

Everyone needs rest



St Nicholas Church Sighthill

5th July 2020

God is good... all the time

Call to worship/ Opening Prayer

This Sunday (5 July), Christians across Scotland will once again join together in the call to worship and prayer below, at 7pm in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Rev Dr Martin Fair, the Moderator of the General Assembly invites us all join with brothers and sisters from across the nation to pray our way through this ongoing crisis. He commends to us the call to worship and prayer below and looks forward to being with us, in Spirit, on Sunday evening.

'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.'
Matthew 11: 28 (NRSV)

These are words of Jesus that we all need to hear. We need to hear these words because they speak into the depths of the experience of so many of us at this time. The words create a picture in the mind's eye. The picture is of ourselves in the times when we are indeed weary and burdened by the particular loads that we have to bear.

Alongside this, the picture is of the One who offers to us rest. The picture is of human need met by divine promise and finds its context in the affirmation that Jesus is the One who knows the Father and holds in God's trust all that has been committed to him. He holds our lives in His keeping and offers renewal to those who seek his presence. Wherever we are and whatever our load, the promise of Jesus is that we will find His renewing presence. We pray:

Lord, we come to you as we are, for we can come no other way. We come acknowledging the burdens we carry and trusting in your promise of rest.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

Lord, we come to you in the sure knowledge that we are not alone. We come in the company of all who know the challenge of these days.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

Lord, we come to you acknowledging that you have already come to us. We journey to the place where you are to be found and rediscover that you have always been with us.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

Lord, we come to you as the One who knows our past and sees our present. Set us free from that which binds us to our past. Liberate us to serve you in the present.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

Lord, we come to you through the One who is the same, yesterday, today and forever. May He hold our lives safe as we embrace the future and the promise of His rest.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Matthew 6: 9-13 (NKJV)

Bible Reading: Matthew 11: 25-30

Come to Me and Rest

At that time Jesus said, "Father, Lord of heaven and earth! I thank you because you have shown to the unlearned what you have hidden from the wise and learned. Yes, Father, this was how you were pleased to have it happen. "My Father has given me all things. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. "Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. **Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me**, because I am gentle and humble in spirit; and you will find rest. **For the yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light."**

Reflection

“For the yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light” (Matthew 11:30).

Most, if not all of us know the poem called, ‘Footprints in the Sand’ written by Mary Stevenson. Here are the second and third stanzas of this beautiful poem.

“After the last scene of my life flashed before me,
I looked back at the footprints in the sand....
I noticed that at many times along the path of life,
especially at the very lowest and saddest times,
there was only one set of footprints....

This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it....
He whispered, My precious child,
I love you and will never leave you
Never, ever, during your trials and testings.
When you saw only one set of footprints,
It was then that I carried you.”

Leona Lewis helped to bring this poem back to our screens in 2007, when she remodelled it as a touching tribute to people who have been an inspiration for others. I like this poem because it helps to remind me and many others that our Heavenly Father is never far away. **He’s always with us. Always.** I know it for a fact and it is one of the many reasons I say our ‘God is a good – all the time’. I have been blessed by God’s unfailing and empowering presence in my journey of faith with Him, especially during those early years of my life, as kid growing up with a single Mum, in the slums (Ghettos!) of Kampala City. I was always grateful, during my times of trouble and great need to be reminded, not only that I was never alone, but also that my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ stretched His wounded hands out to me and my mother and young brother every day saying, ***“Come unto me, because you are tired and are carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit; and you will find rest. For the yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light”.*** I understood Jesus’ yoke to mean His hand around my neck, granting me freedom from everyone and everything that burdened me. Christ’s invitation and the promise therein of rest (or better still, of a peace of mind) gave me (and still gives me) tremendous encouragement, reassurance, strength and hope.

As another preacher noted, “as our nation and world battle COVID-19, and as we continue to hear the troubling news about the infections and the virus-related deaths, our minds need this rest, this peace, this quietness, now more than ever. When our minds are inflamed – when they experience an escalation of intense emotions like fear or anger, we cannot hear what 1 Kings 19:12 calls the Spirit’s ‘still small voice’. All the ‘noise’ will drown out any chance we have to hear a calming voice of the Spirit on the inside of us. All we want is a form of rest Mary Stevenson describes well in her poem as the **Father’s steps carrying us - as He whispers in our ears, ‘Peace. Be still.**

Notice that Jesus uses the word ‘yoke’ to describe the peace of mind He gives freely to all who ask. This does not mean He wanted to

replace one form of yoke (burden) with another. His hearers understood Him and appreciated His offer of an easy yoke and light load. They knew the word yoke meant ‘to bind’. A yoke was a wooden frame placed on the backs of oxen to make them pull in tandem – to yoke them together. Often, a younger ox was yoked to an older and more experienced ox so he could learn quickly how to plough well.

So, by using this word yoke, Jesus was, in effect, teaching that He is the elder ox and we, His followers, are still ‘wet behind the ears’. He invites us to come to Him, to ‘yoke ourselves to Him’ and to allow Him to teach us how to live as sons and daughters of God. He wants to draw alongside us in our good and bad times, in our troubles, in our struggles, in our questioning, in our fears, in our pain and in our dreams. He comes along alongside us as the elder ox – meeting us all at our points of need. When He says, take my yoke, He is essentially asking to you and me, to take His hand. It is light. With Jesus by our side, we can never walk alone. We were never created to live life alone – without God, family and friends.

Prayer for others

We pray for the things that divide us, and keep us from seeing your image in the other, in the enemy, in ourselves.

We pray for the things we think unite us but push others away. Move us beyond our boundaries, our ‘tribes’, our definitions, our teams, our denominations and our parties

Prepare us for lives of yoke sharing, burden lifting, grace proclaiming, and peace breathing: for your yoke is easy and you are gentle and humble of heart. Amen

Closing Song: This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rn9uJ5ayWVk>

♫ This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. ♪
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.
♫ This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, ♪
let it shine, let it shine, oh let it shine. ♪

Final blessings

May the LORD bless you and protect you. May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord show you His favour and give you His peace. Amen

