

King's College London Chapel



A sermon on Isaiah 40:25-31 and Matthew 11:28-30,

by Alli McKelvey

in the College Chapel on the Strand,

on Wednesday 7 December 2022

May I speak in the name of God: Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Amen

I don't know about you but I'm tired. I'm sure this is related to the end of term and all the stresses that come along with the preparations for Christmas but I'm pretty drained. And that's ok, at one time or another we've all been there. Especially as we head towards the end of the year and things feel like they should be winding down but actually we somehow seem to have more obligations than ever? Christmas parties, deadlines, family commitments, and this is all before we take into account our day-to-day usual commitments. Rest is something that all of us probably struggle with. Although our bodies tell us that we need it, we have unending lists of things to accomplish, people to please, deadlines to meet and have to cope with other's and our own expectations of what we should be doing. Often these burdens that we carry can't be relieved with simple platitudes or just by taking a couple of days holiday. The busyness and the weariness always seem to return.

Jesus knew this busyness that we experience all too well. People often crowded around him, they wanted a part of what he offered – healing, hope, restoration, forgiveness, life. And he never turned any of them away.

Nonetheless, He did know the importance of rest. After days of this he would go away to a lonely place, to pray, to be with his Father, to rest. Jesus extends this invitation to us to sit alongside him “come to me and I will give you rest”.

God calls us to be near to him, to lead us beside restful waters. As St Augustine wrote in Confessions “you have made us for yourself O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you”. God has made us, knowing and fully accepting our limitations as human beings. We need only dwell with him who is the creator, the one who names and numbers the stars, to find rest which the world cannot provide.

In today's Gospel reading Jesus uses imagery that seems quite unusual to us. He speaks of a yoke which is a strong wooden bar placed between two oxen joining them together in order to pull a cart or plough a field. And Jesus was a carpenter, so he probably made a fair few yokes in his time.

The people to whom Jesus was speaking were heavily burdened by the yoke of the oppressive Roman regime they were living under. This added with the behaviour of certain Scribes and Pharisees who had misinterpreted the Old Testament law to be something where the people were hardly allowed to put a foot wrong must have made life overwhelming and God seem far away. Religion had turned into a burden.

I suppose this isn't too dissimilar to how Christianity is often misrepresented. When I was growing up, before I became a Christian, I thought that Christianity was just a whole list of does and don'ts, that it was a control mechanism.

However, Jesus now promises to share his yoke with us, to carry it with us, taking most of the weight. We no longer have to go it alone, struggling and getting stuck, often finding that we are actually unable to take the load. Jesus invites us alongside him, renewing our strength, to join and partner with him, to share our burden – to be that which we cannot be on our own.

Hearing this is such a relief. Knowing that we do not have to do everything by our own strength but rather can find comfort in God, a God who does not “faint or grow weary”, allows us to admit that not everything is in our control, to lay our burdens down. We can let Jesus take the strain, knowing that he delights in this and rejoices when we trust him to uphold us in our darkest times.

Nevertheless, Jesus does not promise to take away the pain that we experience in life. Part of being human means facing hardship and loss, and the Christian life doesn't provide a cure for that. A life without pain, without any failure or disappointment, a life without challenge or difficulty, would be no life at all. What Jesus does do is help us go through the pain. He knows what we go through, and he suffers alongside us in everything.

In Jesus we find the perfect worker – God in flesh. He is gentle and humble in heart. He wants people who are suffering and weary to know that he is not some cold supervisor, making notes on how we perform or whether we do the

right things all the time, but rather an ever-present friend. He never looks at us with condemnation or frustration but rather compassion. He wants to enter into the messiness of our lives and to be our strength when we find we have little of our own. He wants to give us rest. Let us rejoice in this opportunity for rest.

There is something freeing in admitting that we do not have nor have to have control over everything. And this rest is just a foretaste of what we have to come. Eventually we will find that perfect rest that comes when God restores all things.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Amen.