

“CARRYING OUR BURDENS”

READING: *Matthew 11 verses 25-30*

In an age of modern gadgets created for our convenience and to enable us to cope with the stresses and strains of everyday living, there still seems to have been no single tool created to give us a totally care free life. We have electronic gadgets, beauty treatments (even for men), diet plans, self help books by the shelf-full, apps on our phones, websites offering help and advice – the list is endless. So why are slightly worried and stressed out, and as time has gone on, instead being more chilled out, we seemed to have become more and more stressed out. Instead of taking time to chill out and relax, our stress levels have soared. For some, there are good reasons – worry about finances, worry about jobs, worry about business, worry about when we can get our hair attended to, when can we go on holiday. We worry about ourselves, our health, the health of our family, the continued closure of our churches. My apologies if you started reading and were all chilled out, and are not feeling stressed.

In our reading from Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus is basically saying to us, **“come to me all who are struggling with life in any way and those of you who have burdens that you cannot carry alone, and I will help you with your struggles”**. Jesus knew that life was not going to be easy for everyone. He told his disciples of this before his crucifixion when he said **“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart. I have overcome the world” (John 16 verse 33)**. Earlier in John chapter 10, Jesus describes himself as the “Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep”, but also describing Satan as the **“hireling, the hired hand, the thief who comes to steal, kill, and destroy”** adding, **“I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full” (John 10 verse 10)**. Life is not easy because we live in a world that is flawed by sin, first committed in the Garden of Eden. Sin makes life difficult for us because it has put into our world all those things that God would have kept from us because he knew these things would make life difficult. Satan is the thief of that perfect relationship which God longs to have with us, longing for us to live the full life He longs for us to have. In these uncertain days, Satan is running rife in our world, robbing us of the joy which God longs for us to enjoy, of the peace He longs for us to know, of that relationship He longs for us to share in. So, instead, Satan piles on the worries and the cares.

Jesus, in his ministry, told many parables. One of the most well known was the “Parable of the Sower”. It can be found in **Mark chapter 4 verses 1-9**, and then he goes on to explain the meaning of it in **verses 13-20**. Jesus tells of a sower going out to sow seed. Some of it fell on the pathway and was immediately eaten up by birds; some fell on rocks and quickly sprouted up without sending down deep roots and when the sun came up, it shrivelled up and died; some fell among thorns and it grew up, but so did the thorns. And as the grain and thorns grew, the thorns choked the grain plant; but others grew up on good soil, and produced an abundant harvest. In the ensuing explanation Jesus explains the purpose and you can read them for yourselves. But I want to draw your attention to **verse 18** where he explains how the thorns are the cares and worries of life which choke the sown Word of God. Commentators tell us that Jesus is not just referring to niggling thoughts, but that the word for worries and cares is translated from the original Greek as meaning, “the things which would tear us apart”. Now whilst we may not feel that our worries are tearing us apart, at this moment in time, they can rob us of the life, the joy, the peace which God longs for us as His children to have.

In **Psalm 55 verse 22** we read **"Cast all your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you. He will never let the righteous fall."** Again in **1 Peter 5 verse 7**, we read, **"Cast all your anxiety on Him, for He cares for you."** In a modern translation these words read **"Cast all your cares on Him, for you are His personal concern."** Let me emphasise that we do not fail God because we worry, but we will miss out on what He longs for us, if we allow them to dominate our thoughts and keeps us from enjoying all He has for us.

Following Dorothy's funeral, I refused to watch the playback of the service. The day had been enough and to know that others felt that it was just right, and the fact that I do not like looking at even pictures of myself, stopped me from looking at the service online. But on Tuesday I did. As I watched it, I felt the burden of grief which I was carrying, come back. I had not grieved. I have spent most of lockdown helping others with their grief, but now I felt the burden of my own grief for Dorothy. So thankfully Tuesday and Wednesday were "funeral free" and just as well. Last Thursday, I had gone into "work mode" because it had to be right for Dorothy and what I had warned others of, came back on me. None of us are exempt.

Jesus uses, in our text, an illustration from his every day and life to explain his helping carrying loads. He says that the yoke that is used on the oxen is similar. He puts the heavy part of the yoke on the stronger oxen, and the lighter part on the oxen that is not quite as strong. In a similar manner, his yoke is made after the same pattern, the heavy end is upon his shoulder, and the lighter one is upon ours. Our heavenly Father bears the heaviest weight of our cares, our struggles, our problems, Jesus tells us loud and clear this morning, we don't have to live life alone, we don't have to live with all of our failures, with all of frustrations, with all of our burdens, but we must bring them to him and then he will shoulder them with us. In fact, he will take most of the weight of our burdens upon himself. He will carry our burdens, he will lighten our loads. Jesus goes on further to say that he will not make our load heavy by adding other things in place of those he has taken away. He tells us he is gentle and kind and he will give rest for our souls. Jesus tells us he doesn't replace our burdens with any of his, he won't put demands upon our lives, he won't give us things we have to do.

Sadly, many people have a view of Christianity in which Jesus will replace one set of burdens with another life of always doing good, of living a perfect life, of being sombre, or being a person who walks with their head hung down, not smiling, not enjoying life. But on the contrary, Jesus relieves our burdens so that we can smile, so that we can enjoy life, so that we can live in his love, so that we can walk with heads held up tall, looking around and enjoying all the creation that God has made for us. He carries our burdens and replaces them not with the strictness of "do's and don'ts", but he replaces it with the security of love, with the gentleness of compassion, with the tenderness of forgiveness. When our lives are filled with that - with love, with compassion, with forgiveness, then we will be free to look around us and reach out with Jesus' love to those who are hurting, to those who need our help in carrying the burdens of life.

Jesus helps us carry our burdens because he wants us to be free to enjoy life, to reach out to others, to share with others his great gift of love. All of us need to hear over and over again that we are loved, we are not alone in this world. We do have someone to share our burdens with, we have someone to truly cares for us that someone is Jesus He says come. The invitation is given to each of us. Come to the Lord come to him with your cares, come to him with your problems, comes to him with all the burdens of life and he will help you carry them. Jesus says, **"Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."**

PSALM 145 verses 8 - 17

⁸ The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.

⁹ The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.

¹⁰ All your works praise you, LORD; your faithful people extol you.

¹¹ They tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might,

¹² so that all people may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendour of your kingdom.

¹³ Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations.

The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does.

¹⁴ The LORD upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.

¹⁵ The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time.

¹⁶ You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

¹⁷ The LORD is righteous in all his ways and faithful in all he does.

MATTHEW 11 verses 25 – 30

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶ Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

²⁷ 'All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸ 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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.'

MARK 4 verses 1 – 9 and 13 - 20

Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered round him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. ² He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: ³ 'Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times.'

⁹ Then Jesus said, 'Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.'

¹³ Then Jesus said to them, 'Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? ¹⁴ The farmer sows the word. ¹⁵ Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. ¹⁶ Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. ¹⁷ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ¹⁸ Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; ¹⁹ but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²⁰ Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop – some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.'

DO YOU SOMETIMES FEEL THAT NO ONE TRULY KNOWS YOU

Do you sometimes feel that no one truly knows you,
And that no one understands or really cares?
Through his people, God himself is close beside you,
And through them he plans to answer all your prayers.

*Someone cares, someone cares,
Someone knows your deepest need, your burden shares;
Someone cares, someone cares,
God himself will hear the whisper of your prayers.*

Ours is not a distant God, remote, unfeeling,
Who is careless of our loneliness and pain,
Through the ministry of love he gives his healing,
In dedicated hands brings hope again.

by John Gowans