

Service Sunday 9th July 2023 Rayleigh

Preparing for worship

Find a comfortable place to sit, be still, close your eyes if you'd like to and relax. Spend some time simply being with God – without trying to understand anything or ask for something. No expectations, no burdens. For a short time, just let everything go.

And we pray: 'Lord, into your most holy presence we come. Calm our anxious spirits. Remove the distractions that would keep us from you and take our burdens from us.'

We keep a moment of silence

Jesus said "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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."

Sung call to worship

Come among us living Lord.

We come to hear your living word.

We meet together in the name of Christ

To share your mission and your sacrifice

To receive the power which only you can give

That we might live

Come fill this time of silence

(Martin John Nicholls)

Song - Come let us worship Jesus WF 19

Come, let us worship Jesus,
King of nations, Lord of all,
magnificent and glorious,
just and merciful.

Jesus, King of the nations,
Jesus, Lord of all.
Jesus, King of the nations,
Lord of all!

Lavish our heart's affection,
deepest love and highest praise,
voice, race and language blending,
all the world amazed.

Bring tributes from the nations,
come in joyful cavalcades;
one thunderous acclamation,
one banner raised.

Come, Lord, and fill your temple,
glorify your dwelling place,
till nations see your splendour
and seek your face.

Fear God and give him glory,
for his hour of judgement comes.
Creator, Lord almighty,
worship him alone.

Church anniversary

The foundation stones were laid in 1898 and to begin with it was a Baptist church called Rayleigh Tabernacle

In 1910 the church became affiliated to the Congregational Union of England and Wales and this is the date we use to measure our church anniversary so this year we are celebrating our 113th anniversary

In July 1910 the first Minister was appointed – Revd George Butcher

The organ was purchased in 1911. Originally the bellows had to be operated by hand.

In July 1914 work started on Caley Hall

Major redevelopment work took place around 2005 with the installation of the large window and the new welcome area

During the ministry of David and Birgit the Music Group was set up under the leadership of John Deane

In August 2008 the Church Camp celebrated its 50th anniversary

In 2010 we celebrated our 100th anniversary and began our partnership with Budiro in Zimbabwe

Prayer of thanksgiving

Write or draw on a sticky label something you like/value/want to give thanks for about our church
Balloons are passed round and people stick their label on a balloon
The people left holding the balloons are asked to come to the front

(invite people to respond with the words 'we praise and thank you Lord' after each line.)

As we celebrate another year together, we offer God our thanks and praise. Let us pray.

For those whose vision led to the beginnings of this church
we praise and thank you Lord

For those whose faithful service maintained the church's life and worship
we praise and thank you Lord

For all the worship which has been offered in this place
we praise and thank you Lord

For every activity which has helped faith to grow
we praise and thank you Lord

For all the love which has been shown in words and actions
we praise and thank you Lord

For moments of glory flashing through the routine of church life
we praise and thank you Lord

For all that we mean to each other and to you Lord
we praise and thank you Lord

For the many things which make this church so special to us
we praise and thank you Lord

We particularly give you thanks for these things

(each person to read out 1 label from their balloon)

Faithfull and loving God, we bring our praise and thanks to you. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Offering and prayer

Loving God, we dedicate ourselves to serve you faithfully,
to love you with all our heart, all our soul and all our mind, and to love each other as Jesus has
shown his love for us.

Renew us, refresh us, as we continue on our journey through life.

Be with us, as we face the challenges which lie ahead.

We bring you our gifts of money.

May they be used wisely to bring about your kingdom here on Earth. Amen

Song - Fill your hearts with joy and gladness WF 23

Fill your hearts with joy and gladness,
sing and praise your God and mine!
Great the Lord in love and wisdom,
might and majesty divine!
He who framed the starry heavens
knows and names them as they shine!

Praise the Lord, his people, praise him!
Wounded souls his comfort know;
those who fear him find his mercies,
peace for pain and joy for woe;
humble hearts are high exalted,
human pride and power laid low.

Praise the Lord for times and seasons,
cloud and sunshine, wind and rain;
spring to melt the snows of winter
till the waters flow again;
grass upon the mountain pastures,
golden valleys thick with grain.

Fill your hearts with joy and gladness,
peace and plenty crown your days;
love his laws, declare his judgments,
walk in all his words and ways;
he the Lord and we his children:
praise the Lord, all people, praise!

