

Haverhill Methodist Church – Worship at Home
Sunday 5th July 2020

Welcome Message – Revd. Peter Goodhall

This week we passed the 100-day milestone since lockdown began. Today we are reminded of the length of the uphill journey so far, any tiredness and burdens we might bear and the gracious invitation of our Lord Jesus Christ to take his yoke and find his promised rest.

Hymn/song

Opening Prayer

At this time, Lord, we seek to approach you, but we forget it is you who first approaches us. You come to us with your gospel of salvation. In our world of troubles and cares you come to us and invite us to be yoked to you. You walk with us and share our burdens. Lord, we seek to move ever closer to you: come to meet us we pray in our worship. Lift our burdens of sin, shame and sorrow. You are our pacesetter. May we learn your refreshing and restful way. **Amen.**

Read Psalm 145 verses 8-14 and
Matthew Chapter 11 verses 28-30

Hymn/song

Sermon

Let us take time to sit with and unpack this wonderful promise. There are four features to this gracious invitation of our Lord to you today. The first feature of this invitation of the living Lord Jesus is: 'Come to Me'. Jesus has got our attention. He is gently speaking directly to you. He is calling to you 'Come to me'. Are you listening? Where are you in relation to Jesus today? Are you close to Jesus or are you social distancing from him? Because of pride, independence or fear are you keeping Jesus at a distance? Jesus says 'Come to me'. He doesn't need to shout it. He can whisper it to your heart. He is closer than you think.

How shall we come to Jesus? Not with pride or self-reliance but in humility like a beggar seeking refuge and nourishment.

We come to Jesus aware of our need for divine help.

Jesus says 'Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden'.

'Come to me all who are weary and over-burdened'. Is that you today? What weighs heavy on your heart and mind today?

What drains your energy? Name your burdens before God.

To some extent we are still under the yoke of lockdown restrictions.

For the common good, we take heed of rules and regulations.

There is a parallel here with Jesus' audience who were under the rule of strict external religious laws. As the Message version puts it – those who were 'burned out on religion'. This current crisis brings its own particular burdens. We are a labouring and burdened humanity. Some risk a burnout and others risk a fizzle out.

I don't know about you but there have been times over these past 100 days when I have felt the weight of lockdown. Of course there have been times when I have found refreshment in the change of pace and routine and for this I am thankful. But there are times when it's hard going and I feel the world is closing in on me.

Then I feel heaviness inside and I worry about the future.

Then I might sense a burden of guilt as I remember there are others whose burden is far heavier than mine.

Some burdens we put upon ourselves.

In these times I must remember the Lord is near and listen for the call of Jesus 'Come to me' or 'Come back to me'.

Do you need to listen for his voice today?

Let us put aside our self-reliance.

Let us not plough on defiantly into another week. Let us stop.

Let us listen. Together let us hear the gentle call 'Come to me'.

How can we refuse him? How can we live without him in these troubled times and anxious days?

The second feature of this invitation from Jesus is 'Rest in me'.

When we come to Jesus he promises to give us rest.

'Rest' here means a pause, a breathing space, and a respite.

Jesus says 'I am your oasis in the desert'. Drink in His living water.

Jesus says 'Come to me and I will refresh your life'.

So will you rest in the Lord today?

Let him untie the burden from your back. Let him lift your burden.

He alone is qualified to bring us the rest we desperately need.

Being fully human, Jesus understands. He's been there.

Being fully God, Jesus is able to save us and carry us.

I came across the following questions and responses:

Do you feel that you don't know what to say?

Jesus says I am the Word.

Do you feel that you no longer understand the world?

Jesus says I was there when the world was formed.

Does each step feel as though you are wading through mud?

Jesus says I, too, have walked on this earth.

Do you feel that everything goes against you?

Jesus says I, too, have been condemned.

Do you feel the weight of life getting too much?

Jesus says I carried my cross for you.

