



FOLLOWING JESUS TOGETHER

Sunday 12th July 2020

Reading: Matthew ch11 v25-30

'Jesus the giver of Rest'

Sometimes we feel a deep tiredness in our soul, on occasion we can point to a significant reason, but often we can't. Our tiredness, or maybe better described as weariness, results from the *'piling up'* of the complexities of life and the collecting of the burdens they offload unto us. Among these are bodily frailties, emotional heartbreaks and the consequences of sin. Life can be complicated as can our attempts to really understand why and how our burdens affect us. Because our burdens are not simple, they are not relieved by simplistic platitudes, we've heard the clichés and the half-baked psychology too many times, if anything it can make us feel worse. But a simple promise can relieve a complex burden, provided we believe that the power behind the promise is complex and strong enough to relieve the heaviness.

Today we are called to remember that into our weariness, into our anxiety, into the situation that we have faced and continue to strive against together, steps the most complex power in existence speaking a promise that is as simple, hopeful, and refreshing as we could possibly ever need: ***"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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."*** The simplicity of Jesus's promise is both striking and uplifting. Jesus doesn't offer us some complicated religious formula, nor does he give us *"10 Ways to Relieve Your Weariness,"* which we pragmatic, self-help-oriented 21st century people are so drawn to. Unique to anyone else in human history, Jesus simply offers himself as the universal solution to all that burdens us. And his simple promise is bold: ***"Come to me."*** Here is the answer to those who say Jesus is nothing more than a good human teacher and moral example, what kind of moral example would say just an outrageous thing? The only way that this isn't madness is if Jesus is who he claims to be: the eternal Word made flesh, our Creator, his simple promise implying a power behind it more than sufficient to lift that which weighs us down.

So what does coming to Jesus really mean? When we read the context of his promise, in the rest of the chapter and the chapter that follows, what Jesus means becomes clear. Ch11 v20-24 Jesus rebukes the unrepentant cities, he will follow on to do the same to the religious leaders in Ch12 v1-8. The Messiah is saying that they saw first-hand his miraculous works that so clearly demonstrated who he is, yet they still refused to believe in him, what Jesus means when he says ***"come to me,"*** is ***"believe in who I claim to be and therefore what I am able to bring to pass in your life, to achieve for you what no one else could do."*** Here is where our burdened souls are tested. Will we believe in him; will we trust him? We want to rest our souls of course, but ***we*** want to do it, to have control, to fit Jesus in to ***our*** timetable and ***our*** schedule, therefore we may say *'how and when will Jesus give us rest?'*, but Jesus does not provide those details. He simply promises us that that weariness and that which burdens us will be addressed.

Jesus does not want our souls resting on the how and when, on the detail and inner workings, he wants our souls to rest ***upon him***, on the surety that he will keep his promise to us in the best way at the best time. ***"Come to me,"*** he says, in hearing that summons and thinking of Christ, we are called to do as Peter so beautifully exclaimed ***"cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you"***. Reflect

back further to Proverbs where wisdom from ages past join with the words of the earthly Jesus and cascade over the pages of our Bibles and speak into the depths of our hearts, into the uncertainty of our lives and the worry of our circumstances ***“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight”***. Surely the wonder of this truth is wrapped up so beautifully in the simple utterance of our Saviour ***“Come to me...and you will find rest for your souls.”***

These last months as so many things were taken from us, not least of all corporate worship, which as Christians is central to who we are and cannot be replaced with online material, no matter how well presented, we have been confronted by the fact that our souls only find rest in hope. That’s what we looked for when the news was bad, that’s what we looked for when we couldn’t see our families, that’s what we looked for when anxiety and worry overpowered us, that’s what we look for even now as things begin to open up again- we look for hope, for that is what we need, for without it we are lost and ruined. There are plenty of things that will claim to offer hope out there but they are false hopes for soul-rest, providing only temporary distraction from or briefly masking the effects of our burdened souls. These recent days have shown us that there is nothing the world can offer us that can truly lighten our loads. Our burdened souls only truly find rest in one place, in Psalm 62 we hear the words of David: ***“Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I shall not be shaken.”*** Jesus proclaims that he has come as our salvation, our fortress, our mighty rock, our refuge. He is the one answer to every question, concern, fear, and need we will ever have. And so he simply and comprehensively offers us himself. For as our greatest hope only comes from him, only in him will we find that great rest for our souls.

Perhaps another question lingers as you look at this passage: *“If what Jesus promises us is rest, why does he tell us to put on his yoke?”* A yoke is placed on a beast of burden in order to work. Is Jesus offering us rest or work? The answer is that in doing his work we will come to know rest. Jesus explains this in John’s Gospel when he says: ***“The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”*** Again in John we find another way of putting it, ***“Abide in me”***. Believe and abide: that really is all the work God requires of us. Faith- believing and abiding- is resting on the hopeful promises of God. That is the yoke Jesus calls us to place upon our shoulders. As we take the yolk of Christ what is actually happening is a yoke-exchange. At the cross, Jesus takes our inconceivably and unbearably heavy yoke of sin and its penalty, and offers us in exchange the easy yoke and light burden of simply trusting him. He does all the work and gives us all the rest. And his work not only fully addresses our sin problem, but also provides the supply of every other need we will ever have, as Paul says to the Christians in Philippi ***“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”*** Does that mean we will get everything we want, that things will always work out the way we want? No, but it means that we will get what ***we need*** and we are asked to trust in him who knows us better than we even know ourselves to supply us.