Talk 1 – Traveling Light

What would you take with you if you were going on holiday or out for a day trip?

I'm going on holiday tomorrow. I've got a few things ready that I think I should take with me. I need some help to try and pack them into my case.

Do you think this case is going to be OK for me to take? Will it be too heavy? Would somebody like to try picking it up?

Sometimes we try to carry too many things with us when we go out and they end up being too heavy for us to manage. Sometimes there are other things that we take around with us which make life difficult – feeling worried about something, feeling hurt or upset, feeling we have to do certain things if we want to be a good person.

Jesus tells us that we don't have to try to carry all these things around with us every day. Jesus wants to give us rest and he wants to be with us wherever we go so he can show us the right way to live.

Reading - Matthew 11: 25-30 from the Contemporary English Version

²⁵ At that moment Jesus said: My Father, Lord of heaven and earth, I am grateful that you hid all this from wise and educated people and showed it to ordinary people. ²⁶ Yes, Father, this is what pleased you. ²⁷ My Father has given me everything, and he is the only one who knows the Son. The only one who truly knows the Father is the Son. But the Son wants to tell others about the Father, so they can know him too. ²⁸ If you are tired from carrying heavy burdens, come to me and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take the yoke^[a] I give you. Put it on your shoulders and learn from me. I am gentle and humble, and you will find rest. ³⁰ This yoke is easy to bear, and this burden is light.

Song - I heard the voice of Jesus say come unto me and rest R&S 349

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Come unto Me and rest;
lay down, thou weary one, lay down
thy head upon My breast!"
I came to Jesus as I was,
so weary worn and sad;
I found in Him a resting-place,
and He has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“Behold, I freely give
the living water; thirsty one,
stoop down, and drink, and live!”
I came to Jesus, and I drank
of that life-giving stream;
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
and now I live in Him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“I am this dark world’s Light;
look unto Me, thy morn shall rise,
and all thy day be bright!”
I looked to Jesus, and I found
in Him my Star, my Sun;
and in that Light of life I’ll walk,
till all my journey's done.

Talk

In our reading from Matthew chapter 11 Jesus reaches out to the people and he has sympathy for those who feel that they are carrying a heavy load. The people may well have felt burdened because of the many rules that they were expected to follow every day in order to keep the religious leaders happy. Religious expression had developed more and more rules as a way to ensure the people did not deviate from worshipping God as they had in the past. For example, the people were prohibited from working on the sabbath; the religious leaders would say, ‘If an item has no use on the sabbath, don’t even handle it!’ This meant that the people were less likely to break God’s Law, but it also meant that the Law itself had become a burden. These extra rules had become the focus rather than the God of love who was at the heart of things.

To illustrate this we’re going to play a quick game of pass the parcel. I need 4 volunteers please to come to the front. We’re going to pass round the parcel and unwrap one layer and pass it on. The religious leaders in Jesus’ time had wrapped up God’s word, also known as the Law, in lots of layers – rules that, if kept, ensured that the Law wasn’t broken. However, this also meant that the people were increasingly distanced from and perhaps no longer able to see what really mattered – the God of love. They were burdened by trying to follow an ever-increasing number of rules. Jesus expresses clear concern that people should be able to come close to God and that these extra ‘burdens’ are not from God.

All these rules were putting a lot of pressure on people and making them feel worried and weighed down with what they were expected to do. For most of us today, life is full of pressures – work, family, running a home and others. What types of pressures and burdens might we end up carrying at some point – even if we don’t mean to?

- Physical burdens – possessions, health issues, leading busy lives with lots of demands on our time
- Emotional – worries/anxieties, responsibilities/things we have to do,

- Expectations – how we should look, how successful we should be, comparing ourselves to other people, this is often as a result of what we see on social media or on TV and the pressure it creates on us to live our lives in a particular way

And often church adds to those pressures – we have a rota for pretty much everything that goes on in church, then there's belonging to committees, being the Secretary or Treasurer or an Elder, helping on groups that run during the week, trying to be what we think God wants us to be.

