

The first part of that gospel reading is the end of a section talking about the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist. John was in prison, imprisoned for criticising Herod who had married his brother's wife, and Jesus seems to be reflecting on the fact that whatever either he, or John, said would be misinterpreted by the crowd. "we played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge and you did not mourn. Whatever they did would be wrong for someone.

Yet, the main part of this reading, is some of the most reassuring, comforting words that Jesus spoke – and he chose to make those comments just after he had been given a hard time. It rather makes those words even more powerful.

Have you ever had one of those days where everything feels heavy? Not just physically, but mentally, emotionally—spiritually?

I can remember a time in my own life when I was probably trying to juggle too many responsibilities: work deadlines, family concerns, and the quiet, well usually quiet, pressure I put on myself to always do at least enough but actually I felt driven to do much more than just enough. I would go to bed tired, wake up tired, and carry that exhaustion everywhere.

When I look at verses 28-30 of this reading today I ask myself, 'why have you not always had these words written in big bold letters across every place where you work?'

"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."

Or to put it another way, "Come to me... and I will give you rest even if you live in a world that is exhausted."

So many people are tired—not just physically, but emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. We are surrounded by constant demands. There are deadlines to meet, bills to pay, families to care for, expectations to fulfil, and worries that often keep us awake at night.

Many people carry burdens that cannot be seen. Some carry grief. For others it can be guilt about something that has happened. Some struggle with anxiety about the future. Others feel the weight of disappointment, failure, loneliness, or regret.

I sometimes think that the remarkable thing about this world in which we live is that although our world has more technology to make life easier than ever before, many people have never felt more weary. And it is into this weary world - and particularly into our weary hearts – that Jesus speaks these wonderful words: "Come to me... and I will give you rest."

Do you know, this is one of the most gracious invitations in all of Scripture. It is not a command to achieve more, but an invitation to receive more. There is no checking up on whether we deserve help. Jesus does not first ask what we have accomplished. He simply says, "Come."

And he does all this in three ways:

First, Jesus invites the weary to come to him.

He begins: "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden." Who is invited? Not the strong. Not the successful. Not those who have everything together. He invites the weary.

The people listening to Jesus knew exactly what heavy burdens felt like. Daily life was difficult enough under Roman occupation, but many also felt crushed by religious expectations. The teachers of the law had added countless regulations that made following God feel almost impossible. Instead of bringing people closer to God, church, if you like, had become another burden to carry. Jesus says, "Come." He does not say: "Fix yourself first." "Carry your burden a little longer." "Become worthy." He simply says, "Come."

I don't know about you but there are occasionally times when life just feels too hard. And when you are feeling like that how wonderful is it when someone says, come over here, sit down, take the weight of your feet, have a cup of tea, or a glass of wine, and just chill for a bit. That is what Jesus is doing here.

And the invitation is universal. "All who labour." No one is excluded because their burden is too heavy. And let's be honest – are there not sometimes when you look at someone and think, 'that's beyond me to help' – but never would Jesus do that. Perhaps today your burden is guilt over past mistakes. Perhaps it is illness. Perhaps it is caring for someone you love. Perhaps it is uncertainty about the future. Perhaps no one else even knows what you are carrying.

Except - Jesus does.

He invites every weary heart. And that point is where it all begins. The Christian life begins with coming to Jesus —not believing facts about Him, not following a set of rules, but trusting ourselves to Him.

"Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden."

Second, Jesus can give us the rest we cannot create

That is precisely what Jesus promises: "I will give you rest." Not "I might be able to help." Not "I'll give it a go." But simply, "I will."

There is a kind of rest that sleep cannot provide. We can sometimes sleep, I don't know, maybe eight hours, and still wake up anxious. We may go off on that much needed holiday and return just as worried as when we left. External rest, or physical rest, cannot always solve internal unrest. What Jesus is speaking about is something much deeper.

He says, "You will find rest for your souls." The soul is the deepest part of who we are. Only Jesus can quiet a restless soul. This does not mean Christians never struggle. We still experience grief. We still face illness. We still encounter hardship. But we don't carry these burdens alone. And this is the point that Jesus is trying to make here. The greatest burden Jesus removes is the burden of our separation from God. This was the separation many people at that time were struggling with due to all those laws that I mentioned before, and this is the separation that Jesus was desperate to close.

Through His death and resurrection, Jesus deals with our sin and opens the way to peace with God – to closing that gap. As the Apostle Paul later writes, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. When our relationship with God is restored, everything else begins to find its proper place. That is why Christians throughout history have found peace even in prison cells, hospitals, and places of persecution. Their circumstances were difficult. But Jesus gave rest within.

"I will give you rest."

Third, Jesus calls us to walk with Him. And actually what comes next is a bit surprising. Jesus first offers rest. But then He says: "Take my yoke upon you." Is this rest? A yoke was a wooden beam placed across two animals so they could work together. At first glance, it seems like another burden. But Jesus'

point is that the yoke he is talking about is different. It is not a burden for us to carry: it is a shared burden with Jesus, and that is easy.

Why? Because it is His yoke. When we carry life on our own, every burden rests entirely upon our shoulders. When we take Jesus's yoke, we walk with Him. He bears the greater weight. Following Jesus is not about independence. It is about dependence. And don't feel bad about that – Jesus wants us to be dependent on him.

Jesus continues: "Learn from me." Notice that He does not simply give lessons. He gives, Himself. Christian discipleship is all about us learning about Jesus. It's about us watching how He lives. It's about trusting how He leads. It's about growing into His likeness. But what is Jesus really like? Well listen to what he said. "For I am gentle and humble in heart." This is one of the few places in Scripture where Jesus tells us about His own heart.

He does not first say He is powerful. Or wise. Or glorious. Although all those things are true. He says He is gentle. Humble. And that means when we approach Jesus we never approach someone who delights in condemning weary sinners. We come to One whose heart is full of compassion. How different is that from the voices we often hear today: the voices that can cause us to be weary:

The world says: "Prove yourself." Jesus says: "Come to me."

The world says: "Carry your own weight." Jesus says: "Walk with me."

The world says: "You're only valuable if you succeed." Jesus says: "You are welcome."

Imagine carrying an enormous backpack filled with stones. At first, you think you can manage. But mile after mile, the weight becomes unbearable. Then someone stronger comes alongside and says, "Give it to me." Many people would rather keep struggling than admit they need help.

Pride tells us to keep carrying the load. Faith hands it over. That is what Jesus invites us to do.

Not to pretend our burdens do not exist. Not to deny our struggles. But to entrust them to Him.

The invitation of Jesus, that invitation that he made two thousand years ago, still stands today. He does not promise a life without difficulty but He does promise His presence.

He does not promise that every burden will disappear immediately but He promises that no burden needs to be carried alone.

He does not simply offer advice but He does offer Himself.

The question is not whether Jesus is willing. The question is whether we will come. For those who have never trusted Him, His invitation is open today. For those who have walked with Him for many years, perhaps it is time to stop carrying burdens He never intended you to bear.

Let's once again listen to His wonderful words:

"Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, 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."

May we hear His invitation. May we come to Him. And may we find the true rest that only Jesus can give. Amen.