



We need rest.

“Come to me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

These are beautiful words, and they are probably my favourite words in the entire Anglican Eucharistic liturgy. The comfortable words from the Book of Common Prayer Service, coming just after the Absolution:

Hear what comfortable words our Saviour Christ saith unto all that truly turn to him.

COME unto me all that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you. *St. Matthew 11.28*

How many weary and over-burdened people came to Jesus – the lepers, the woman bleeding, the woman begging for her daughter, the centurion, the widow whose son had died, blind Bartemeus, and so, so many others, all carrying too much and all reaching out to God – help me. And he always did. He always does.

Come to me if you are tired.

Tiredness is not always about needing to sleep; often it is about carrying too much, sometimes carrying the things we don't need to carry. Things we were not made to carry. Many of us are feeling tired – many of us need rest.

You will have heard of famous people who, according to legend at least, barely slept. — Thomas Edison never slept but took naps through the day and night. Winston Churchill used to try to take a rest during the darkest days of the London blitz because he knew he needed his energy. He would hold a pencil and drop off to sleep. When the pencil hit the floor, he would wake up. It was enough—it was rest. In 1940, United States Ambassador Alexander Kirk remembered seeing President Roosevelt carried to his cabin on his yacht in a state of extreme exhaustion. In an hour's time, he came out a new man, looking twenty years younger. Just an hour. And Margaret Thatcher famously got by on four hours a night. But maybe they shouldn't be our role models.

Because, on the other hand, there is also a legend about John the Apostle. One day someone found him playing with a tame partridge and criticized him for not being at work. His answer was, “The bow that is always at full stretch will soon cease to shoot straight.” We need to rest. We need rest for our bodies, our minds, for our spirit. For our souls.

God is offering us deep and real rest, but in a 24-7 culture when we most need it, many of us are too busy to hear it.

Some of us are tired because we are getting old, the body has put in plenty of hours, and it wants to slow down, take its time, and it tells us so in every way it can. If we listen to our body and go at its pace; it's good; if we don't, whatever age we are, the result is exhaustion.

Some of us feel tired because we simply do too much – by choice or by necessity.

Ironic really, because I remember when I was in secondary school the teachers used to tell us that by the time, we were their age we'd all be working much less and have lots of leisure time on our hands!

Yes, right. In reality, smart phones mean we're always available, always able to check emails, and of course everything costs so much more too. Food is going up, mortgages and rent - I guess my teachers forgot to consider that as wealth grows so do prices and so do expectations. The truth is that we as a community have never had more and yet we've never been working so hard! The treadmill is a reality for many.

So, some of us are tired because we are growing older. Some of us are tired from feeling overworked.

Some of us are probably just feeling spiritually and emotionally *drained*, and in many ways that is the toughest form of exhaustion to deal with.

When your body is tired, and you can get yourself a good night's sleep you generally wake up feeling a lot better. But when you are exhausted in your spirit, you go to bed tired and you wake up tired, and sometimes it can be very hard to muster up enough energy to make it through the day.

Some of us struggle with the old '*black dog*' (as Winston Churchill used to term his depression).

Many great saints from Martin Luther to Mother Theresa have been '*clinically depressed*' (as we now term it). I didn't know this. Luther indeed had a list of strict instructions that he gave his wife, Katie, to help him deal with his depression:

I have a close friend who suffers from depression – that feeling of being dragged down, to a point where you can barely breathe, barely lift your head, and you cannot seem to go forwards or backwards. The black dog follows you. This man is a Christian and when he says, and I agree with him, that the idea that having a relationship with Jesus is something that should always fill you with constant joy is not helpful.

Jesus was not someone who was constantly *jolly* so why should we expect to be? Jesus wept, and the more I get to know Jesus the more I find I want to cry too! And God knows, Jesus rested. He says to us, as he said to his disciples when they hadn't eaten, in Mark 6, come away with me, and have a rest. Have a rest.

We all need rest.

The thing about over-work in particular is that it can be necessary, but it can too be a habit.

Let me illustrate this from my own experience. I became a single mum when my children were twelve, eight, and two. I had no family around at all and the sense of personal responsibility for these three little lives was completely over-whelming. I felt that if something that needed doing didn't get done by me, it wouldn't get done - if I didn't earn money, we would have no food, if I didn't remember to pay the bills, there would be no heating; if I didn't sit up all night with a sick child, who would; if I didn't create the perfect magical Christmas, their childhood would be like some bleak Dickensian novel. Much of that was not really true, but I thought it was, and so the sense of needing to be juggling plates all the time became quite overwhelming. It was necessary – these things did need to be done. But it became too a habit of mind. If I stopped, the world might stop turning. I don't apologise for over working when my children needed me, but the thing is, by the time they didn't need me, and they are now adults, I had lost the ability to stop over-working. It was a mind-set. My mind was set.

When overwork is a habit or caused by a wilful desire to be in control, to be needed, it can become quite idolatrous. Tom Wright wrote an amazing book called *Virtue Reborn* – it speaks of how Christian character, or virtue, is formed by habits – we practice charity til it becomes part of our being, so too prayer, or humility or any Christian virtue. None one of us are born saints. But vices can also become habitual – and unnecessary over-work is one of them. when we get our sense of self-worth or idea of meaning or purpose, our identity, from our work we can forget that we are not first and foremost, a hairdresser, or a doctor, or a florist, or a priest; we are first and foremost a child of God – when work becomes who we are, rather than merely what we do, then it is a problem. It becomes idolatrous.

