

## All Age Talk at St John the Evangelist, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2017

In Gospels, Jesus often challenges us & turns our way of looking at God & the world on its head...

Today is no exception, because today Jesus presents us with 3 sets of contrasts, to help us understand better what it means to trust him & follow him. +He does it through 2 sayings, one about the wise & intelligent, and the other about finding rest (words known, traditionally, as the 'comfortable words', because they give great comfort to us. So imagine sitting back in a comfy sofa, with a cup of cocoa & your feet-up, as I read them to you again:

*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.'*

Now in a minute we're going to have a look at what that amazing saying of Jesus means & how it might speak to you. But before then we're going to have a quiz, to look at those 3 sets of contrast in our reading:

- Between 'the wise' & infants (as Jesus puts it)
- Between carrying heavy burdens & being refreshed
- Between really knowing God & not really knowing him

So I need 2 teams! You're going to be asked a few questions, and you have to decide your best answer: A or B. At the end we'll see who's got the right answer & so I truly wise....

So are you ready to play? When you've decided your answer, you need to hold up A or B.

- When Jesus says that God has revealed himself to 'infants', is it because: A. They already know everything, or B. They are willing to trust God. (B)
- When Jesus says God has hidden these things from the 'wise and intelligent', is it because: A. They already understand about God, so don't need to know more, or B. They are arrogant. (B)
- When Jesus talks about people carrying heavy burdens, is he either A. Talking about people walking long distances with heavy shopping bags, or B. Talking about other kinds of burdens, like pain or sadness or guilt? (B)
- When Jesus says that he will give rest for our souls, is this through: A. knowing the love & healing peace of God, or B. being able to have a good night's sleep? (A)
- When Jesus talks about truly 'knowing' God and revealing God to us, what is more important, either: A. Knowing all the laws about God in the Bible, or B. Having a deep friendship with God? (B)
- Bonus Question, anticipating what we're going to look at in a moment: Is the 'yoke' that Jesus refers to, either A: the yoke of an egg, or B: something worn by oxen ploughing the fields? (B)

So the question is: what does Jesus mean by God revealing himself not the wise & intelligent, but to little children? + What about all this talk of a yoke, which is easy and a burden which is light?

Now I don't know if you've ever seen a yoke - or an ox in action, with its yoke, pulling an old-fashioned plough, in order to plough the fields for planting? We don't have them in this country anymore, but they still use them in some parts of the world.

But the point about it is that it's a great big heavy piece of wood, put over the shoulders of an animal - & it's very unpleasant. So just imagine what it would feel like if you were walking along with a yoke over your back & shoulders?

In the Bible the yoke was sometimes used to describe the weight or burden of the OT law, and trying to remember & follow all its regulations (over 600 of them). +This month, the Church remembers a special day (exactly 500 years ago) when a young monk called Martin Luther, nailed a message to the door of a Church in Wittenberg - basically saying that the Church has forgotten its message, that what really matters isn't trying to remember all these complex regulations & rituals, but that (as St Paul says in Romans) we are saved by faith, which bears fruit in love. So one of the things Jesus may be saying, when he talks about the yoke, is replacing the burdens of trying to follow all laws, with simple faith in God and the one most important law of all, which is Love.

But of course this isn't the only meaning of the 'heavy burdens' that Jesus is talking about - when he refers to us being weighed down, as if we were carrying a heavy yoke (like the oxen). So what else do you think Jesus might mean by suggesting we/ people are carrying heavy burdens?

Brainstorm:

- Suffering of all different kinds
- Physical pain, sadness or stress
- The burden of looking after others
- Sin, guilt or a struggle to find God or peace

Yes, all of these things are part of the 'heavy burden' that we sometimes carry, that Jesus speaks of.

But Jesus doesn't leave it there - acknowledging the yoke, the heavy burdens that we (& many others) carry...

Jesus goes on to promise us - those who dare to believe and trust in him, and come to him in faith - REST. 'Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.'

And Jesus does something amazing, he turns the image of the yoke (which pulls the heavy plough) on its head: Jesus promises that his yoke (burden of following him, belonging to him) will be easy, his burden light: 'Take my yoke upon you' Jesus says, 'and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart... for my yoke is easy, my burden light.'

What does he mean by this? Sometimes it's good just to sit with Jesus' word and mull them over in our minds - to pray with them, and see how God speaks to us through them...

- What Jesus is promising here is that whatever our burdens (& we can't always be free from them) that He will give us rest & peace: deep within our souls

- What Jesus is saying here is that if we dare to trust in Him, to spend time with him & pray to him (not just active prayer with words, but the kind of prayer which is like laying on a deck chair on the beach with God), then he will truly refresh us
- What Jesus assures us of here is that, over time, he will free us from our anxieties & hurts & fears, and will reveal to us his deep love & friendship with us, and his complete acceptance of us.

So I wonder if we could end, briefly, as Elizabeth plays us some music, with a short time of meditation, as we listen to those words again & think about what these words of Jesus might mean to us, here & now, and how we can 'take his yoke' upon ourselves and find rest... as well as seeking to bring that rest and peace to those around us: those whom we know in need of God' rest.

*'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.'*