

## Trinity IV

5 July 2020

**Readings: Zechariah 9: 9-12; Psalm 145: 8-15; Romans 7: 15-25a;  
Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30**

Jesus speaks of a yoke in this morning's Gospel. Yokes are devices we don't see anymore, but they were once used to make carrying or pulling easier. A yoke is essentially a wooden frame that goes across the shoulders. With a yoke on your shoulders you can carry, let us say, two pails of water balanced on each end of the yoke. And I am sure that if you had a yoke for two people you could carry even heavier loads balanced on each end. You could also use it for pulling something heavy or for ploughing. When I was a child we had a yoke hanging on a wall in our home. It had belonged to my great grandfather, who had used it with oxen on his farm. I remember thinking how I would like to have seen it in action, for it was a huge wooden pole, quite thick, with rounded hoops on each end which would have gone around the necks of the two oxen yoked to it. This strip of cloth that Annie or I wear when we are presiding at some services is called a stole, but it is actually meant to represent the yoke that Jesus is talking about in our Gospel today. Jesus speaks of his yoke being easy and his burden light, a bit like this light strip of cloth.

On the other hand, we can contrast this with what Saint Paul is saying in his letter to the Romans, our second lesson for today. In this well-known passage Paul is crying out in anguish because, although he knows in his heart what the right thing to do is, he finds that despite this, he still does the wrong thing: 'I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.' Couldn't we all say this? As Christians none of us is perfect, far from it. How often do we not give in to temptation? And there is an insidious quality to sin, a quality that can at times make us think we are doing something right when in fact we are creating a mess. Paul is here speaking about what the Church calls 'original sin.' It's the name given to that within us that wants to put us, instead of God, first, that within us which impels us to try to have things our own way.

We see wanting to have things our own way reflected in the first part of our Gospel where Jesus says that people were not satisfied with John the Baptist because his stern message of repentance was too strict; but at the same time they were not satisfied with Jesus because they thought he went too far the other way, enjoying wedding feasts and dinners, only wanting to do it with everyone, including those considered sinners. In other words, people wanted God on their own terms and in their own image of what they thought God should be, refusing to accept God as God is.

We can also just forget about God in our busyness to try to serve God. As you

have heard me say before during this time of pandemic, how often do we take on too much, wearing ourselves out by thinking that it's up to us to do everything? How often do we try to spend all our time doing, leaving no time for contemplation and prayer? And so we end up with Paul, crying out in anguish at our sin, our wanting to do things our way, either out of selfishness or because we think it's all up to us.

Well the good news is that it's not all up to us: in the final analysis it's up to God. If our endeavours are God-centred, God will cause them to bear fruit, even if the bearing is in a way we might never have predicted or even if we are never there to witness the bearing. Our problem is that all too often we leave God out of the picture.

In today's Gospel Jesus speaks of God's hiding things from the wise and revealing them to infants. What I think he means here is that the so-called intelligentsia of the world all too often think that the solution to everything lies within the power of the human mind. Jesus, however, is saying that it doesn't. He is telling us that the solution always lies with God. This is why God is God, creator and re-creator. We humans, if we work with God, can merely help with the solution; but we can never be the solution. We can only know that the way to the solution is love. In speaking of infants, Jesus is saying that simple, unsophisticated people are often the ones who are closer to God because they in humility know that they possess no solutions of their own. I think Jesus is making an indictment against most of our Western society here, as we are part of a society which has pushed God aside and does not even think of God as a part of the solution.

Having said this, let's go back to where we began with the yoke. Think of two oxen attempting to pull a plough. Put your self in their place. It's much easier to do a job with help instead of on your own. Shouldn't we remember that God in Jesus is always there to help us? Isn't this the reason he calls us to remember him and come to him when we feel weary as a result of all our busyness or when with Paul we are crying out in frustration and remorse at our sin? Isn't he inviting us to the comfort of forgiveness? Isn't he inviting us to be refreshed, reinvigorated, and restored to hope? And, as we are so prone to forget this gracious invitation, should we not take the time to turn to him anew not just every day but all throughout the day? None of us will attain perfection in this life. But by the grace and help of God we can be transformed into something better than we are, if we take it slowly, a day at a time, in the knowledge that Jesus is with us, helping us to carry our yoke. May we turn to Jesus for this help. And may he make us to become yoke-mates for others. There's a new way to think of Christian discipleship: being a yoke-mate for others.

May God help us in this endeavour.

Charles Brown