

Sunday 5th July Trinity 4

Read Matthew 11.16-19, 25-end

Reflection

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If you have ever read John Bunyan's classic Pilgrim's Progress, We find Pilgrim carrying a heavy burden upon his back – life and all its troubles; and carrying this burden makes everything he does difficult. He seeks a way to lighten the load, and I'm sure there are plenty of us who are seeking a way of getting rid of our burdens just like Pilgrim.

The heart of this reading I think are v25 -30 in which we find Jesus' gracious offer of rest, but before we can understand the offer of rest we must understand the setting in which the offer is made. Jesus has commissioned the disciples and sent them out. He is now alone and ministering in Galilee. John the Baptist is in prison and Jesus has praised his work. But now Jesus is answering the critics both of John and himself. The people were saying John was possessed by a demon because he wore strange clothes and ate locusts and Jesus who was preaching the good news, healing the sick, performing miracles, feasting with people and mixing with those on the margins of society, say he's a glutton and a drunkard. Have you ever thought that whatever you say or do, you are damned if you do and damned if you don't. That is a bit how John the Baptist and Jesus are in this passage. The people are fickle, desiring the Messiah they have been promised, but John and Jesus don't meet their expectations. Jesus says they are like kids in the park who can't decide what games to play. They are the ones who claim to have wisdom, but wisdom is verified by works, and their works have proved them to be foolish. Nothing will satisfy them.

So what does Jesus do, he goes off and prays to his Father and it is in this prayer at v25-27 we find the prerequisite to receiving Jesus' offer of rest and in v 28-30 the nature of the offer and its reward. Jesus thanks God that the knowledge of the kingdom to come has been kept from the so called wise and intelligent people and has been revealed to the infants. Not babies but to those whose hearts and minds are open to hearing the good news of the gracious love of God. The first prerequisite: only the humble of heart will hear and understand the offer being made. Everything has been revealed through Jesus, because everything He says and does comes from the Father, because the Father knows the Son, and the Son knows the Father. Jesus then will only reveal all the goodness to come to those he chooses, those who will listen with open hearts and those who will follow him.

The nature of the offer is in v28 **come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest.** The words **come to me** involve a change of direction or change of life. A turning away from the path we were on, to the path upon which Jesus is inviting us to follow – the call – and if we follow the directions what will we receive? **I will give you rest.** An easing from all the burdens of sin and worries and cares, all the things we cannot deal with by ourselves and which stop us from leading a Christian life. The next aspect is how will we receive this 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.** In other words, we have to let Jesus be our teacher, to listen to him, read his word, change our lives. We can share our burdens and worries, he won't take them away, but sharing them will ease our minds and souls. We will become his disciples. And our reward? **For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.** Jesus knew all about yokes, being a carpenter, he perhaps learned from Joseph how to make ones that fitted well and did not rub or chaff, which will make our learning easier. Jesus is not a hard taskmaster, his demands are light even for those who are persecuted and are willing to die for their faith, can find that rest which Jesus speaks of. Jesus will give us that spiritual rest in Philippians 4:v6 *"do not worry about anything,"*...and again in 1 Peter 5:v7 *"cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."* To rest in Jesus involves the wonderful assurance that our destiny is secure in Him. We do not need to fear death, for Jesus will prepare a place just for you and me in his Father's House.

So what is the message for us today in these uncertain times, when we worry if it's safe to go into shops, to meet up with loved ones, to demonstrate our love and affection for our friends and family in the shape of a long awaited hug, to wonder if there will be another spike in the virus, - the message is this:

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