

Genesis 24:34-38
Psalm 45:11-18
Romans 7:15-25a
Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Proper 9A
St. Barnabas Bainbridge Island
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Come As You Are

Today we mark significant changes in our community. While we hope we are always growing, always discerning God's call to us, always opening minds and hearts, those aren't the only ways this community changes. People come and go and that changes our community too. Today, we hear Paul's sublime music for the last time – at least for a long time. Maybe he'll come back and play for us from time to time. But his absence will become very present, very soon. I told Paul yesterday that I'd been crying all morning – trying to get the crying out of the way before today! But the truth is, Paul's leaving breaks my heart. And when hearts break, they invite us to be more vulnerable, more tender, more gentle and good – all things that herald the Kingdom of God. So God can even use Paul's departure to build God's kingdom in this place.

We'll also welcome a very special addition to our community today. When we baptize baby Iris Anne we will all welcome her into the household of God that is this community. And even though she is just a wee one, her presence will change our collective life too. Her presence as one of the little ones Jesus loves so well, will call forth love pure and simple, from us all. And love, of course is at the heart of the Kingdom of God.

And those of you who are here for the first time today and you who have been with us only a few times, you are changing our community too. While we don't yet know you well, we do know you are precious to God and to us, and your presence invites our welcome, our curiosity, our kindness and open-heartedness, all of which bring God's Kingdom ever closer.

People helping God's Kingdom to come - or not- is what Jesus was talking about in today's gospel reading. Whether it's whining about all the attention they deserved but didn't get... *'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.'* or being unwilling to see the new thing God is doing... *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!'* either way, Jesus had had it with people who'd taken their eyes off the prize that is the Kingdom of God.

I'm pretty sure Jesus was beyond frustrated. Sometimes Jesus seems really angry and judgmental in Matthew's gospel, and to hear Matthew tell it, it's not just because individuals aren't doing their part to bring God's kingdom to bear. It's also because those privileged people, along with the religious systems they're a part of, make it hard for others – especially marginalized people – to access God's comfort and nurture and love. That really made Jesus

mad¹. In John the Baptist, and especially in Jesus, God was doing a new thing in a new way and people refused to consider what God was doing because God wasn't doing things the way God had always done things. Sounds sort of Episcopalian, doesn't it? Change? Change that lightbulb? You can't change that lightbulb; my grandmother gave that lightbulb. We pretend to make fun of ourselves, as we ignore the implications of our reluctance to look at the new things God wants to do with us. I wonder, what new word is God trying to say to us, and through whom is God trying to say it? Matthew's listeners didn't want to hear from Jesus or John because they weren't the same as everybody they'd heard from before. I wonder, which voices are we ignoring, and at what cost?

Jesus had been preaching and teaching and making miracles all over Galilee and people were not paying attention! They were blatantly unrepentant and arrogant too. The Pharisees were sure they had everything they needed to lead good and righteous lives, and thought they'd please God by the hard work of their perfect keeping of the law. So when Jesus came along, preaching things like *humans weren't made for the sabbath, the sabbath was made for humans*, and all sorts of other ideas that made caring for each other more important than following the rules, the religious authorities came unglued and the people who thought they'd save themselves by being perfect rule followers became pretty uncomfortable. Jesus taught the new Law of Love, and told his followers, then and now, that we're supposed to do that too.

As it turns out, living the Law of Love is the lighter burden Jesus offers. *'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.'* Such wonderful words that soothe our troubled souls when life feels too hard to bear. Come to me. Come here. Come closer. I am the safe and restful place. Come.

First century Jews – the people Matthew was writing for – were burdened by many things, not the least of which was following the letter of the Law, essentially an impossible task. Strange as it seems, early in Covidtide, many of us experienced the burden of attending to the tiniest details of the most mundane tasks. Like going to the grocery store for a gallon of milk. Do you remember?

Grab your mask, hand sanitizer and gloves. When you get to the store, put on your mask and gloves. Sanitize the cart handle. When you go into the store, make sure you don't touch anything you're not going to buy, stay at least 6 feet away from everybody, do not linger over the beautiful produce, get in and out as fast as you can, remove and dispose of the gloves only after you've put everything in the car, sanitize the door handle you opened with the contaminated gloved hand, wipe down the steering wheel with a sanitary wipe, make sure the outside vents are closed before turning on the car, drive home, take the contaminated grocery bags in, place them in the contaminated area, take things out one by one and spray them with bleach water, set them in the

¹<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtOYWSJ4WeU>

uncontaminated area, allow them to dry, put them away never setting them back in the contaminated area, remove the contaminated bags and containers from the kitchen, sanitize the contaminated area, wash your hands, sanitize the doorhandle, the sink and all counters then wash your hands again.

For first century Palestinians, following the letter of the law was a little like that. Trying hard to do everything right, and believing our good work will save us, is exhausting. There were also people who want nothing to do with God. Those folks are exhausted by their cravings for power and prestige, miserable if not the best and the brightest, the most beautiful and successful. These are all ways of being in the world that say “it’s all up to me.” Whether we err on the side of working hard to get everything right or we err on the side of thinking we can handle and control everything or we err on the side of some sheer arrogance that asserts there is nothing grander than me, it’s all the same. There is nothing so burdensome as having to be perfect, as trying to control our lives or circumstances, as being alone in the world, as thinking we can somehow be our own savior. “Come to me.” Jesus says. “and I will give you rest.”

These words still comfort. Have you ever sat with someone who is dying? Maybe you’ve received a frightening diagnosis. Perhaps you’re exhausted from the burden of too many tasks in over-scheduled days. Or depleted from the isolation that comes from being infirm or carrying on relationships only on screens. Maybe the supreme court, or the lack of common civility has sucked the lifeblood out of you. There are times in our lives when nothing seems to make sense, when nothing can be explained away, when what we face is far more than we can handle. Misinformed people say God never gives you more than you can handle, but I don’t believe that. I don’t believe God manipulates or dictates or dishes out the stuff of our lives, and I know for a fact that sometimes things really are much more than we can handle.

And that’s when Jesus’ comforting words matter so deeply. “You are tired,” Jesus says, “it really is all too hard. I know about such things. I’ve lived such things. Come to me. Let me be your resting place. Come to me – you who work so hard to get things right, you who have sadness deeper than Jacob’s well, you who labor under the mistaken impression that it’s all up to you, come to me. Come to me, and I WILL give you rest.”

Jesus doesn’t promise lives free of difficulty or burden, doesn’t promise to prosper some over others. Jesus never promised a life of blithely floating along on a cloud of tranquility, abundance and bliss. Quite the contrary. Jesus makes it very clear that life is often profoundly difficult, and there is a cost to discipleship. But he also promises he will never, ever abandon us. Jesus’ burden is the lighter one, because his is the burden of living the gospel life, a life that bears the yoke of love, gentleness, humility, compassion and forgiveness.

There will always be burdens, but once we’ve taken up this yoke of love, the burdens we carry are worthy of God and of our lives. The burden of being the face of love in the world is so much lighter than the burden of self-absorption that leads to turning away from the suffering in the world, or pretending there is nothing we can do. Once we have yoked ourselves with

Jesus, we can rest in the blessed assurance that we have given our lives to love, and that we bear the burden of love with Jesus. And in this, we can rest.

So come to Jesus just as you are. Whether you are weary or discouraged or overflowing with joy and delight. Rest in God's boundless love and mercy. Know yourself to be God's beloved. And let God's Holy Spirit work in you and on you so that you too can pour out God's love for the life of the world. Amen.