

Soul Sunday

Today in our Gospel reading we see part of Jesus' grief, for his generation who cannot see the love of God and all that God longs for, for us. In Jesus' words is an invitation to a place of comfort; a place for soul nourishment: a place of rest: and a place where we can learn from and recover from our pain.

"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 light." Matthew 11: 29-30

Today we come, just as we are, to Jesus for soul rest.

Light Your Candle



Call to Worship

God invites all who are weary to come.
Come now with the burdens of work, "stay at home", and the world community.

Jesus says,

I will give you rest.

God invites all who are weary to come.
Come now with the burdens of illness, of fear, of hopelessness. Jesus promises,

I will give you rest.

God invites all who are weary to come.
Come now with the burdens of anger & frustration, of prejudice, of alienation. Jesus promises,

I will give you rest.

God invites all who are weary to come.
God invites all who are weary to lay down their burdens.
God invites all who are weary to find peace.

We gather in hope and to rest in God.

Come, let us worship.

Acknowledgement of Country

We give acknowledgement this day to the First Peoples of our land, and in particular the Bunurong and Boon Wurrung peoples. We pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging. We commit ourselves to truth-telling and the seeking of reconciliation.



Opening Readings

Song of Solomon 2: 8-13

Opening Hymn The Summons

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?

Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?

Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?

Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?

Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare?

Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?

Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?

Will you kiss the leper clean and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean in you and you in me?

Will you love the "you" you hide if I but call your name?

Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?

Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around, through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?

Lord your summons echoes true when you but call my name.

Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.

In Your company I'll go where Your love and footsteps show.

Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

John L. Bell & Graham Maule

Opening prayer

Breathe in: breathe out: feel the weight of life: feel the rest of release.

God of the Sabbath,
you created not only work,
but the blessing of rest.

After weeks of global pandemic
After weeks of political injustice
we feel our exhaustion, our stress,
we have been overwhelmed, and
we are in need of renewal and
refreshment,
– to be re-created.

Help us hear your invitation to respire for our souls and spirits,

Help us to take up the invitation to rest
In your yoke:

Find comfort for our bodies and minds,
A Sabbath Rest.

Open us to receive your gentling Spirit and your humbling presence. Amen.

Prayer of confession

In our rest and recovery we reflect upon

Those moments where we have lacked capacity

To be and live your loving grace in our relationships

And in our world.

<pause in silence>

God of new life,
we come to this time and place,
feeling raw and vulnerable.

We know that too often we forget your constant love for us;

we seek love in all the wrong places,
and we put our trust in life and all the wrong things.

Yet, we come to you

With each other,

Knowing your yoke: seeking to learn from your humble heart.

Words of affirmation

As we dip deep into the well of God's love in the sound of water,
we hear vibrancy.

In the touch of water,
we feel calm.

In the taste of water,
we experience nourishment.

Drink these words in:

Sin is forgiven

Thanks be to God



The Readings

Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30 and
Romans 7:15–25a

VOICE ONE: **Matthew 11:16–17**

¹⁶“But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

¹⁷ 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.'

VOICE TWO: **Romans 7:15**

¹⁵ I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

VOICE ONE: **Matthew 11:18–19a**

¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; ¹⁹ the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'

VOICE TWO: **Romans 7:16**

¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good.

VOICE ONE: **Matthew 11:19b**

Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

VOICE ONE: **Matthew 11:25–26**

²⁵ At that time 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; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

VOICE TWO: **Romans 7:17–21**

¹⁷ But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand.

VOICE ONE: **Matthew 11:19b**

Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.

VOICE TWO: **Romans 7:22–23**

²² For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, ²³ but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

VOICE ONE: **Matthew 11:27**

²⁷ 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.

VOICE TWO: **Romans 7:24**

²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

VOICE ONE: **Matthew 11:28–30**

²⁸ "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, 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."

VOICE TWO: **Romans 7:25**

²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

For these Words of faith and Jesus the Word: **Thanks be to God.**

Sermon Rev Jennie Gordon

There was a time, and it still happens in various parts of the country, when having a Bush Dance was a fun and exciting thing to do. The Mucrakers Bush Band formed at Montrose Uniting Church in the foothills of Mt Dandenong in the early 1990's to raise money for the children's program Advent Workshops.

As I am not proficient or even particularly talented musically, I managed the band and called the dances. Our reputation grew and people from schools, churches and clubs would phone and book us to play. We'd arrive, set-up the 6- 8 piece band, and as dusk fell the dancing would begin. Most times the first dance was thin on the ground; me and a few people I could invite/cajole into the circle for a barn dance. Forward-two-three-kick-back-two-three-kick-twirl-slide-slide-back-back-waltz.... People were hesitant, not knowing the steps, not wanting to look silly, feeling awkward. Often the children were the first to get up. Once we got going, it usually didn't take long and we'd have a floor full of people whirling and swirling, up and down, around and around. Do you remember? It was good for the soul.

The bible readings this week are full of invitation; the invitation to 'come away' into a fruitful springtime, the invitation to dance, the invitation to 'come to me ...', as Jesus said, 'and you will find rest for your soul'.

I've got at least three questions here (actually a lot more but 3 is a good number):

- What does it mean to 'find rest for your soul'?
- How do we trust that we will learn the steps and know the way?
- How do we respond to Jesus' invitation?

The word 'soul' occurs approximately 247 times in the bible, depending on what translation you use. At the beginning of 1 Samuel we see Hannah pouring out her soul before the Lord in the temple, and the priest supposes she is drunk. There's beautiful and powerful imagery further on in 1 Samuel chapter 18 when 'the soul of Jonathon was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathon loved him as his own soul.' Job, in his misery, sits in ashes and speaks of the bitterness of his soul. In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus responds to a lawyer's questioning about the greatest commandment saying, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' Mary's Magnificat in Luke's gospel speaks of her soul

magnifying the Lord. According to other texts, our souls can seek, tremble, weep, desire, be puffed up or troubled, and can endure after the body is killed. No wonder they need a rest.

