

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
09/07/2023
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 would like to focus on our reading from Matthew's Gospel. I would like to explore the words of Jesus, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me", and what it might mean for us to do this, and submit our lives to God.

Submission

Let's begin by looking at this idea of submitting our lives to God.

At this time in history, it seems a bit odd that we would want to submit our lives to anyone or anything else. The prevailing culture seems to say things to us like :- "do your own thing", or "look after your own interests", or "you need to be the master of your own destiny".

In light of this prevailing culture, it might seem counterintuitive, but the Christian faith tells us to submit our lives to God by accepting Jesus, and following Jesus in our lives. It tells us that it is only by first submitting to God, that we can begin to experience life in all its fullness. I believe I have experienced this in my own life, so it is not some sort of odd theory we are looking at as we seek to live out the Christian life, but rather it is, a way of life that has been handed down to us, and a way of life that traces its way back to the very first followers of Jesus.

Yoke

So, let's continue with the words of Jesus, "Take my yoke upon you".

When Jesus says these words, he isn't envisaging eggs being cracked on our heads. A yoke was a commonly used piece of farming equipment, in Jesus day. As a carpenter Jesus probably would have made and repaired yokes. A yoke was a wooden harness that was put over the necks of two oxen. This yoke was usually connected to a plough, or another type of farming implement. This yoke allowed the farmer to direct the oxen, and it enabled the two oxen to work together in the field.

By Jesus telling us to take his yoke, he is telling us to come under his control, to be directed by him, to do his will, and to do this together with other Christians.

Our Need

But why might we need to take on the Yoke of Jesus in the first place?

In the earlier verses we hear words like weary, burdened and rest. 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 was enabled to live with, through 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.

In our humanity we are designed to live in tune with God our creator. Coming under the “yoke” of Jesus allows us to do this.

In coming under the yoke of Jesus we find real peace and real comfort in the many challenges that we will inevitably face in life.

Rejecting the Yoke

Of course, all analogies ultimately break down, they are not meant to be direct examples. In the case of the “yoke and the oxen”, oxen do not choose to have a yoke. The yoke is put on them by the farmer, and at the direction of the farmer.

Jesus encourages us to take his yoke, but he doesn't force us.

Taking on the yoke of Jesus is a choice we have to make. We hear at the beginning of today's Gospel reading how some rejected "John the Baptist" because of his austere and strict lifestyle. And we hear how some rejected Jesus because he came eating and drinking with his disciples and those he met.

In our human nature we are drawn to want to do our own thing and reject God. (That is of course the definition of Sin.) But if we really want to live the best lives that God has planned for us then we will want to take on the "yoke" of Jesus in our lives.

Learning

Jesus tells us to take on his yoke, and learn from him.

Learning from Jesus is a part of the Christian way of life, as Christians we are continually learning how to follow Jesus in our lives. Becoming a Christian is a decision we have to make in our lives, but it is also a journey we are called to live into, and continue to grow into. As we continue throughout our lives, to pray, and to be immersed in the scriptures, and gather for fellowship and worship, we learn more and more about who Jesus is, and we are enabled in our lives, to be drawn closer and closer in to the "Peace of God" which passes all understanding.

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. Amen.