

Grace and Freedom – 5th July 2020

Jesus said, Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

We come, Lord Jesus, we are weary and heavily burdened and long for the rest you give.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

We come to find that rest for our souls.
Be gentle, Lord Jesus, and humble our hearts.

Let us pray,
It's hard to understand healing when so many are sick.
It's hard to understand blessing when so many are in need.
It's hard to trust when trust is so often broken.
Yet you come to us
in the midst of sickness,
in the midst of need,
in the midst of brokenness.
And you see us— you see to our very hearts.
And you love us— you love us to our core.
Take these gifts and use them for the healing of the nations.
Take our lives and use them as blessings for brokenness.
Take our hearts and fill them with your love that never ends,
As we pray together the words Christ taught us saying

I came across this story in a weekly children's worship magazine and wondered if they'd been looking through my window.

In a village in Scotland there lived a family of four children and their mum. They were doing their best to keep busy and get along well while they had to stay at home because of the Coronavirus. One day the children all got into a very grumpy mood and could not agree on what to do. Mum kept overhearing their arguments...

"Let's get the paddling pool out and have some fun!"

"No, I don't want to get soaking wet."

"You can go on the trampoline then."

"No, you might fall off and there are no ambulances, they are all too busy!"

"I don't want a noisy day and you'll all start screaming and shouting if you're in the paddling pool."

"Well, you can go inside and read your book then."

“I don’t feel like reading.”

“I think we should help mum by tidying our bedrooms.”

“My bedroom is always tidy.”

“And I like my bedroom the way it is, mum doesn’t mind the mess.”

“Why don’t we go out on our bikes?”

“My bike still has a puncture and you can’t buy repair kits just now.”

Mum listened to all the unhappy, grumpy voices until at last she went outside and sat with her four children.

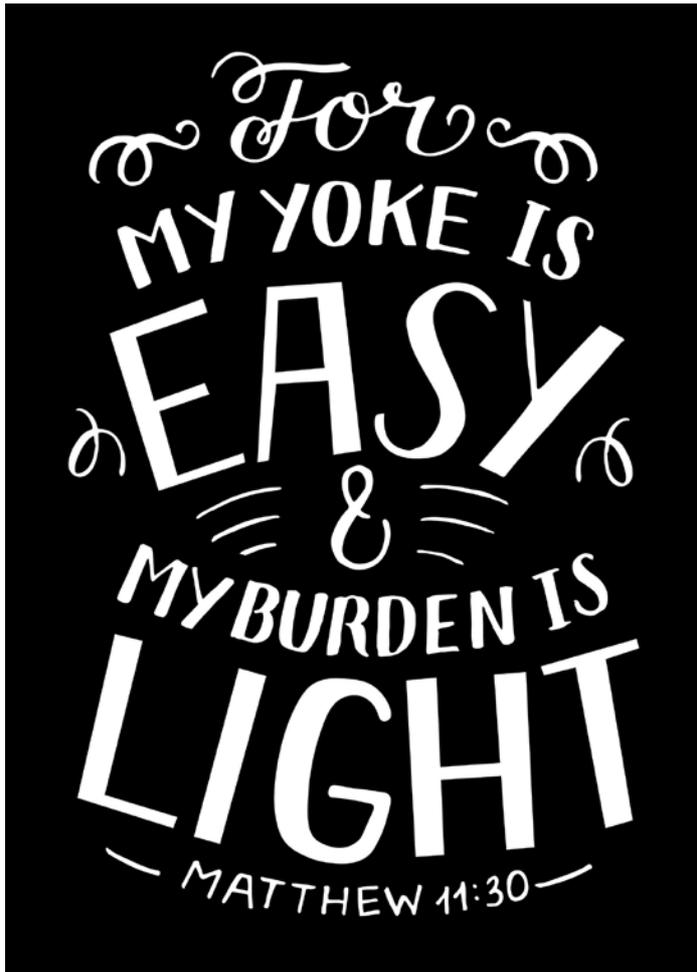
“You’re having a tough day,” she said, “you don’t know what you want to do.”

Four heads nodded slowly and sadly.

“I wonder if there’s one thing you can agree on,” said mum, with a twinkle in her eye. The children looked at her and waited. “Who wants to be arguing?”

One by one, the children smiled a little, because mum was right, nobody wanted to be arguing.

“Right. I’m going to the kitchen to start making some homemade biscuits. You can come and make some too—if you want to!”



Romans 7:15-25a

¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.^[c] For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

²¹ So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Everything is permissible but not everything is beneficial **coronavirus**

Give an inch take a mile...

Be safe stay at home protect the NHS

Someone said to me a few weeks ago I think we've dodged the bullet but I am not sure we have yet...

This is the weekend many things are beginning to open up and people are now able to travel more than five miles, to their holiday homes and caravans, and so many other places, and yet I am strangely content to stay home.

Maybe it's because I am hearing first hand what could happen if we don't keep safe,

All of the hospitals in my hometown are full.