We can rest and God calls us to rest.

Come unto me all who are weary.

For my yoke is light

But hang on, you may think, I don't want a yoke at all thank you very much. I don't want to replace one burden with another – but isn't that what Jesus is saying. My yoke is light.

How is this helpful?

A 'yoke,' as you probably know, is something you put around an animal's neck to help it drag along a plough or some similar weight.

Yoke here refers to the sometimes heavy burden of the law placed on people by the pharisees and the Sadducees. - in Jesus day every rabbi had his disciples – his followers; and following their teaching was the yoke they carried. It was determined by their teaching; their take on Mosaic law. Don't pick corn on the sabbath for example or speak to women.

And Jesus would have been very comfortable with the image as he may have made yokes for oxen as a carpenter. He would have known how a well-fitting yoke made it much easier for the oxen to do their work. Made their burden lighter.

It is bizarre that one of the most beautiful promises in all of scripture – this promise of rest and relief to the weary and over-burdened – is coupled with an exhortation to take on another burden.

"Take my yoke upon you," says Jesus.

Leave your yoke at His feet and then prepare to shoulder another yoke – the yoke of Jesus. Take on burdens that are worth bearing, experience pain that is worth suffering, a cross that is worth carrying! In place of worrying about money, He gives us a burden for the poor. In place of worrying about looking good, He will place upon us a burden for those who don't have the clothes they need. Instead of worrying about ourselves, our careers, our security and our future, He gives us a heart for the sick, the imprisoned, the lonely and the destitute. My yoke is light, and I share it with you, carry it with you.

Leave your burden with God; and rest, knowing he is carrying you. Because if God is carrying our burdens with us, then sometimes we can afford to put them down. The world won't stop turning. Note to self.

An image to leave you with

A little girl and her dad stand at the edge of a ravine – they need to cross over, and the only method is a fairly rickety looking bridge.

Dad says – it's ok, hold my hand.

No way, says the little girl. I'm not holding your hand. You hold mine!

What are you saying, says dad, not getting the difference?

If I hold your hand, says the little girl, I might let go.

If you hold mine, I know you won't.

The little girl simply trusted her dad more than she trusted herself.

And we can do that with God.

God won't let go.

When we can't hold him, he still holds onto us;

when we are too tired to carry the world on our backs, as we think we should, he says – don't worry, I have done the saviour of the world bit, you don't need to.

When we feel over-burdened, he says put those burdens down, give them to me, you're carrying the wrong stuff and you were never made to carry it alone anyway.

And have a rest. Take time out. You're not indispensable.

If you fall asleep praying, it's really Gods way of saying you needed a nap.

Come unto me, all that are weary and heavy laden.

Prayers

The response to Lord hear us, is Lord graciously hear us.

Lord, hear you,

Lord, graciously hear us.

From the BCP Communion service...

Hear what comfortable words our Saviour Christ saith unto all that truly turn to him.

COME unto me all that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you. *St. Matthew 11.28*

A prayer for those who are tired,.

Jesus, I am tired. My mind is frazzled, my hands are full, and my emotions are reeling with all the things I have to do. Help me to come to you in the middle of the overwhelm. Remind me of your ever-present help in my times of need. Show me how to rest in You. Reveal to me both the beauty in the work and in the rest. Calm my anxious thoughts and encourage my heart with Your nearness. Instruct me in your ways. Bring productivity and contentment out of the peace and comfort I find. Settle me in Your truth and in Your love and let me find rest in the certainty of your truth, of your love.

Loving God, we pray for those who are working hard to pay their way, to support family, to keep their business ticking over, to pay the rent or mortgage; we pray for those who have money worries; who struggle to make ends meet; we pray for those who have to juggle more than one job, or work and family, for those who cannot find a job, and are burdened by a lack of income. Father, you call us to live abundantly; help us to help others to do so - Help us to be aware of the needs of others, to be a practical support where needed, guiding people to the help they need and deserve that they might have the space and the time to rest because those basic needs are met

We pray for those who are weary for all sorts of reasons; simply because of the pace of life in these times; or because of emotional or spiritual weariness; we pray for those who are tired because their body grows old, or because troubles keep them awake; for those who carry too much alone.

Loving God, we pray today for all those who need your healing hand upon them; we pray especially for Karen and Mike, and the kids, for Sharon and Terry, for Vicky and George and their family; for so many others known only to you – may they know their every need met in you, their rest found in you; their spirits healed in your Spirit.

General Synod has begun this weekend – we pray for Esther and all our reps there today and in the coming days. We pray for wisdom and discernment in the topics discussed, a sense of responsibility in the power they have, and a desire to use those powerful voices in the service of all those our churches still excludes. May that be the yoke we bear by your grace and with your help – to speak for those who have no voice, to bring shelter to those who have no home, to bring food to those who go hungry, to bring hope to those who have no joy, and faith to those whose faith has been destroyed.

Loving God, Help us to accept your invitation to come empty and receive the rest we need. Help us to willingly release our fears, and our worries, our agendas, and to-do list. Ease the tension and replenish our bodies. Silence the voices of doubt and urgency and speak your words of comfort. Come unto me all who are weary, and I will give you rest. Speak abundantly into our lives, fill us with Your peace, joy, and love. Fill us until the overwhelm is consumed by Your grace, and our life reflect the beauty of resting in You.

Merciful father,
Accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ,
Amen.