

A song to sing or to read: Come As You Are (TiS 693)

Come as you are, that's how I want you
Come as you are, feel quite at home
Close to my heart, loved and forgiven
Come as you are, why stand alone?

No need to fear, love sets no limits
No need to fear, love never ends
Don't run away, shamed and disheartened
Rest in my love, trust me again

I came to call sinners, not just the virtuous
I came to bring peace, not to condemn
Each time you fail, to live by my promise
Why do you think, I'd love you the less?

Come as you are, that's how I love you
Come as you are, trust me again
Nothing can change, the love that I bear you
All will be well, just come as you are.

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Closing Prayer

God of love and compassion, of mercy and justice, open my heart to that which I have been unable to feel. Keep me focused on the details where your love can be infused. Keep me focused on the bigger picture of the church—the gathering of those who wish to follow Jesus. Keep me focused, keep me present. In Jesus name.
Amen

With thanks to Shirley Colless for preparing today's reflection



Church in a Bag
5 July 2020
Dubbo Uniting Church



Gathering

God of love, Abba, Father, Amah, Mother, Creator.
We breathe and know that you are God
united as your people wherever we may be.
We breathe and know that you are God
filling us with your breath of life.
We breathe and know that you are God
even in our inevitable moments of exhaustion.
We breathe and know that **you** are God
not us.
We breathe and know that you are God.
Amen.



In Preparation

Dear God, silence all voices
within our minds
but your own.
Help us to seek
and be able to follow
your will.
May our prayers be joined
with those of our sisters
and brothers in the faith
that together we may glorify
your name
and enjoy your fellowship
forever.
In Jesus name
Amen.

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Reading: Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30

“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.’”

The ‘wise and intelligent’ may refer to any who reject Jesus and his message, but perhaps especially refers to the religious leaders, whom Jesus often rebukes for their self-importance and hypocrisy. The scribes and Pharisees pride themselves on being learned in the law, yet fail to understand the basics of justice, mercy, and faith. They repeatedly reject Jesus and conspire against him, thus conspiring against the very purposes of God.

In this time of protest about climate change, black lives matter, protection of the environment, Knitting Nannas and other widespread gatherings at which people air their concerns in a public forum, who are our ‘wise and intelligent’?

The ‘infants’, on the other hand, are not regarded as wise or important. They are the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, the persecuted - all of whom Jesus calls blessed. They are the sick and the lame, the lepers and demon-possessed, the tax collectors and sinners – all of whom come to Jesus for healing of body and spirit. It is God's gracious will to act in ways that confound human wisdom, and so these ‘infants’ see what the ‘wise’ cannot - that Jesus is sent by the Father and reveals the Father.

In today’s world, who do we see as the ‘infants’?

“Jesus said, ‘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.’”



Think what a yoke is. It is a heavy burden, a contrivance that links two beasts together, to control them so as to complete a task – to pull a plough or a wagon - at the will of the

farmer or teamster, urging them on, with commands and the blows of a whip.

To Jesus’ hearers, it was a familiar symbol of burden bearing, oppression, and subjugation. Yokes were laid on the necks and shoulders of oxen and also on prisoners of war and slaves. But ‘yoke’ was also used metaphorically with positive connotations, as in the invitation to wisdom in Sirach 51:26, "Put your neck under her yoke, and let your souls receive instruction", and as a rabbinic metaphor for the difficult but joyous task of obedience to Torah.

So, what is Jesus trying to tell us?

He knew only too well what a burden was. He knew that each and every one of us carries, like Christian in John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, a burden of fear and doubt, of care and trouble. He knew only too well that it was the common people, the everyday men and women (and children) who laboured under the burden of often cruel and unjust law. The law that was imposed by their own religious establishment and the rule of Rome, by inequities in social and economic belief and practice.

So the yoke, the burden, he offered to people was based on love and compassion. It was not intended to drive people but to guide them. Jesus’ yoke is found in his teaching, his way of discipleship – not as a soul-destroying weight of fear and hopelessness, but as a life-giving gift that comes from his all-consuming love for those oppressed. He invites the weary to learn from him, for he is not a tyrant who lords it over his disciples, but is ‘gentle and humble in heart’. His yoke is easy (*chrēstos*, better translated as good or kind) and his burden is light. To take his yoke upon oneself is to be yoked to the one in whom God's kingdom of justice, mercy, and compassion is breaking into this world, and to find the rest for which the soul longs.

So take the time to reflect on the burdens each of us might carry. Are they burdens we carry from our past lives or burdens that have come into our lives in the present times?