

Rest for the Weary and Burdened

Matthew 11: 28

Sunday 6 July 2008
Church of the Ascension, Hilton
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Unusually for me this morning, I will focus on a single verse instead of the full Gospel reading for the day (Matthew 11: 25-30). I realise it leaves out a lot, including explaining some of Jesus' analogies regarding being yoked, and also Paul's words about sin in his Letter to the Romans (NT Reading Romans 7: 14-25a) although I will refer to that, but having preached on these passages before, I decided to do something more focussed along this line...

What makes you weary or burdened?

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treading in the sea of stress  
    my bones  
    fall asleep  
    as i put in my time  
    at work;

    my eyes glaze over  
    as i stare  
    at the demands  
    of my (computer) "palm pilot";

    my brain rebels  
    at storing  
        one more event,  
        one more task,  
        one more meeting;

too tired  
to be tired  
    i yearn:

to hear  
your invitation  
of rest,

to be yoked  
to your healing love,

to lie down  
in shalom's caress.

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What makes you weary, burdened?

Consider quietly for a few moments... [a minute of quiet]

Allow me to tell you a few of my thoughts, considered during the week:

- There is a good or acceptable weariness, such as following a normal, tiring day nevertheless with the satisfaction of a good day's work
- Exercise – feels great! Also an OK weariness
- Weariness for me comes with the sense of unrelenting tasks, never quite finished with everything; burdensome – Not OK
- Aspects of my work as a parish priest and the things I deal with, such as the sudden death last week of Peter Barnard – even for me outside the family and circle of close friends, nevertheless sudden, sad, shock to the family and community, loss to the parish, and involving preparations for a good funeral
- Economic issues we all deal with including household budgeting under pressure, national political issues, church issues – concerns, fears for the future
- Sometimes personal issues or frustrations wear one down; failure to be the sort of person you would like to be
- Relate to the words of St Paul – “the good I would do, I do not, and the bad I do not want to do, I do...” – which includes an awareness of sinfulness and failings, as a person, a husband, a father, a priest, a disciple of Christ; I know I am not perfect

Consider some responses:

Jesus' invitation to the weary and burdened presumably did not deal directly with “acceptable tiredness” but I have mentioned this for one reason:

At the end of a tiring day, we “retire”. That is good and sobering – it reminds us that we are not super heroes or little gods and that we need to replenish our energy. God designed us like that. It includes replenishing spiritual energy. Get the “batteries recharged” / Time away – read, reflect, retreat...

I only half joke when I refer to my Sunday afternoon snooze as “part of my religion”. In fact, it is “holy rest”! [I'm sure that one of my dominant genes is the “Greek siesta” gene ☺]

The parish hike to the Drakensberg last weekend – good for recharging in every way. Share the poem that we had as one of our meditations:

### **The Peace of Wild Things**

*[From "Collected Poems" of Wendell Berry, as quoted by Philip Yancey in the book "Prayer"]*

When despair grows in me  
 And I wake in the middle of the night at the least sound  
 In fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
 I go and lie down where the wood drake  
 Rests in his beauty on the water,  
 And the great heron feeds.  
 I come into the peace of wild things  
 Who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief  
 I come into the presence of still water  
 And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with their light.  
 For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and am free

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What about the bigger matters, those that are not dealt with in just a siesta or a day off?

I do not expect to experience complete Shalom in this life, due to sin and human imperfections. Hebrew word Shalom: Much wider sense than the word peace in English; includes, broadly, a state of peace and tranquillity and well-being and satisfaction that all is as it should be in God's scheme of things

If Paul battled in some areas, I will too. It does not help me to bash myself on the head – nor on my heart and soul.

Yet Jesus issued this call:

"Come to me all who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Those words can evoke an intense longing. Jesus is not promising to lift the burden of ordinary responsibilities and daily life from us. He is speaking of the burdens of trying to live up to our own demands, of trying to restrain our sinful desires, of the burden of trying to make us into better people through own will and determination.

(As a commentator wrote – summarized by me)

The idea that we are unable to follow through on our own good intentions because we are under the control of sin is not some hyped up spiritual idea. What Paul is saying is no different to the experience of smokers who have good intentions of giving up but find themselves unable to overcome the cravings. It is no different from the businessmen and women who have good intentions of spending more relaxed hours with their family but find themselves unable to overcome their own and others' expectations and so continue to work more than seventy hours a week. It is no different from many of us who have good intentions of simplifying our lifestyles and consuming less...

Come to Jesus? How do we do that?

Primary response to God and to Jesus

Prayer [– elaborate]

Way of living, a sense of “connectedness to God”

Times out to “recharge” – including prayer, worship, being part of the worship and other activities of our church that enable us to connect with Jesus, to focus on Jesus, that stimulate prayer and reflection; that help us in our relationship to Jesus; also spiritual reading; conversation with others

Rest? When the subject is discussed in the NT Letter to the Hebrews, it refers to the wandering Israelites in the desert, seeking “God’s rest” – Shalom – as well as the future rest that will come when all human striving ceases and we enter the fullness of God’s Kingdom. More than just resting weary bones, but a “state of rest” – and the assurance of ultimate salvation offered by God

In conclusion:

Prayer

[Adapted from a longer Communion Prayer,
Thom Shuman, 2008]

Compassionate Creator

At the first moment of time

You drew from the deep wells of gentleness and goodness

You wandered the fields,

Planting the seeds, which blossomed into rainbows of
beauty

You walked in evening's coolness, scattering the stars
and moons into the deep blue-black skies.

All that you made was given to us

That we might eat, drink, and dance with you forever.

But we did not understand all the blessing you offered,

Choosing to sit in sin's marketplace,

As death played it's mournful tunes for us.

You offered us rest from our wandering ways,

Whispering to our souls through the prophets' heartaches.

When we could not, or would not, turn back to you,

You sent Jesus to rescue us from ourselves.

So, with every generation before us,

With all who will come after us,

We lift our voices in praise to you

Holy are you, God of every moment,
And blessed is Jesus Christ, Saviour of all.
He humbled himself to come to us, to lead us back to you.

Yoked with your heart, he came to bear our burdens,
So we might find rest in your hope and healing.
Fed by your love, he came to eat and drink with all the
outsiders, so we might dance forever in your kingdom of
love.

Embraced by your gracious will, he handed himself over to
death, carrying the heavy burden of our sins, so the joy
of resurrection might be revealed to us.

We are gathered to remember his life, his death, his
rising
When the last moment of time has come,
And creation is restored to goodness and beauty,
We will sit at the Heavenly Banqueting Table
With all the sinners and saints,
With all the winners and losers,
With all our sisters and brothers,
Celebrating your peace and joy forever and ever, Amen

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