

**PENTECOST 5A 05-07-2020** *The Reverend Lorna Green*

Genesis 24.24-38, 42-49, 58-67; Ps 45.1-10; Romans 7.14-25; Matthew 11.15-19, 25-30

*Matthew 11.15-19, 11.25-30*

*(Jesus said) Let anyone with ears listen!*

*'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another, "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn."*

*For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.'*

*At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.*

*All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*

*'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*

*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.*

*For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'*

When you meet up with friends or see someone at the shops, and you ask, "How are you?" what are they most likely to say? I'm busy; flat out; trying to catch up- etc.....

Do you hear many people say, "I'm great, thanks: just cruising along, enjoying the winter weather- isn't life great?"

If you did get that response, would you want to strangle that person??

So why are we all so busy? When we have access to more labour-saving technology than ever before, why do we complain about being time-poor?

We see the results of long-term stress all around us, as people over-eat, get high blood pressure, suffer insomnia, anxiety, and all kinds of stress-related or induced disorders. We know that being permanently under pressure is bad for us: stress raises the levels of cortisol in our brains which leads to all sorts of problems.

We may have very high expectations of ourselves, and beat ourselves up if we don't achieve what we think we should: but where do those expectations come from? Whose is that little, nagging voice telling us to work harder and get more done?

Why do we sometimes feel guilty about relaxing, taking it easy, and having a break?

Our society seems intent upon programming us to work harder, faster, more efficiently, more productively, because if we don't- then we can be accused of being a leaner, not a lifter. A bludger, not a working tax-payer. You must have a go to get a go.

Employers demand more, schools and universities demand more, government demands more: and what about the churches? What do they say?

Churches are made up of human beings, so they are not perfect and don't always follow the way of Jesus as closely as they should. They don't always provide us with good role models.

Our bishops sometimes work ridiculously long hours, as do most clergy; and many priests have poor health because they don't take the time to care for themselves.

This is not the way Jesus taught us to be.

The Bible translation 'The Message' puts Jesus' words from Matthew's Gospel this way:

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion?

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."

That is Jesus, teaching us how to do stress relief.

His teaching back then was radical and different: the religious leaders in those days put heavy burdens on people, setting the bar almost impossibly high for ordinary folks. They couldn't possibly follow all the rules and be as pure and pious as they were expected to be. So Jesus told them to stop worrying about it because God loves us unconditionally- no pressure.

His teaching today is equally radical and counter-cultural. While society tells us to work harder, earn more money and buy more stuff, Jesus tells us to let all that go because it doesn't really matter.

Of course, you want to be able to provide for yourself and your family, there are things we all need; but we don't have to work ourselves into the ground for stuff we might want, but don't actually need.

When you watch a little child sleeping, it is wonderful to see how completely they surrender themselves to sleep. When my son was a baby, if his lunch was a bit late he would start his afternoon nap anyway and fall asleep in his highchair, face down in his dish.

Tiny children don't worry about anything much: if they want food or a cuddle they cry, and you provide it. Sadly, as they grow up they learn to worry, and they learn it from us. We put expectations on them: some good, some bad. Parents know that spending time with their children is vitally important. Taking the time to read to them, play with them, talk to them, reaps great rewards as children grow up feeling secure and confident. Best of all- it's fun! Being too busy to spend time with your kids is not healthy, we know that. Being too busy to spend time with God isn't healthy either; neither is being too busy to spend time with ourselves.

Jesus said his yoke is easy, or well-fitting, and his burden is light. But it is still a yoke; and yokes are there to enable us to pull more than our own weight. Burdens still have to be carried.

So while Jesus doesn't lay anything heavy on us, that doesn't mean there are no expectations at all. He wants us to walk with him, learn from him, and follow his example.

Our relationship with Jesus is like any other relationship in that it takes effort. Making time to pray and talk to God; reading the Bible and learning about it; worshipping with other people; living the life of a Christian, these are his expectations. Working for peace, speaking out against injustice, taking care of the needy- all are part of the job description.

It is up to us to model this life in our families and communities, to show that it is possible- and desirable- to live differently. We teach our children to pray to God, who loves them even more than we do. We want to be in church on Sunday mornings, instead of at work or playing sport. We want our children to know that greed is not good, that other people matter, and that we need to take care of our world and one another.

In the letter to the Romans, the writer speaks of struggling with himself as he tries to live as he knows he should. He says, in effect: 'I want to be a good person but keep letting myself down. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.' However, as he says- Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! I may not be able to change my self, but with the help of the Holy Spirit I can do it.

So next time somebody asks me how I am, I intend to try to avoid the trap of answering "Oh, busy as usual!" More than that, I intend to listen to what Jesus is telling me and 'learn the unforced rhythms of grace'. I hope you will join me.

The Lord be with you.