

Come to the King

Date: 1 March 2026, 2nd Sunday in Lent

Location: St George's, Battery Point

Series: Matthew - Following the King

Texts: Jeremiah 9.23-24; Matthew 11:25-30; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

“You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you.”

So begins the world's most famous autobiography, the *Confessions*, by the 5th century African theologian St Augustine. As Augustine tells the story of his life he speaks of a deep longing that he tried to satisfy in different pursuits. As a teen his father took him to a brothel to make him a man and for a while he ran after pleasure. Then he read a philosophical work that sparked an intellectual awakening. He pursued a glittering academic career, but again something was missing. So he threw himself into Eastern religion, but again this did not satisfy. Finally he tried politics, making it all the way to the Emperor's court in Milan, but again frustration. It was through hearing the preaching of Ambrose bishop of Milan and his welcome and friendship and then his own reading the Bible that Augustine finally found the rest he had been looking for, in the person of Jesus. The prayers of his mother Monica over many years were finally answered.

You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you. In choosing the theme of rest, Augustine picks up our text today, Matthew 11, where Jesus says, “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.” After years of searching and striving, Augustine heard Jesus' invitation and found his promise to be true. Augustine's story is one that we so often see and one we can recognise in our own lives. We have an emptiness in our hearts and we run after relationships or career or politics or even different religious practices to fill the void. We can feel like we're on an endless treadmill, always running, never arriving, longing for a place where we can find a deep rest for our souls. So let's have a look at Jesus' invitation today. We'll look at 4 points

- The invitation
- The exchange
- The promise
- The foundation

The Invitation - Come to me all you who are weary

In verse 28 we read. “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.” This is Jesus' invitation.

Jesus knows what our experience of life is like. We are weary and burdened. The pressures of work. Projects so big you don't know how you'll finish them. The knowledge that when you finish one task, there will be 5 more to replace it. The burden of parental expectation. The worries about what others think about us. Where am I in the friendship circle at school? The battle in our own minds against intrusive thoughts. Fears about our future. About our health. About work. About finances. About ageing. About whether we'll find a spouse. Worries about our children and grandchildren and the choices they are making. Weariness of life. The crushing burden of guilt and shame at the things we've done and not done. Shame at what has been done to us. Guilt at the things we've done to make us feel better at our guilt!

Jesus is talking to us, with all that wearies and burdens us, all that is crushing us, and he invites us to come to him. We come to him in worship and Scripture and prayer. We give him our burdens in prayer.

"Don't be anxious about anything," Paul writes in Philippians, "but in every situation, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God."¹ And we read in 1 Peter, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."² Writing this sermon I was stressed about getting all my work done for the week and wondering what things will look like with Claire being away. I realised, I needed to do just what Jesus says here! To bring my weariness and my burdens to him. And I can tell you that it is such a weight off your shoulders when you come to the Lord to know that he is with you and will keep you and those you love. Nothing happens outside of his care. He will give you the strength to do the good he has planned for you to do.

And Jesus invites *All* who are weary and burdened to come to him. There's no burdens you can have that are too big to bring to Jesus. He is the Lord of the universe. He has infinite power. He can handle them. There is no burden that is too small, too trivial for him. He feeds the birds of the air, he loves you and he cares for you. And it doesn't matter who you are, or what you've done, his invitation is to all - men and women, boys and girls, whatever your family background, whatever the colour of your skin, whatever your education, whatever your age, whatever your wealth, whatever your sexuality, whatever your faith tradition, he invites *all* to come to him.

¹ Philippians 4.6

² 1 Peter 5.7

And he invites you to come to *him*. Not to some self help guide, not to some religious guru, not to some youtube psychologist, not to some tik tok influencer, not to some preacher, but to him. Will you come to him?

The Exchange - heavy burdens for a gentle yoke

In verse 29-30 Jesus offers an exchange. Your heavy burdens for his gentle yoke.

“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.”

If you come to Jesus he will take your burdens. In exchange he will give you his yoke. But isn't that just swapping one burden for another? How can carrying his yoke be rest?

The picture of a yoke is that of an ox with a crossbar of wood laid on its shoulders, then pulling the plough attached to the yoke to till the soil ready for planting. The idea is that Jesus gives us rest, yes, but he also has work for us to do. In Jeremiah 6 we read:

This is what the Lord says: “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.”³

Here, as so often in the Bible, life is imagined as a road, and you can choose a good or a bad path. It's a picture associated with wisdom and with hearing and obeying God's commands as the pathway to life. In Psalm 119.32 we read:

“I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.”

The way of wisdom is living with the grain of the universe, living according to the law of our being rather than kicking against it. God's word reveals that law and here Jesus says, “Come and learn from me. Become my disciple and I will teach you the way of life. Yes, there will be some constraint, you cannot just do whatever you want, but that is because this is the path of life and true freedom. As you take this burden, you will find that my way is easy, and my burden is light.” Will you take his yoke?

