

## “Come to me”

Bible reference Matthew 11: 25-30

*28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

Let's pray. Loving Lord Jesus, help us now to hear your voice and your invitation to come to you when we are weary and burdened. Help us to find true rest and peace in you. Amen.

I've had recent experiences of my mind racing uncomfortably, uncontrollably in relation to matters of health and wellbeing for me and loved ones. At these times when my mind raced I felt I had no peace nor could I rest. I was all over the place.

Does your mind sometimes race?

Do you sometimes have great fears, anxieties, concerns, struggles - even anger for which there seems to be no peace and no rest?

The apostle Paul's mind is racing when he struggles with the reality that he continues to sin even though he doesn't want to. He gets so tangled up in his despair over his continuing sinning:

*15 I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. 17 But in fact it is no longer I who do it but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that the good does not dwell within me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do the good lies close at hand, but not the ability. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it but sin that dwells within me.*

### **What a wretched person I am! Who will rescue me?**

In the context of Matthew's gospel today, the disciples of Jesus are under the pump like Jesus himself (and John the Baptist earlier in the chapter). This is the same for Jewish Christians who had come to faith in Jesus and were being persecuted for their faith.

Jesus says to those disciples and to John the Baptist, and to Paul and to you and me: I know there are times when you don't and can't rest in your life. I know you.

“Do you know me?” If so, come to me for I am the one who can give you rest... Jesus loves us with a love so deep he was willing to give his life for you and for me and for all people. To know unconditional love in life is rare. No wonder we can struggle for rest!

When Jesus spoke to his disciples, inviting them to come to him for rest, they knew the imagery of the yoke of which he speaks.

Actual yokes were laid on necks and shoulders of working animals (oxen) and on prisoners and slaves. The yoke was a familiar figure of subjugation, bondage, oppression, burden bearing (I wonder - how is this rest??). But the positive use of the word yoke is that it allows us to be harnessed to Jesus...in lock step with him (unforced rhythms of grace as the Message translates).

Taking the yoke of Jesus is to learn to be his disciple. Jesus wants us not just learn words by rote. '*Learn my heart*' is the call Jesus makes. And this involves listening to the heartbeat of God in his Word, which points me to Christ.

Relationship with Jesus is the key: learning about a person involves a lot...but I contend the key to me and to anyone is our hearts.

Jesus is **gentle and humble in heart**: from this heart...the heart of Jesus...the heart of God we learn unforced rhythms.

Jesus takes away the hard yoke of the law and the punishment for sin and replaces it with his own yoke. The yoke he replaces is the yoke of the Law, a common expression in Judaism at the time for the Law for all its commands and prohibitions.

Rest and peace in Christ produce a new yoke, which is in effect a new attitude to the will of God, where his will for us to love him and our neighbour becomes a joy and a delight, whereas previously the Law was a hard taskmaster

Jesus' love is so deep and so strong that his love alone can sustain us in life. Because of him and his unconditional love we can look at life differently and love in the face of hatred. Today there are extremes at work it seems to me in politics and society which divide and cause fear.

To this world today Jesus comes gentle and humble in heart and calls us to him even in the face of hostile opposition in life and in death.

My mind has raced sometimes in thinking of my death. What will it be like to die? What will I be like? What will God do as I approach death? My mind races again. Our minds can race over many things and times in our lives.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran Pastor who will be known at least in some way by many of you. Some of you will know much more of his story and his writing than me.

Bonhoeffer was not only a pastor but a key member of the resistance to the evil heart of Hitler in Nazi Germany. Bonhoeffer was a key member of a failed attempt to assassinate Hitler. He and his team were caught. Bonhoeffer was executed on April 9, 1945 just a few weeks before the end of WWII. He was known for being strong in the face of oppression from the Nazis and in the face of death as it approached. But his mind raced too,

In Tegel prison he penned a poem  
**“Who am I”**

Who am I? They often tell me  
I would step from my cell's  
confinement  
calmly, cheerfully, firmly,  
like a squire from his country-house.

Who am I? They often tell me  
I would talk to my warders  
freely and friendly and clearly,  
as though it were mine to command.

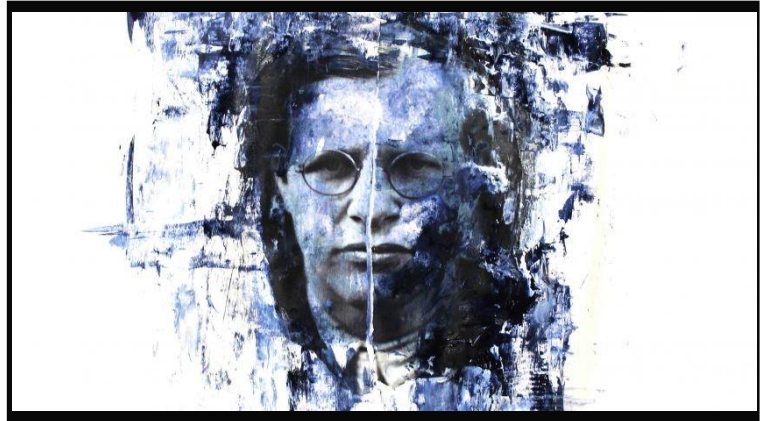
Who am I? They also tell me  
I would bear the days of misfortune  
equably, smilingly, proudly,  
like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really all that which others tell of?  
Or am I only what I know of myself,  
restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,  
struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat,  
yearning for colours, for flowers, for the voices of birds,  
thirsting for words of kindness, for neighbourliness,  
trembling with anger at despotism and petty humiliation,  
tossing in expectation of great events,  
powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,  
weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,  
faint, and ready to say farewell to it all?

Who am I? This or the other?  
Am I one person today, and tomorrow another?  
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,  
and before myself a contemptibly woebegone weakling?  
Or is something within me still like a beaten army,  
fleeing in disorder from a victory already achieved?

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.  
Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine.

**I'm yours dear Jesus**, Bonhoeffer is saying, and that is all that matters.



And somehow there is true rest. Paul asks the question ‘Who will rescue me from this body of death?’ and answers it in the next verse: ‘Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!’ The heart of God.

The key to rest, to learning Jesus’ unforced rhythms of grace is knowing Jesus. knowing Jesus’ heart is to take his hand when he reaches to you from his cross and again on Easter morning and invites you:

**“Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”**

Amen.

*Video of the service including the above address can be found on the St Paul’s Lutheran Church Youtube page <https://www.youtube.com/@stpaulslutheranchurchboxhi1133>*