

Today's passage has had me falling to my knees..mentally, clearly not physically!

In the beginning of this 11th chapter of Matthew, after publically rebuking Herod's flagrant sin in an illegal marriage, John the Baptist had been arrested and was in prison. He had doubts about who Jesus was.

Was he really the Messiah?

John sent his followers to ask Jesus; who reassures him with evidence of his healing acts and thus His sovereignty.

You can understand John's concern. Especially as John and Jesus' ministry was so very different.

And it certainly confused and angered the authorities.

John was seen as a religious fanatic and Jesus as a libertine, a free thinker, and a person blatantly disrespecting the scribes and Pharisees. They were expecting someone like themselves. Steeped in the law and sticking to the rules.

But Jesus was wondering around with a disparate group of followers, mixing with tax collectors, women of ill repute, the poor and diseased. And healing on the Sabbath, Partying and enjoying peoples, all sorts of peoples, company. Shocking and challenging all of them.

I can hear in these verses Jesus' irritation and exasperation.

John and Jesus are being seen from a blinkered view. They are misunderstood because they are unexpected.

It may be a lesson for us; do we suppose that God works primarily, or even exclusively in those who look and behave like ourselves?

In John and Jesus we see that God is at work in both.

They are very different; different ministries and lifestyles.

I find it so very encouraging to look at this passage and remind myself of God's generosity, who meets human diversity with divine diversity.

One person cannot effectively speak to all. We need to recognise and value each other's gifts and abilities .Different voices for different ears and different needs.

I am proud and honoured to be part of a preaching team with such a great selection of approaches and understanding.

We all have something unique to offer. Whether up at the front or quietly behind the scenes.

There is more than one way to the great end that is God.

I would love us all to take some time to consider each other through Gods eyes and recognise each person's value in our church family.

Let's look at these familiar words in verses 28-30

*'Come to me all 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.'*

In his book 'The Velvet Elvis', Rob Bell talks about the Bible being open-ended. It has to be interpreted; what it means at this time, in this place, for these people.

It is Jewish tradition to debate and discuss scripture and the law. A Rabbis set of rules and lists derived from their own particular interpretation of how to live the Torah, and was called the Rabbis Yoke.

Following a certain rabbi meant you believed that rabbis set of interpretations were closest to what God intended through the scriptures.

When you followed that rabbi, you were taking up that rabbis yoke!

I got very excited when I discovered this.

Of course, for those working the land, these words were familiar; a yoke is a wooden bar or frame fitted across the neck of two oxen so they could carry a plough through the fields. Or on the shoulders of a human as they carry objects, like buckets of water. A yoke imposed a measure of control on the animals. It produced a level of suffering but was also responsible in accomplishing many tasks.

Neither animal was free to go in its own direction because its bond to the other animal served as a constraint.

Many of us are carrying really heavy yokes.

Burdens that weigh us down and limit us. They may be addictions, responsibilities and worries.

They are actually chaining us up and we are carrying them on our own.

Let Jesus free you from those burdens.

To follow Jesus, to follow our Rabbi and take his yoke, to believe His teaching. To trust Him; We become joined with him.

That means we are not alone.

He is with us every step of the way.

And some of it is difficult, but with Christ we are free of bearing the weight on our own.

We focus on Him, we live in his presence, listen for his voice. And learn from Him by watching and imitating, like an apprentice.

He is also calling us to the living community of his body, the church.

Not the building but the people. To live for one another and care for one another.

Jesus invites us to be yoked with Him.

We get to choose.

*'Let your heart love like mine. Let your mind be filled with the same concerns as mine.
Let your feet walk in step with mine. Let your hands touch the world like mine. Let your
eyes see the Father like mine. Live and move in tandem with me, as one, and you will find
rest for your soul.'*

Jesus does not ask us to work and live alone.
We are a team with Him.
We are not alone.
Praise God.

Let's pray,

Thank you Father that you created us uniquely different.
Help us to embrace the diversity and value each other.
Most of all we want to be with you.
To be in your presence and yoked with you.
We want to experience that rest you promise.
Your love, healing and peace.

Amen

Gilly Robinson, 9 July 2023