

Trusting in the compassion of God, let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us ...

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

Jesus, Lamb of God, have mercy on us.

Jesus, bearer of our sins, have mercy on us.

Jesus, redeemer of the world, grant us peace.

**Almighty God, we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.**

- 1 Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does his successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.
- 2 Blessings abound wherever He reigns;
The prisoner leaps to lose his chains;
The weary find eternal rest,
And all the sons of want are blessed.
- 3 Let every creature rise and bring
Peculiar honours to our King;
Angels descend with songs again,
And earth repeat the loud 'amen!'

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.

St Margaret's Old Catton



5 July 2020

4th Sunday after Trinity

proper 9

*this service can be found online at <https://youtu.be/XIF8wcDUf0k>
You can also find it on 'A Church Near You' - look for St Margaret's Old Catton
and St Margaret's will be open for live worship on Sunday 5th at 10.00 am*

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you
and also with you.

We meet in the presence of God
**who knows our needs, hears our cries,
feels our pain, and heals our wounds.**

Lord God, the maker and redeemer of all, as we come before you in grief and praise this day, comfort us with your presence, make us attentive to your voice, and sustain us with the hope of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Free us, God of mercy, from all that keeps us from you; relieve the misery of the anxious and the bereaved, and fill us with the hope of peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

As we gather once again with our friends and neighbours,
before the throne of grace,
let us confess our sins in penitence and faith,
firmly resolved to keep God's commandments
and to live in love and peace with all.

**Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name. Amen.**

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent,
have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

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Collect

O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that with you as our ruler and guide we may so pass through things temporal that we lose not our hold on things eternal; grant this, heavenly Father, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Thanksgiving

The Lord is with us, he is our stronghold;
God will help us at the break of day.

**The Lord is with us, he is our stronghold;
God will help us at the break of day.**

God is our refuge and strength,
ready to help whenever we are in trouble:

God will help at the break of day.

We will not fear, even if the earth shakes,
and the mountains topple into the sea:

God will help at the break of day.

Come now and look at the works of the Lord,
the awesome things he has done on earth:

God will help at the break of day.

Be still and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations;
I will be exalted in the earth:

God will help at the break of day.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

**The Lord is with us, he is our stronghold;
God will help us at the break of day.**

Jesus, our companion, when we are driven to despair,
help us, through the friends and strangers we encounter on our path,
to know you as our refuge, our way, our truth and our life. **Amen.**

Gospel Reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

St Matthew 11.16-19, 25-30

At that time Jesus said, 'To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

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Lord God, you are the most holy one, enthroned in splendour and light,
yet in the coming of your Son Jesus Christ you reveal the power of your love
made perfect in our human weakness.

Embracing our humanity, Jesus showed us the way of salvation;
loving us to the end, he gave himself to death for us;
dying for his own, he set us free from the bonds of sin,
that we might rise and reign with him in glory.

On the night he gave up himself for us all
he took bread and gave you thanks;
he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way, after supper
he took the cup and gave you thanks;
he gave it to them, saying:

Drink this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

Therefore we proclaim the death that he suffered on the cross,
we celebrate his resurrection, his bursting from the tomb,
we rejoice that he reigns at your right hand on high
and we long for his coming in glory.

As we recall the one, perfect sacrifice of our redemption,
Father, by your Holy Spirit let these gifts of your creation
be to us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ;
form us into the likeness of Christ
and make us a perfect offering in your sight.

Look with favour on your people
and in your mercy hear the cry of our hearts.
Bless the earth, heal the sick, let the oppressed go free
and fill your Church with power from on high.

Gather your people from the ends of the earth
to feast with all your saints
at the table in your kingdom,
where the new creation is brought to perfection
in Jesus Christ our Lord;
by whom, and with whom, and in whom,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory be yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Let us pray to God the Father,
who has reconciled all things to himself in Christ:

For peace among the nations,
that God may rid the world of violence
and let peoples grow in justice and harmony ...;

For those who serve in public office,
that they may work for the common good ...;

For Christian people everywhere,
that we may joyfully proclaim and live
our faith in Jesus Christ ...;

For those who suffer from hunger, sickness or loneliness,
that the presence of Christ
may bring them health and wholeness ...;

Gracious Father, by the obedience of Jesus you brought salvation
to our wayward world: draw us into harmony with your will,
that we may find all things restored in him, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Merciful Father,
**accept these prayers for the sake of your Son
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

The Lord is here
His Spirit is with us.

Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give thanks and praise.

You are worthy of our thanks and praise,
Lord God of truth,
for by the breath of your mouth
you have spoken your word,
and all things have come into being.

You fashioned us in your image
and placed us in the garden of your delight.
Though we chose the path of rebellion
you would not abandon your own.

Again and again you drew us into your covenant of grace.
You gave your people the law and taught us by your prophets
to look for your reign of justice, mercy and peace.
As we watch for the signs of your kingdom on earth,
we echo the song of the angels in heaven,
evermore praising you and saying:

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"We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we wailed, and you did not mourn."

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon";
the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton
and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" Yet wisdom is
vindicated by her deeds.'

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; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been
handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the
Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom
the Son chooses to reveal him. '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.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

The Coronavirus has been a great burden these last few months, a massive
burden for many nations, and in some parts of the world it's on the rise.
Our media often regard it as a national problem, but as a church, we know
our neighbours are very much wider than our nation. And it's been a great
burden for the NHS, a burden for Care workers, key workers, and a burden
for those of us trying to keep a very low profile, going out only where
necessary. We have missed our regular contacts and friends, our social
interaction. It's been a burden for those businesses which depend on
people gathering, in pubs, shops, trains and cinemas, in theatres, concert
halls and churches. Many have been furloughed, many have lost jobs, and
many more will do so. As one man who called at my door to give me a
wrongly delivered letter, 'its my grandchildren who will be paying for this' -
blaming me personally for the outbreak, I felt, and forgetting that it might
be my grandchildren, and yours, who would share that heritage too.