Our reading from Matthew 11 can help us to reflect on what it is that Jesus offers as he calls us to himself – something other than the stresses and burdens of life and trying to live up to unrealistic expectations and images of ourselves. Jesus says to the people and to us - If you are tired from carrying heavy burdens, come to me and I will give you rest. Take the yoke I give you. Put it on your shoulders and learn from me. I am gentle and humble, and you will find rest. This yoke is easy to bear, and this burden is light. Jesus invites all of us to accept a new 'yoke' from him, one that we will be able to manage and that will allow us to know God as was always intended.

In Jesus' time, a yoke was a wooden beam that was fastened over the necks of 2 animals – possibly oxen - and then attached to the plough or cart that they were pulling to allow the animals to pull together and use their combined strength. A yoke was a symbol of obedience and hard work. But Jesus talks about taking the yoke that he is giving us and putting it on our shoulders. Imagine if we have a yoke on our shoulders and that Jesus is walking right alongside us because he is also wearing the same yoke as we are. We will have Jesus with us every step of the way, wherever we go and whatever we do. Jesus will be beside us to guide and support us and to share whatever is happening in our life so that we aren't struggling on our own. Jesus will teach us and show us the right way to go and the best way to deal with things. Jesus won't load us down with all kinds of demands and rules that make life hard for us. He simply asks that we follow him closely and allow him to guide and direct our lives as he knows best.

Some of us will be going on holiday at this time of the year and we're probably thinking about how great it will be to get away from the stresses of everyday life, to go to a place where we can unwind, chill out, kick back and do what we like for a couple of weeks. But how does that compare with what Jesus offers in terms of rest, recovery, and a relationship with him all year round?

Jesus invites everyone who is 'heavy-laden' to look to him for rest. How much of our lives involve carrying extra weight that we do not need – trying to meet other people's expectations, or buying or doing things that (we are told) mean a better life? Jesus says that his yoke is easy, his burden light: if we feel weighed down, it is worth asking what we are carrying that God is not asking us to bear.

This week's reading calls us to look at ourselves: are we set in ways that complicate what God wants for us or asks of us, ways that make it harder to know that we belong to God? Jesus invites us to quite deliberately link ourselves to him and to do only what he asks of us. Jesus is the only person who can show and teach us how to live a good life and what is important

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Reflection

What burdens would we like to lay down, to bring to Jesus and give to him so that we can find release and freedom by living for Jesus instead of trying to live by other rules and standards.

Everyone should have been given a stone when you arrived. Weigh the stone in your hand, and think about something that is currently affecting you and weighing you down in some way. Now pass your stone to the person nearest to you. Spend a few moments praying for the person whose stone you are now holding – in particular, that they might be able to give their burden to Jesus, and receive his rest in its place. Let's spend a few moments in prayer. Now I invite you if you are able to come and lay the stone you are holding – representing the burden of another person – on the communion table, as a symbol of offering that burden into God's hands.

A prayer

Jesus, thank you for offering us rest.

We trust you with the things that worry us.

We ask you to walk beside us.

We ask you to share their burdens.

Amen.

Song - Lord for the years your love has kept and guided R&S 603

Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided,
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

Lord, for that word, the word of life which fires us,
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,
teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us;
Lord of the word, receive your people's praise.

Lord, for our land in this our generation,
spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care;
for young and old, for commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.

Lord, for our world, when we disown and doubt him,
loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain;
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without him;
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

Lord, for ourselves, in living power remake us-
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne,
past put behind us, for the future take us,
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

Prayers of intercession (Joyce)

Song - What a friend we have in Jesus R&S 413

What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!

O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
take it to the Lord in prayer!

Are we weak and heavy laden,
burdened with a load of care?
Jesus is our only refuge--
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield you;
you will find a solace there.

Words of dedication and commitment of ourselves to God, to each other and to being God's church in this place

Leader: Trusting and trusted God, in response to your unfailing love throughout this year, in response to your total commitment to us, what can we do?

All; we will give you our best, not our second best.
we will give you our heart, and not be half-hearted.
we will give you our time, not just our spare time.
We will give you ourselves to become your people. Amen.

A sending out prayer

Loving Lord Jesus, we take your yoke upon us now.
Lift from of us any burdens we are carrying,
any expectations we are trying to meet that are not from you.
Give us rest, and lead us to those good works
that you have prepared for us to do this week.
Be glorified in us as we walk with you.

Amen.