

Sermon - Pentecost 5 2020

“Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of 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.”

There are so many of ways to find diversion in the 21st century, but where do we find rest? A place where we can let go of all tensions and become quiet and at peace - and at a time where so many anxious thoughts gnaw at our consciousness.

There is a deep and profound hunger in the human spirit for a resolution of our doubts and conflicts, for a relief from the weight of unanswered questions, for a lifting from our shoulders the burden of unfulfilled potential.

Where do we find rest – a sense of quiet within? Many today ask, “But is this all there is? Is this as good as it gets?”

Most of us, at some stage, settle for diversions, and there are so many!

Diversions vary from old school ones such as lusting after wealth or entanglement in the game of power, running through multiple sex partners, or engaging with the sordid world of gratuitous violence and addictions.

And then there is the internet - with new and intensive versions of old distractions, like gambling - without leaving your chair. Now conspiracy theories travel like wildfire.

Other are new school - pseudo-relationships, cyber space sex and adultery; many things so dark that I will not name them here, but now readily available also from your armchair.

It is easy to become utterly lost.

Of course, that includes religious diversions. Never before have so many religions and sects been available. Religion is just another consumer product. Once again, the internet gives the illusion of a false intimacy, a sense of community which is particularly attractive in the religious context. As if the great leader is there for me. This glamorised internet style of religion then offers a false intimacy, which in the end cannot satisfy.

For many of us the absence of true community which is the hallmark of Christian worship is obvious. It is painful and its loss is acute. Our online services and other Zoom services fill a need, for which I am grateful, but they are not the same as the actual presence at worship with actual people, in the flesh.

In the recent Covid 19 lockdown I have no doubt that all of these distractions increased. Interestingly home cooking and house improvements were popular. Decluttering was a thing too. A local rubbish skip ...operator we know told us his business was best ever.

During the Lockdown we have been able to slow down, but for many of us those moments had to be filled with distraction.

We can actually spend our whole lives going from one diversion to another without finding rest.

Thankfully, into this diversionary world, one enduring voice speaks. It does not shout or bribe or seduce. There are no flashing lights, no state of the art technology, no click bait lures, no *next level* to aspire for; no *to be revealed soon* hook to keep us going.

No. It is the one who says,

“Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of 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.”

Jesus offers us rest. Rest for our total being, recuperation for our frayed psyche. He offers us a place where we can lay down our burdens, satisfy the deepest longings of the human spirit.

What Jesus calls us to discover and trust is the hidden, deep sacred reality that impinges on our lives. He invites us to find a reality which is around us though we see it not, beside us though we touch it not, within us though we know it not. Jesus asks us to enjoy that reality which cannot be probed by scientific investigation, or captured in a mathematical equation, or summed up in a theological creed, yet can be loved and trusted even by a little child.

To those who come to him, Jesus offers the secret of the “kingdom of God.” The good news of God’s ruling presence in all and through all yet above all. A kingdom of overflowing love, where sinners are recovered, rebels are forgiven, lepers are embraced, and where the lost find themselves at home.

In 1979, Bob Dylan recorded a song called *You’ve Gotta Serve Somebody*. For each of us there is some prime focus, some first priority. Someone or something to serve.

But with Jesus, this service, this yoke is light and it puts all other priorities in order.

Jesus offers us his yoke. He wanted to free the ordinary people from the heavy yokes they wore and the burdens they carried.

Why then did Jesus employ the image of yoke? Isn’t the yoke a metaphor of bondage?

Actually, paradox lies at the heart of Christian experience. Last week in the Gospel, there was such a paradox. *“He who saves his life will lose it. And he who loses his life for my sake will find it.”*

Paradoxically, by taking on the yoke of Christ, we become free. As Dylan points out there is no absolute freedom in the scheme of things. However, his yoke is the nearest thing to freedom that we shall ever experience in this life.

In the second reading for today, Paul pinpoints the problem that all human beings face.

“The good that I want to do, I fail to do. The evil I do not want to do, that I end up doing. O wretched man! Who shall rescue from this body of death? Thank God, Jesus Christ my Lord will!”

Without Christ's saving love, we can become inevitably yoked to various delusions and bondages. In this time of Covid 19 we can become overwhelmed by anxiety and fear. We can become captives. However, even in this situation we have choices. We can entrust those worries to Christ.

Jesus wants us to have life, and to have it in full abundance in all the circumstances of life. His yoke is freedom.

Diversions and distractions will never put us in touch with our truest selves. God in Christ can and will, if we accept the invitation.

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