What is more, Jesus is not a harsh taskmaster. What does he say? “Learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart.” Gentleness means using strength lightly to serve. It's why we love the picture of a strong man delicately cradling his new born daughter. Jesus has all the power and authority of God himself. His hands are strong enough to make the universe, and they are also strong enough to bear the nails and to hold you safe. And unlike so many that we see in positions of power and authority who throw their weight around, he is humble in heart. He used his great power to step down from the throne of heaven to become one of us,

³ Jeremiah 6.16

taking our suffering and making it his own, shouldering the crossbar of the cross, bearing the great burden of our sin, and entering into our death that we might receive his life and forgiveness. It's this one who loves us like this, who is gentle and humble, who invites us to learn from him that we might find rest. Will you learn from him?

The Promise - rest for your souls

As we come to Jesus and give him all our burdens, as we take his yoke and learn from him, what does he promise? Rest for your souls. To the ceaseless turmoil of our hearts he promises to give his peace. He is the safe harbour in the storms of life where we can drop anchor and find our rest. He offers us the deep rest of the soul because through his blood he has purchased our redemption, through his death he has won for us life eternal. In him we are reconciled to God, transformed from being enemies to being God's daughters and sons. Through him we are invited into the bosom of the Father where we can rest safe and eternally secure. Nothing can threaten this rest. Oh yes we can face the insults and rejection of people, the accusations of the devil, maybe even threats to our body. But our lives are hidden with Christ in God. As we bring our burdens to him in prayer so we find he gives us his peace which passes understanding. It is from this place of safety and rest that we can then venture out into the world, bearing his easy yoke, to do all the good he has for us to do.

The foundation - Jesus reveals the Father

How? How can Jesus offer us such wonderful rest?

The answer comes in verses 25-27. The foundation of this rest is that Jesus reveals God the Father. We are diving into some deep waters here. In these verses Jesus opens for us a window into the inner life of the Holy Trinity. But let's follow his invitation and come to him.

Some years ago I was in a philosophy book club and we read a work by the 19th century German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer writes that, "Religion is truth expressed in allegory and myth" because most people are not smart enough to grasp the deep truths of life.⁴ Religion in that sense is a "pious fraud", "a short term aid" that we will abandon when they grow up, which is what we need to do.⁵ It's an argument that may sound familiar. Indeed Richard Dawkins' 2019 book is called, *Outgrowing God: A beginner's guide*. But the "we" for Schopenhauer is not humanity in general, but Europeans in particular. Christianity is fine for peoples that he considers "still in the state of childhood," like Africans

⁴ Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, trans. Hollingdale, Penguin, 1970:103

⁵ 109

and South Sea Islanders.⁶ It's a position of arrogance and condescension that bears the fruit of a profound racial prejudice. This kind of sentiment has plagued our academic institutions and subsequently our culture since the Enlightenment.

To this Jesus says in verse 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.

The approach of Schopenhauer and others has been building an intellectual tower of Babel. That is thinking that through human power and effort, be that philosophy or meditation or reason or science, we will be able to storm the heavens and lay bare the truth about God. This is the path that says I have to know all the evidence, get an answer to every question, prove beyond a shadow of doubt before I believe. It is an epistemology of pride.

By contrast Jesus says, actually, to know God is to be like a child; to listen when he speaks; to believe what he tells you. When you think about it, this is how all of us come to know most things about the world. Someone we trust tells us something we didn't know, we believe what they say and so receive the gift of their knowledge and learn something new. This is knowledge by revelation which we receive by faith. It requires relationship, the relationship of a parent to a child, a teacher to a student, rather than an abstract, arms length approach where we experiment on the thing we want to know with gloves and tongs and a test tube.

There is something absurd about thinking that we who are finite and fallen could through our own effort come to know God who is infinite and holy. But there is someone who knows God, and that is God himself. And he chooses to reveal himself through the person of his Son. Jesus says in verse 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.

With these words Jesus gives us a window into the inner life of the Godhead, and his eternal relationship with the Father. Strictly speaking, only God can know himself. Only he can comprehend his own eternity and infinity in a way that is proportionate with himself as God. As the Father knows all things, including himself, so he has committed this knowledge to the Son whom he has known from all eternity. As he is one with the Father so the Son alone knows the Father. For us to have the true knowledge of God we must in some

⁶ 99

incredible way share in the knowledge that God has of himself. But this is exactly what Jesus says he does here. He reveals the Father to those he chooses. This is his incredible grace.

Think of a relationship. The cliché is that husbands are not mind readers though their wives might want them to be. None of us are. If we want to know what is going on inside someone else, they have to tell us. It is only when they reveal their inner life that we come to know them. All else is guess work. So it is with God, we can only know him as he reveals himself, and this is exactly what Jesus does. He is the Son who knows the Father from all eternity and reveals him to us. No one else knows the Father - not Buddha, not Mohammed, not Krishna, not Jordan Peterson or Deepak Chopra. Only the Son knows the Father. Only he shares in the life and being of the Father. Only he can make him known.

This is why only in coming to Jesus we can find rest for our souls. Because as we respond to his invitation and come to him, so we find that we meet God himself. Jesus invites us to share in his own knowledge of the Father, a knowledge expressed in the infinite and eternal love that the Son has for the Father and the Father for the Son, a love that he freely shares with all those who would come to him.

Is your heart restless? Are you weary and burdened?

Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Will you come to him, today?