, fear or anxiety to motivate our actions.

Jesus' invitation has an imperative about it, a vitality: "Come to me, ... take my yoke...." A gift is offered that finds its meaning in being taken up: in being received. It has strength to it: come, take.

Do we actually trust God so we will do this? Do we believe we will be given rest, peace? It took me a long time to trust these promises. I thought I had to earn God's love. But when I was about 30 years old, I was encouraged to slow down and rest in the life-giving promises of God, to savour them. Well, things began to change; and, with it, came the experience that Jesus' yoke is easy, the burden light.

There is a gift in this invitation of Jesus. Our context, being so constrained by this virus and its restrictions and by any other burdens you may be carrying, we are given an opportunity in this slow time for light to shine on this gift and promise of God. It is so good! so filled with life and blessing,....

When we walk with Christ, when we focus on our relationship with him, being yoked to him, the road opens before us with less resistance and less striving on our part....

When I looked for images of yokes on the Web, [\[show image\]](#) most were images of double yokes, designed for working animals to pull in tandem. Imagine this as the kind of yoke that Jesus was talking about, a yoke that we don't have to carry alone, a yoke that he wears with us? For when he says, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me," it sounds like we learn from him by doing what he does. That's the way it was in ancient Palestine: When a bullock driver was training a new bullock, he yoked it with an experienced bullock – who carried the larger part of the load until, having learnt from the old hand, the new bullock could shoulder more of the load. We are yoked with Jesus so that we might learn from him.

"Come to me," Jesus says, "and get into the harness with me and work shoulder to shoulder with me." What a beautiful call to those of us who are carrying burdens. A yoke for sharing the load, a tool of connection, a way of being in relationship with Christ that makes our work easier, builds strength and community: which gives rest for the soul.

A story which illustrates this...

A few days ago, I was speaking with one of you on the phone. At the beginning of the call, I was feeling a bit flat. But, after the conversation had finished, I felt alive. There was a spring in my step and a smile on my face. I revelled in the feeling, and stayed with it for a while.... It's not surprising I felt like this.... Jesus calls us to him: offering rest for our souls as he lives with and in us. In that conversation – as in any conversation or meeting or gathering we might have – the God in you meets the God in me; and the God in me meets the God in you; and we are enlivened....

Jesus says, "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." Amen. Thanks be to God.