The ancient Greek word for soul is *psyche*, 'breath'. It suggests that the soul is the essence of us and that the soul is what leaves the body when we die. Maybe the soul is that part of us, deep in our unknowing, that connects us with God, and through that threshold of love, connects us with each other. Then our souls are troubled and weary when we are disconnected, lost in ourselves and our own pain, or making decisions that turn us away from the invitation to life. We can find rest for our souls when we are in step with the divine dance, when we participate in the relationship that Jesus offers, when we say yes when he says 'come'.

So, Jesus reaches out to us with the promise of rest for our souls. He doesn't say that life is going to be easy, in fact he tells us that the 'yoke' is easy. The yoke is a piece of agricultural equipment designed to connect two working animals together, often a younger one and an older one. They work side by side, sharing the load and learning the way. Having an 'easy yoke' means that it fits well and is suited to our capacity and to the work that we are doing. Jesus also said that our burden would be light, not that we would be relieved from carrying a burden. Jesus' way is the way of the cross, that's heavy. His path is narrow, and the invitation is to walk beside him, sharing the load and finding rest in deep communion with him. That's how we will know the steps, we'll be yoked to the Lord of the dance.

So how do we respond to this invitation offered by Jesus, to come back into a state of deep connection in our souls, to join the dance, to move with the universe, to find rest? Or as we hear in the Song of Solomon, how do we arise and come away, leaving the winter behind and joining the beloved in the fruitfulness of springtime? As long as people have walked this earth, I think this question has been our quest. The incarnation, the birth of God as Word made Flesh, was about pitching a

tent and moving in next door so that we could have a better chance to deeply connect with the source of life and love, so that we might have the fullness of life, so that our searching, weary souls might find knowledge, intimacy, comfort and rest. We respond by prayer and study of the text, by letting our deeds speak of the wisdom we have been shown and by walking the narrow path in the company of the lost and forgotten.

Well, it's one thing to say yes and to come, and another thing to stay there, yoked and steady. The Apostle Paul speaks of the struggle; "I do not understand my own actions. I do not do what I want but I do the very thing I hate." The invitation from Jesus is ongoing and refreshes whenever we need to hear it again. Sometimes our souls need to struggle, we need to stay awake at night, we need to seek, to ask, to knock and to pour out our souls like Hannah before they can find rest. Sometimes too, we sense that blissful state when 'all is well with our souls', when we delight in the dance and our feet know the steps. Thanks be to God, Amen.



Prayers of the people

Find something which has a smell you love.... Perhaps a fresh plant or herb, a perfume, a coffee or even some toast! Keep the smell close as you pray for others.

God of gentleness and compassion, sometimes our burden feels soooo heavy. We see the struggle of our neighbours and friends, the pain of our world. We feel sad that we are unable to take away the heavy load of others. And so, we bring all of our heaviness to you, for you offer us rest.

Gentle and humble One, give us rest for our souls.

We long for intimacy, for rest and for liberation. You long for us just as much as we long for you. You don't wait for us to

recognise our need, but you reach out your loving arms and reassure us that we are your beloved. You waft into our senses and we know your nearness.

Gentle and humble One, give us rest for our souls.

Someone I know is struggling with grief and sadness. Someone else is lonely. Their load is heavy. Someone I know has a physical struggle. Someone is unwell, someone else is hurting, Someone is living with disability, someone with a lack of meaning in their life. Guilt and shame is an overwhelming burden for someone.

Gentle and humble one, give us rest for our souls.

Someone I know hurts for their children, someone knows violence too intimately, someone knows incarceration. Someone knows addiction and its painful temptations. Someone is hungry and someone lacks reliable shelter and a sense of true home. Others are refugees and live in such uncertain times. Someone is coming undone in their mental health struggles. Sometimes we are simply weary and know that others are too.

Please, gentle and humble one, give us rest for our souls.

Thankyou humble and gentle One who gifts us with liberation, justice, peace and mercy. Your invitation to us is to find our life in you, to mirror your character in our own lives. We believe O God, bring us into ever greater faith and belief.

Gentle and humble one, give us rest for our souls. We hear your invitation into soul rest and respond with a heartfelt yes.

(Perhaps the fragrance you have been using will always remind you of God's tender care of your soul).

We bring all prayer, together in

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory
are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Passing the peace

Just before we bless our offerings: I'd like you to take a pen and paper and write down the names of 2 people in your congregation: somebody you know well, and somebody not so well: ...and make a commitment today that you will ring them today or this week: just to check in and see how they are.

Offering

When we get to the time of offering, loving God, it reminds us of how well you care for us.

And so we are here to say thanks.
Thanks for giving us the people in our lives who are dear to us.
Thanks for all the material things we enjoy.

We are also conscious that alongside our thanks, the offering time reminds us that not everyone in our world can enjoy things as we do.

We find our welcome in you, help us to share that with a world that sometimes seems so lost.
Take our lives and resources, whatever they are, and use us to share your love with others.

Notices

Make sure you phone those two people you thought of in our "passing the Peace" time



Hymn: It is Well with My Soul

When peace, like a river,
attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot,
Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

It is well with my soul,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Traditional: Horatio G. Spafford

Blessing

*Your soul is held and tended by
an infinitely loving and intimate God.*

Go on into life knowing
that the intricacy in your creation
reflects an awe-some,
dynamic and amazing God.
Go to share God's love
with those around you
in new and vibrant ways.
Go in peace. Go to be peace.

