

Sermon 5 July 2026 'Come to me all who are weary.'

Philippians 4:4-4 Matthew 11:25-30

The first part of our gospel reading includes the greatest claim Jesus ever made, the claim which is at the heart of our Christian faith: *'No one truly knows the Son except my Father and no one truly knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.'* Matthew 11:27. It has a distinct echo of what Jesus says in John 14:9 – *'He who has seen me has seen the Father.'* It is the Christian conviction that in Jesus we see what God is like, and it is through Jesus that we understand what God wants us to be.

I remind you of what I said three weeks ago, when quoting from Colossians 1:15, *'Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.'* To understand the nature of God, all we have to do is take a close look at the person of Jesus. I quoted Samuel Gordon who said, *'Jesus was God spelling himself out in a language humanity could understand.'* So here we have Jesus reiterating this point.

Then we come to what is one of the most comforting and reassuring passages in the Bible: *'Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."* Every single one of us feels the burdens of life from time to time; we cannot escape them. I have absolutely no doubt that there are many of us gathered here this morning who are feeling something of that weight. Jesus is telling us that he is there to help and that we shouldn't forget that. He invites us to take his yoke upon our shoulders. So, firstly, let's have a quick look at just what a yoke is.

As you probably know, a yoke fits across the shoulders of an ox, or oxen, and so enables them to haul a plough, a cart or something similar. Whatever it is, it is a burden. Jesus says, *'My yoke is easy.'* The word 'easy' in Greek is *chrestos*, which can mean 'well-fitting.'

In Palestine, yokes were made of wood. Measurements were made of the ox, the first shaping of the yoke was made, and then the fitting was made on the ox. The yoke was then carefully finished so that it would fit well on the shoulders of the ox and not cause chaffing.

There is a legend that Jesus made the best yokes in the whole of Galilee, and so he was using an image with which he was very familiar. And he is telling us that if we can put ourselves in his hands, he will enable us to carry, to deal with those burdens that life invariably brings our way. It is a message of comfort, it is a message of reassurance, it is a message of hope.

It does require a degree of faith on our part. In fact, I would go so far as to say that if we are really struggling with the pressures and the burdens of life, then it requires a significant degree of faith. We probably tend to focus on how we are feeling and on what is causing us to feel that way, rather than have the confidence to hand it all over to God there and then.

I remind you of the experience of Martin Luther King which he relates in his book, *'Stride towards Freedom.'* I quote: *'One night I settled into bed after a strenuous day. Coretta (his wife) has fallen asleep and just as I was about to dose off, the phone rang. An angry voice said, "Listen you (a couple of rather derogatory words followed by the N word), we've taken all we want to take from you; before next week, you'll be sorry you ever came to Montgomerie."*

I hung up, I could not sleep. I had reached saturation point. I got out of bed and began to walk the floor. Finally, I went to the kitchen and heated a pot of coffee. I was ready to give up. With my cup of coffee sitting untouched before me, I tried to think of a way to move out of the picture without appearing a coward. In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had all but gone, I decided to take my problem to God. With my head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud. The words I spoke to God are still vivid in my memory.

"God, I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone." At that moment, I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced him before.'

The rest, of course, is history. Martin Luther King, despite his greatness, was a very fallible human being, as are we all. He had his weaknesses and he had his doubts, but he had faith, and it was through this faith that he was able to metaphorically prostrate himself before God and ask him for help, and God met him in his despair and his stress.

I quote from our first reading, *'Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace.'* Philippians 4:6.

I want to finish by making this point. When things are not going our way, when life seems to be throwing us one curve ball after another, it is not easy to remain positive, and that can include our relationship with God. I know that, I can relate to that. I have spoken before about getting a little angry with God; that's ok, that's very human. The most important thing is that we need to hang in there, we need to persevere. Nothing good is achieved without perseverance, and that includes our relationship with God. He is on our side, and we need to have the confidence, the faith to put our trust in him.

These words I read in Word for Today quite some time ago: 'God is in control, he is bigger than whatever you're dealing with, and you're on his mind this very moment. Your tears, your fears and your pain have been noticed by him – and he will move on your behalf.'

I quote from Psalm 30:5 – *'Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes in the morning.'* In other words, this attack, this struggle won't last forever – morning is coming!

One final observation: partaking in prayer is a very positive thing to do. It demonstrates faith, it demonstrates that we are willing and able to do something to address whatever challenge we are facing. When confronted with a challenge we need to have the mindset of David as he faced Goliath. He didn't say to himself, 'Oh my goodness, he is so big, I can't possibly overcome him.' On the contrary, he said to himself, 'Oh my goodness, he is so big, I can't possibly miss him!'

We should think of prayer as our slingshot as we face up to whatever giant of a challenge we are confronted with.