So today 'Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you' (1 Peter 5v7) Rest in the Lord. Rest in his unchanging love for you. The third feature of this invitation from Jesus is 'Take from me'. Jesus says 'Take my yoke upon you'. Let's think about this word yoke. A yoke is a shaped wooden beam that would be laid on the necks of a pair of animals such as oxen or horses. The yoke would help them to pull a heavy load together in unison. So when Jesus says take my yoke upon you he is saying in effect 'Join your life with mine'. 'Walk with me. Not as a lowly beast but as my friend. My yoke is easy – or well-fitting - and my burden is light'. The burden is light because he bears it with us. Jesus helps us to bear things we could never bear alone in our own strength. Jesus doesn't offer us a laid back life of inactivity, nor freedom from struggle or responsibility. We each have our burden to bear. We take our share of the load. But we bear it with Christ and so we will not be crushed. Will you humbly bow to take his yoke upon you today?

The fourth and final feature of this invitation from Jesus is "Learn from me". As a global community we are learning a lot through the experience of these past 100 days. We are learning a lot about ourselves. We are learning a lot about our mortality and the fragility of life. We are learning a lot about the nature of church and community. We are learning how to respect one another and how to be a good neighbour. I hope we are learning a lot about our belief in God. What has these past 100 days taught you? Today, Jesus says 'Learn from me'. He is your master and your teacher. We are his pupils. We can learn so much from Jesus as we walk with him and seek to follow his example. He is gentle. So we must learn to be gentle with others and ourselves. He is lowly in heart.

So we must learn humility. Let Jesus lead you and teach you.
He sets the standard and he sets the pace.
We give thanks for the gracious invitation of our Lord to us today.
Let us each receive his word and respond in obedience.
Jesus says to you today 'Come to me' – will you come?
Jesus says to you today 'Rest in me' – pause and find rest in the Lord.
Jesus says to you today 'Take from me' – take his tailor-made yoke upon you.
Jesus says to you today 'Learn from me' – there is no greater teacher.
May our Lord Jesus bring to your life all that He is, as you give to Him all that you have and are. God bless you and keep you.

Hymn/song

Personal Prayer of Response

Lord, we like to think of ourselves as self-reliant; we don't need anybody's help. Though the furrow be long and the going tough, we will plough it alone. That is what is admired in this world, Lord: pride and self-sufficiency, never giving in. But you see that this is the way of slavery: you offer us a different yoke, and we confess that we barely understand it, for your yoke is light and easy, a balm to our shoulders and a lightening of our load. We confess the need of your help, your guidance, and we fall into step with you.

Amen.

Hymn/song

Prayers for Others

We pray for those who carry burdens today:
For those whose burden is responsibility; those in government or elected to office. Bring wisdom and a heart for servant leadership.
For church congregations everywhere and our own church family.
Bring your exiled people home we pray.
For those who plough a lonely furrow.
Bring friendship and strength we pray.
For key workers and carers whose duties would overload them.
Bring support and refreshment we pray.

For those bowed down with the weight of keeping family together.
Bring rest and reassurance we pray.
For those bearing the weight of illness or suffering.
Bring healing and wholeness we pray.
For those whose hearts are heavy with grief and loss.
Bring comfort and deep peace we pray.
For those who carry a burden of guilt.
Bring release and forgiveness we pray.
For ourselves and the needs closest to home.
Keep us in step with Jesus Christ, that side by side
and stride by stride, we may journey on together. **Amen.**
Unite your prayers with the whole church as you pray
The Lord's Prayer. 'Our Father...'

Hymn/song

The Blessing

We offer our lives and our gifts to the Lord.
Lord, you shoulder our burdens and ease our heavy hearts.
Give us the strength to carry each other as you have carried us.
Teach us to take up his gentle yoke and find rest from our burdens
and cares. May God your Creator, Saviour and Friend keep you,
guide you and sustain you to live in love and grace this day and
forever. **Amen.**

Coffee Time Conversation

- What troubles or worries weigh you down?
- What helps you to find rest when these things tire you out?
- This week, how might you help others who carry heavy burdens?

Suggested Hymns and Songs

More Traditional Music:

Dear Lord & Father of mankind

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WqOnjmr9Ah0>

I heard the voice of Jesus say

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUVCpF8-VuE>

Jesus lover of my soul

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFaiiPv-Q6l>

More Contemporary Music:

To be in your presence

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=typ7cueKdT4>

All I once held dear

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxpPla-BskY>

Lord I come to you

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ga6Qtxzd6vk>

Keep social distancing. Keep safe. Keep communicating.

Keep abiding in Christ.

God bless you and keep you until we meet again.

You are missed!

My prayers are with you.

With love,

Peter