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

¹⁶ "To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

¹⁷ "We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.'

¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.'¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by her deeds."

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶ Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

²⁷ "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.²⁹ 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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Prayer before Sermon

In the readings from Mathew over the past several weeks, I have noticed that there is a tension at work in the texts which is in many ways similar to the tension in our society at the moment, between keeping safe and protecting those who are vulnerable, and the health service, having restrictions put on what we should and should not be doing, and being free to exercise our own common sense in what we do and where we go, which is constantly under review as people are left to take personal responsibility for their actions, and not put others at risk, whilst trying to find out what is the new normal. It's a very fine line, you can't wait to see

your loved ones, and yet you may worry what the impact of this mixing of people will bring. Underlying much of the imagery in Jesus' time has been a concealed existential threat to the community into which the imagery has offered assurance.

There have been ripples of disagreement and division.
Through all of that Jesus has been offering his alternative way.

There is on the one hand tension,
and on the other hand the integrity of Jesus' ministry
which he will take all the way to the cross, and beyond.

The engineer Richard Buckminster Fuller
coined the term "tensegrity" back in the 1960s
from "tensional integrity"

to describe certain architectural forms that depend both on
elements in compression and elements in tension.

While that may not mean much to many of us,
you will no doubt have seen toys that rely on this kind
of structure.

The word can be adopted to help us reflect on the nature
both of the gospels and of life.

We find this balance whereby keeping integrity
depends on the tension in the framework
of competing elements.

There is no one simple answer to complex questions;
there is an interplay of different elements,
all vital to the integrity of the whole.

In theological terms we would describe that tense,
bonding that holds all together as Grace,
but it is an uneasy bond.

Grace is profoundly unsettling.

Regardless of our biology, biography, ideology, or theology;
Christ's promises are for us all.

Christ's challenges catch us all.

The invitation of peace and assurance of presence
does not come despite human contradiction and finitude,
but amid our wounded and beautiful lives.

As Philip Yancey says in his bestseller

What's So Amazing about grace – Grace means

There is nothing you can do to make God love you more
and nothing you can do to make God love you less.

I did a wee poll on social media asking friends
how they would define grace, here are some of their responses,
kindness and gentleness, elegance
acceptance and unmerited favour,
undeserved love, blessings, guidance and forgiveness,
God's active love, and here's an interesting one
particularly pertinent for today.

"class and empathy, an overriding concern

for your fellow human”.

Uplifting, protection, love, a swan,
a person by the name of Grace or who embodies this trait,
and here’s another one that struck me,
a gentle empathetic awareness,
being humble and compassionate.

Such Grace ends today’s gospel reading,
and that is always a good place to start.

Theologian Richard Rohr said it this way in his
2020 Easter Homily:

Unsettling Grace is the promise of Easter
and the path of Pentecost.

Grace is always free.

Grace is always humiliating to the human ego.

We just don’t like getting love for free—
and that, beloved is resurrection.

Paradox, doubt, and contradiction
are woven throughout the gospels.

The journey of faith is no different.

Be like John and you are a demon;
be like Jesus and you are a glutton or drunkard.

The kingdom is hidden from the wise and shown to the child.

My yoke is easy and my burden light.

Grace is not transactional. It is not intuitive.

Instead, as the blessing I often use says,
it urges us toward a peace that by its very nature
passes all our human understanding.

Such peace is not the absence of tension
but the presence of justice.

The “easy” yoke and “light” burden
are neither passive or parochial.

Our task is never to earn God’s love but to share that love.

Grace comes as a pure gift and presents
a persistent challenge which undoes the ego
and can transform the world.

Whether you are feeling weary burdened,

Anxious or isolated, take time to rest

As you prepare yourself for the new normal,

And whatever changes that brings for you us, for us,

I encourage you to take time to

ponder God’s undeserved gift of such grace

and give thanks for it is a welcome respite

from the politicized and polarized narratives

that dominate our consumptive media culture

of quick fixes and tribal loyalties,

of selfish motives and social quandries.

Engage in longer deeper conversations, or prayers

Be they of lament, or anger, hope or supplication.
Be bold, be strong,
Confront the inevitable in a measured way,
Safe in the knowledge that as Paul says in Corinthians,
God's grace is sufficient for all our needs,
and His power is made perfect in weakness."
Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses,
so that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Prayers for Others and Ourselves

We pray for the things that divide us, and keep us from seeing your image in the other, in the enemy, in ourselves.

We pray for the things we think unite us but actually push others away.

Move us beyond our teams, our tribes, our parties,
our definitions, and our denominations.

May those who are lost be found, and those who are captive find freedom, not in themselves or the ways of this world,

But by your grace and peace.

As we bring this time to a close,
and prepare whatever lies ahead,
Prepare us for lives of yoke sharing, burden lifting,
grace supplying, and peace proclaiming:
for you are gentle and humble of heart. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ His Son, as we seek to live our lives in truth and love through the power of the Holy Spirit at work within us, despite us, among us. Amen.