To add to all of this, while Jesus is not solely a good moral teacher this passage points us to him, whom we can learn from. In becoming human and dwelling among us, Jesus makes it possible for us to learn from him how to live by faith. As the author of Hebrews expresses, ***“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”*** In wake of coronavirus and all that we have faced and are still to face, hear the call to believe, abide in, and follow in the steps of Jesus, put on the light yoke, the only yoke in existence that gives us rest for our souls. Jesus’ great invitation for us to come to him, exchange yokes, and find rest is not intended for us to do in isolation. He intends for us to come to him in community, to ***come together***. As we as a church family start up our services again, while being mindful of those who still are unable to join with us, we can

proclaim to the world our shared faith in Christ and our journey with him and with one another as we follow him together. Coming to church ought not to be an act of religious habit but a desire to say to the world that you belong to Jesus and that you are part of a united expedition with those who have also heeded the call to come to him who points the way and offers rest.

We all bear burdens and become weary, but in different ways, for different reasons, and often at different times. When we are weary, we are easily discouraged and can be given to cynical unbelief. In those moments we are not the best preachers to our own souls. We need others to speak the truth to us again and help us when we falter in our following of Jesus. That's why the author to the Hebrews tells us to meet in worship and be encouraged and encouraging so that we can remember that we are in this together. So today be encouraged, if you are weary, for whatever reason, however complex, Jesus invites you to come. Come, take his light yoke of faith. Believe, abide, and follow Jesus. And you will find rest for your soul.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHURCH SERVICES

At Cregagh we want to create an environment that is both welcoming and safe. While I would actively encourage you to come back to worship, believing it safe to do so with the measures we have taken, I also want to say that no one should come to services if they have any symptoms or if they are shielding. The guidelines state that there are no restrictions on numbers as long as 2m social distance is maintained, this would therefore allow us to have two services each Sunday one at 10am, the other at 12noon, accommodating around 60 people on each occasion. This pattern would continue for three services at least- 12th, 19th and 26th July. The church doors will be opened at 9:30am and 11:30am so that folk can be guided and seated by an usher.

The service itself will be shorter than normal, around 35-40mins, consisting of prayers, readings, children's talk and sermon, for these initial three Sundays there will be no congregational singing. There will be no offering plates passed around at the service, instead there will be two stations where offerings can be placed upon leaving the building. Due to 'contact tracing' we have been instructed to keep a record of those attending services for the time being. Therefore we would ask you to register if you wish to attend by contacting Michael Graham email: michaelgraham112@gmail.com or phone: 07548635075, indicating how many are 'in your bubble' and attending with you. If you have registered and for whatever reason you or someone in your group cannot attend please contact Michael so that the register will be as accurate as possible.

Children are very welcome and encouraged to attend. Upon registering with children you may initially, for these three Sundays, be asked to sit in the gallery, please check with an usher when you arrive at church. KidZone will not take place on 12th July but we are keen to trail run its return on 19th and 26th. If you do register with children please also let Karen McCurry know email: j.k.mccurry@tinyonline.co.uk or phone: 07552606550, indicating which service and which children are attending, so that information can be sent out to you. Unfortunately Crèche will not be available over the course of the three Sundays. Over the course of the three Sundays an update, in a different format, will be sent out to members, with printed copies being made available for those who do not have internet access or who cannot attend. The services will also be recorded, being placed on our website and social media. On Monday 27th July all these procedures will be reviewed, following which, a further update will be sent out to keep you up to date with whatever changes we hope to make.

CHURCH FLOWERS

The flowers on display on Sunday 12th July are provided by Mr & Mrs A J Spence, Donaghadee and are 'In Memory'

OPEN CHURCH

The church building will be open on Fridays 10am-12noon for private prayer. A one-way system, social distancing and hygiene procedures will be in effect. The facility to drop off church envelopes is also available during this time.

PRAYER

The Prayer Link will be sent out during the month of July, if you have any prayer requests please pass them on, if you do not receive the Prayer Link but would like to via email or printed copy please let me know.

BIBLE STUDY

The Bible Study on Zoom has its final meeting on Monday evening 7pm.

FINANCIAL UPDATE

The effects of the pandemic have reached far and wide. The temporary closure of our church has been a most unfortunate and regrettable consequence. Church finances have been impacted significantly. Whilst the response of church members who have continued to provide financial support, e.g. by setting up standing orders, has been encouraging, we have experienced, nonetheless, a substantial fall in income. At the end of June, our income from freewill offering was down £5,901, compared to the same period last year, and we had a deficit in the General Account of £6,166. This deficit figure would have been greater had we not availed of funding from the Government's Job Retention Scheme.

With regard to the Building Fund, your continuing support in these unprecedented times is very much appreciated. At the end of June, income year-on-year from envelopes & standing orders was down by just over £1,000, but it is on fund-raising that we have felt the impact of lockdown most with income down by £11,000. This is evidenced by the inevitable cancellation of events such as the garden fete. However, we are continuing to meet our loan commitment to the Ulster Bank and at 30 June the balance owed was £148,481. In addition, an estimated £47,000 (incl. Vat) in contract payments remains to be paid.

As we return to church after the "lockdown", we would ask you - if you have not already done so - to do what you can to bring your WFO, Building Fund and Missions contributions up to date.

Thank you for all the support you have given to date which is very much appreciated.

Gordon Dunlop / Richard & Elaine Molyneaux

GET IN TOUCH

Please do not hesitate to get in touch

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