

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
05/07/2020
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Genesis 24: 34-38, 42-49,58-67	Abraham sends his servant to get a wife for his son. Isaac and Rebekah are married
Psalms 45: 10-17	A poem to the King for a wedding
Romans 7: 14-25	Sin is in the body, but Christ can overcome:
Matthew 11: 15-19, 25-30	To what can I compare this generation Come to Jesus if you are burdened

Introduction

Today I'd like to focus on the last three verses of our gospel reading.
Matthew 11: 28-30

²⁸“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

As we look at these words I'd like us to think about the fact that in Jesus we find not only the way to the next life, but also the way to live this life as God has intended us to.

Our Humanity

In these 3 verses we hear words like weary, burdened, rest and learn. These words all point to our humanity. The fact that we have bodies. Often when we think about faith, we think about it on a spiritual or on an intellectual level, and rightly so, but we cannot disconnect our bodies from our souls. What happens to our bodies very much affects our souls.

And what we do with our bodies very much affects our souls.

St Paul talks about this very clearly in the reading we've heard this morning from his letter to the Romans. He talks about really wanting to do one thing, but his sinful body doing another. I'm sure we can all probably relate to that. I'm sure we can all probably think of things that we knew weren't really right but we did them anyway. We are encouraged though at the end of the reading. At the end Paul asks – Who will rescue him? – the answer “Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!”. We also hear St Paul talk in his writings of a thorn in the flesh. Many have speculated on what this ailment was, and we don't really know. But one thing we do know is, that it was a part of Paul's life and it was something he lived with in his faith.

One of the many books on my shelf is called Embodied Holiness. It talks a bit about how we can compartmentalize our faith. One of the authors also looked at peasants from the middle ages and lamented that we couldn't recognize and live our lives more along this model. Not in a negative sense though, not suggesting that we needed to be physically poor. But rather that their Christianity was totally integrated into their life. For them their faith wasn't something they did on a Sunday, but rather it was part of and reflected in their whole life. For them, everything they did in their day was connected to the work of God.

Our bodies are who we are, and we live out our faith through our bodies. That's why I like these verses so much because Jesus promises to give us rest. Jesus cares very much about our physical bodies. But Jesus is concerned about so much more than just our physical bodies. He is concerned for our entire being

Take My Yoke

Jesus says that if we come to him, he will give us rest. But what does he say with this? – "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me."

When I was young I used to think this had something to do with the yellow bit of an egg. After all that's what a yoke is, isn't it.

I subsequently learned another meaning for the word Yoke, and what Jesus was most likely referring to. A yoke is the big wooden harness that they used to put on the oxen. It was to this that they attached the plows or carts that the oxen were to pull.

So we are to take up the big wooden harness of Jesus. This sounds very much like what Jesus says to those who would be his followers in Matthew 16:24 "They must take up their cross and follow him."

But what might it mean to take up Jesus's yoke? Firstly I think it really means that we must come under his control. The yoke was there to control the oxen in doing the work the owner wanted the oxen to do. Likewise we are to be controlled by Jesus, but not in the same sense as the oxen and its owner.

Jesus said "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me."

An oxen probably doesn't really learn anything from its owner. It just does what the owner wants. Jesus wants us to learn from him. And he goes on to say, "for I am gentle and humble in heart". From this I feel Jesus is calling us into relationship with him. To learn from someone we need to know them. We need to have a relationship with them. So this yoke of Jesus should not be seen as a controlling noose, but as a guiding hand.

The last sentence of these verses says "for my yoke is easy and my burden is light". Some people misinterpret this and think it means if we become followers of Jesus we should have an easy life in this world. We only need to look at the world to know that this is not right though. Christians still suffer and others are severely persecuted because they choose to follow Jesus. What I think is meant by this is that once we accept Jesus he allows us to leave our worldly problems with him, and no matter what happens he is there for us. We receive what is known as the Peace of God which passes all understanding.

Life and Death

Dying is a normal part of our human experience. I have always found funerals to be sad occasions, but to go to a Christian funeral, where you know the person had a strong Christian faith, is not only sad, but also wonderful. There is such an overwhelming sense of hope and reassurance that Jesus will give us rest in Him. Some secular funerals I have attended in the past really seemed to be devoid of this.

Jesus is the Way

So Jesus's call to come to him is for everyone. We answer this call by accepting Jesus into our lives, and taking his yoke upon us. By accepting what he did for us in his death on the cross and living in hope through his resurrection. We heard today though in the first part of our gospel reading Jesus saying "To what can I compare this generation". John the Baptist was rejected because he abstained. Jesus was rejected because he ate and drank. Jesus invites us to come to him and to take his yoke, but some people may still choose to reject this. As Christians we must choose to accept Jesus and his yoke upon our lives.

When I was a teenager there was a tv show called "The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy"- in the search to find the answer to the meaning of life the computer comes up with the answer. 42. The answer for us though as Christians is quite clear. The answer is Jesus.

Conclusion

Sometimes it's not easy being a Human Being, although here in Australia we have it a lot better than most in the world. But we still have our human frailties. Our propensity to turn away from God. To do what we want to do, and not what God wants us to do. (that is to sin)

We will all suffer physically at some time or other. From either accident or illness. It will also be rare if we are not let down by someone in our lives.

We also face the fact, that unless Jesus returns before it happens, we will all physically die.

To me knowing all this, having felt the Joy's that we can experience in life, but also being exposed to some of the pain, accepting these words of Jesus are of immense comfort.

²⁸"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

I hope these words can also be of comfort to you.