

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

How apt this verse was as I read it this week. I had managed to have a full nights sleep for the first time in weeks and I woke up weary. In fact not just weary, full on exhausted. It's one of those bizarre things that I never understand – why should a good nights sleep leave you feeling worse than when you're not sleeping properly?

Anyway – I digress!

So when I saw that this was the reading for today it filled me with joy – because for once I could understand and relate to what I needed to preach on straight away. I decided it was a special gift that God had given me – he was giving me my rest.

God assures us in this reading that he will give us rest. And his rest is much more than just a good nights sleep.

I'm sure many of you are feeling weary at the moment. Weary of watching the news, weary of having to try and work out what you can and can't do today that you couldn't do yesterday! Weary of queuing for shopping, weary of having to move out the way of people coming along the pavement towards you, weary of suppressing the strong desire to hug friends and family.

Many people that I have spoken to have said that when we were in full lockdown they felt safe and secure because they knew what they were doing. OK the options were very limited but everyone was doing the same thing and we were safe. The weather was gorgeous too so that definitely helped.

But as things have begun to change and each week the restrictions have been lifted we are having to work harder to understand what it is we are able to do. The daily briefings, whilst sometimes frustrating gave us a clear idea of what we could and couldn't do. If you are a person who likes rules and likes sticking to them then that must have given a certain amount of assurance. If you're a rule breaker then it gave you something to make a calculated risk against.

But now, it all seems so much more confusing. I seem to spend endless amounts of time reading through diocesan emails to see what it is I can and cannot do. And for the first time in ages I have had to go back to using a diary. During lockdown, as long as I knew which day was Sunday it was ok. No alarms, very few meetings, the days took on a calmer feel once the initial panic had subsided.

Now, I not only have to use a diary, I've had to start saying 'no sorry I can't do that date' or I can do that date but not that time. All my good intentions of not getting too busy again are already being challenged.

And I'm sure it's the same for many of you. Maybe your routine of working from home is being changed as offices begin to open up. You may be looking forward to re-turning to have the contact with colleagues. But you may also be worried about resuming travel on public transport, or not want to give up the extra time the lack of commuting has give you with your family.

God's rest means that the worries and the anxieties that we are holding can be released to him. Of course, it is easier than it sounds, I'm the worst for allowing my anxiety to take hold at times by not keeping it in check. But when I come back to God and remember to hand it over to him he gives me the rest from that anxiety that nothing and no-one else can give.

Jesus offers respite for the weary but he is also highlighting the importance of instruction. Though we think of the yoke as equipment for an animal, to take the weight of the plough from it's back. The term was often used in rabbinic literature to refer to the task of obedience to the Torah. He was saying that in order to obey the law, you must know the law. Jesus wanted those who were burdened to learn from him. An instruction that still applies today. Jesus' gentle instruction will enable you and me to find rest for our souls; to allow us to find wholeness and completion.

Instructors are guides and Jesus' guidance is not harsh or arrogant, and therefore obedience to the word should be easy. Jesus' invitation is instructive. Wisdom enables self-reflection. Getting to know Jesus helps us to know ourselves better. Our pursuit of following Jesus is at the same time a pursuit of wisdom.

There are so many books published today and online courses from people who are offering people a way to get to know themselves and who claim that by simply following their 10 simple steps that your life will become easier! Of course, if that was the case and it was that simple then so many books wouldn't have been written. However, the one book that has all the answers is the one that you will all have in your homes already – it's in the bible.

Not only does Jesus promise to give us rest, he tells us to cast all our fears and anxiety on him.

Philippians 4 6-7 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.' (ESV)

You may find that it is helpful to explore new ways to cast your fears and anxiety on God. Journalling, mindfulness, meditation can all help to calm the mind and allow us to focus on God – but he is always to be our focus. A prayer walk can be grounding if we take the time to look at what is around us rather than gazing at our phones or listening to a podcast.

Whatever the next week throws at you my prayer is that you will be able to find a way to come to Jesus and allow him to carry your burdens.