

Mt 11:25-end (*First service after the break for the coronavirus*)

It is a joy to meet again today, to be together, to be in our lovely church building.

How are you feeling? I hope pleased to be here..

I think a lot of people are feeling weary, and still anxious as the lock-down is eased.

Weary of the stress of living with the threat of catching the virus, weary with not being able to live as we normally live, no groups to attend, no church, separated from families and friends, no hugs, feeling shut-in...

Today's gospel reading contains the, so called, '*comfortable words*' that occur in the BCP (Book of Common Prayer) Holy Communion service. What has been called '*the most welcoming and encouraging invitation ever offered*'. Wonderful words that have long intrigued me and drawn me to them. They speak of something we all need, perhaps especially at this time, and many long for – **Rest**, from the weight of all we carry around with us in our hearts, souls and minds, and from the weariness and anxieties of life.

Many of the people Jesus spoke to were weary from their hard daily lives, but also anxious as they sought after God, and tried to be good, but not sure of God's acceptance or love.

There are **two kinds of rest** found here:

v28 Jesus is speaking particularly of the rest of **coming to him as our Saviour**, when we commit ourselves to him and his love, and we decide to put our trust in him and in nothing or no-one else. It is in this that we can find his love, forgiveness, peace and joy as our own experience. Find rest from the anxieties of carrying the weight of our failures and guilt. cf Christian's great exchange in Pilgrim's Progress. This rest is given to us, a free gift of God's grace.

v29 This rest is the rest of **following Jesus every day**, which is learned, and gained gradually.

A '**yoke**' is a fitted wooden bar that joined two oxen together as they ploughed a field. The yoked oxen were kept in a straight line as their owner drove them.

They weren't free to roam wherever they wished.

The Pharisees spoke of being called to carry '*the yoke of the Torah*', the heavy burden of the Jewish Law with all its commandments, covering every aspect of life in minute detail, because it was impossible to keep all those laws all the time.

Jesus, out of his mercy and love offers us something very different. Jesus doesn't stand over us as a judge, demanding we keep God's laws. He welcomes all who will come to him as they are, in need of his grace and forgiveness, and freely seeking to follow him.

Jesus carried heavy burdens at times, almost crushing him as he went to the cross, yet he was able to bear them, and through most of his life he carried out God's will with a lightness, always able to see other's needs, and with a joyful spirit.

How did he do this? And how can following Jesus be easy?

What about the many demands Jesus spoke of? Denying ourselves and taking up our cross to follow him; some asked to leave family, home, possessions, to do God's will?

Jesus says, as we take his yoke upon us and follow in the path he leads us, we will find rest, because the path is one of **gentleness and humility of spirit, which Jesus models for us**. This is both gentleness and humility **towards God**: going where God leads us, laying down our pride, our small ambitions and stubborn ways, and being willing to humbly follow in Jesus' footsteps.

And also gentleness and humility **towards others**. For Jesus, all he did was a labour of **love**. If we live in love, even heavy burdens can seem light. If we resent what we are doing, even a light task can seem to take such a huge effort.

The joy, rest, and refreshment Jesus offered, all spring from his own inner character, his gentleness and warmth to all who turn to him, and we find our rest when we are like him. This is often a hard and difficult path to walk, but it is the way of true '*rest*'.

v30 '*easy*' here means '*well fitting*'. Jesus says what he asks of us is easy and light, because it is exactly what God has designed for us and planned for us. It fits well.

But are we humble enough to accept God's will for our lives, or do we prefer something that seems more appealing, more exciting, more rewarding than the humble path of service?

In the midst of this strange and anxious time of the coronavirus, and the challenges that our lives present to us, do we know the '*rest*' of salvation this morning?

And can we find daily '*rest*' in living Jesus' way?