The other great burden that has come across loud and clear is that running
a church during lockdown is a great burden. There are a lot of fixed costs
but suddenly much less fixed income, as contributors have become unfixed
from their pews. I know Alec Holliday has struggled manfully to get a
handle on the finances of this parish, but without weekly envelopes and
Sunday collections, life has been very hard for him to balance the books. I
have appealed in the printed and emailed service sheets we have sent
round, and I do so again. Please don't forget your regular giving - we
depend on it. If you can pay what you would have paid, it would be great.
And if you can raise your giving, it would of course be really helpful.

So the assumption that following Jesus is difficult feels like being borne out
in reality. This feels like a tough time, for a treasurer particularly! But it's
not just money that seems a burden. There are the gospel sayings like,
"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and
whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and
whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me."

3

But in today's gospel we hear something very different, words of invitation and consolation. '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.'

Yes, following Jesus can be difficult. It has consequences. But at its heart, discipleship is about relationship, and about learning. To learn from a religious teacher, to follow one, is first and foremost about relationship, about being together. When Jesus called his disciples, he told them, "Come, I will make you fishers of men." Now he tells them, "Come, all you that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

That's an invitation we need, a reminder we desperately need in our stressful world. We are overwhelmed by so many things. We may be anxious, fearful, angry, like the man at my front door. Jesus invites us to come to him with all of that, with our worries and concerns, our burdens. He invites us to find rest in him.

Now, a yoke was the common symbol for the Law of Moses, especially for the details of the law and the minute demands of the legalism of the Pharisees. The yoke of the Pharisees, their demands that you have to do this in exactly right in order to matter to God, in order to be a decent person, in order to be loved or counted significant – that yoke Jesus rejects, even though it was the yoke of the wise and intelligent.

That yoke, the yoke of seeking God by keeping the rules, by trying to get it right all the time and so living constantly in fear of getting it wrong; that yoke leads those who wear it to "labour and be heavy laden." It leads to a religion and a life of fearful obedience to a multitude of petty dictates where the spirit is deadened, and where some measure of success is more likely to lead you into self-righteousness, than into the heart of God.

To say to your child, or a friend, or your spouse, or anyone, really, "I will only love you if you do right," is to ensure a sick and twisted relationship. It hurts everybody involved.

To teach that God says this is not only terrible theology, it can also be devastating. Yet the yoke of the Law, at its worst, did just that. Those who, like Paul, struggled under such a yoke discovered that it didn't fit; that it didn't bring them to God; that it didn't enrich their lives. Yokes like that never do.

To go scurrying about with the notion that if we could only figure out the right thing to do – the right way to act, the right words to say, the right way to do the rituals – then we would be all right, is to skate on the edge of magic, as if we could conjure up God's acceptance. It will only ensure frustration and exhaustion. God's presence with us and God's love for us are never the results of our actions. He is in charge; we are not.

In response to all of this, Jesus says, "Come to me" not to a new law, not to a new teaching, not to a secret interpretation or a hidden loophole, not to a book, not to a list; but "to me." Come to Jesus himself.

In essence, Jesus is saying, "If you seek God; if you seek his love; if you seek a life that makes some sense; if you want a way of understanding the world that allows you to deal honestly with what happens and not be destroyed; if you want to be who you are created to be – if you want this, then come to me."

It's a call to relationship – to relationship with Jesus and to relationship with the community that continues Jesus' life and ministry.

One more thing: in many translations, Jesus calls his yoke "easy." Now, that's an unfortunate English word; it makes it sound like everything's a snap, that very little effort or energy is required to do it. And as anyone who has tried to live the life of Jesus knows, that's just not true. The New English Bible's translation is better: it reads, "My yoke is good to bear."

The point is not that this yoke, the Lord's call to relationship, makes no difference or asks nothing of us – quite the contrary. The point is that it fits, it's the right size, so it works – it leads to God, and it brings with it wholeness and a peace that can be found nowhere else. To come to him is to discover that the task of getting it all correct is replaced by the absolute gift of God's grace, and our grateful response to that gift.

All the strong stuff we've been hearing the past few weeks about the cost of discipleship is still very much there. But the yoke is good to bear. It leads to life. To put it on is to be embraced by God's mercy – to carry it is to fulfil both God's will and our own deepest humanity.

We are called to this new yoke, not to a law, or to a set of rules, but to a person and a community built around that person. And in this the religious quest – the greatest journey of human existence – can find its richest fulfilment, and its deepest satisfaction.

At the very end of Matthew, Jesus promises his continued presence with his disciples, "And lo, I will be with you always." Here, Jesus explores and explains the meaning of that presence. It's not just "being with" him. It is opening ourselves to the transformative power of that presence, to find in his ongoing presence with us, rest for our souls.

It is also to make that same invitation to others. In Matthew 9, Jesus looked on the crowd and "had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." The world we live in, the city we live in is full of people in desperate need. Can we speak Jesus' words to them, "Come unto him, all you that are weary and heavy-laden, and he will give you rest?"

Let us pray.

Prayers may include these concerns:

- ¶ *The Queen, members of parliament and the armed forces*
- ¶ *Peace and justice in the world*
- ¶ *Those who work for reconciliation*
- ¶ *All whose lives are devastated by war and civil strife*
- ¶ *Prisoners, refugees and homeless people*