

Year A Proper 14, 5th July 2026

Zechariah 9:9-12. Romans 7:15-25a. Matthew 11: 16-30.

You may have heard various news reports about their being a quiet revival in churches across the UK. Unfortunately, the statistical analysis that led to this conclusion has been found to be flawed, and the statistics do not in fact back up this notion of an increase in church membership, especially by twenty-something males.

But let's not be too dismissive and too hasty to dismiss the notion that there is a generation of mainly people who do not have a faith background starting to inquire about the meaning of their lives, of how they can live a better life. Many are on a spiritual journey¹. They do not see our 'worldly systems' as having all the answers, and they don't see that hard work and long hours brings the sorts of rewards that will enable them to afford a house of their own and a good quality of life.

Many people are anxious, have bouts of poor mental health, and struggle from day to day with managing their household budgets. Relationships suffer when people are under such pressure, and that just adds to the burdens many people feel. The younger generation cannot foresee that they will enjoy the sort of retirements most of us currently live. Both in terms of at what age they may be able to retire and what size of pension and quality of life they will experience.

Our first reading was from the Book of the Prophet Zechariah. He was writing after the return of the exiles from Babylon , after Cyrus took over that empire and encouraged all exiles to return to their home

¹ Our Faith Development book, we shall discuss on Monday 31st August, 'The Great Spiritual Migration' by Brian McLaren focusses on what people seek from church.

countries. This was in 539 BC. The exiles started to create some order out of the ruins of Jerusalem and the temple, but gave up. In 520 BC Haggai and Zechariah set about urging the populace to take up their work of restoring the temple once more, and the temple was rebuilt. This was the start of what is called the Second Temple Period which lasted about 590 years, until 70 AD.

Chapter 9 of Zechariah's prophecy is the start of a five chapter section that has two distinct features:

- ✝ They are hoping for God to act decisively to provide a much better destiny; implying there was a lack of hope and a pessimism that things would get better, and
- ✝ They are disillusioned with the leadership of their community, which they criticise frequently.

It is as if Zechariah is writing for our time here and now in the 2020's. Who said the Old Testament wasn't relevant? Many people in our world yearn for a better life, but have little hope in their being a change for the better. And yes, people are disillusioned with leadership at various levels in our social and political structures.

Paul's letter to the Christian community in Rome, that he will visit sometime after this letter is read out to them,² includes a fascinating confession. A confession about his own weaknesses and human failings; doing things he knows he should not do. He calls this a 'sin that dwells within'. He says he feels wretched when he acts against what his heart knows is right. He sees this as a form of bodily death. However, Paul knows that the only way to be transformed is to have faith in Jesus Christ, and to let Christ dwell within him. It doesn't

² Incidental, Paula Gooder's book 'Phoebe' is a great read about the transmission of this letter to Rome and its reception.

mean the struggles will still not occur; just that with what AA calls a 'higher power' he is able to resist doing evil acts. Paul knows that his relationship with the risen Christ is essential to living a life of internal peace and wellbeing, and living a life of external good, gracious, and generous acts. Only then will Paul feel whole and truly living in Christ.

Our Gospel reading also describes a society populated by people who are unsettled, dissatisfied, not at peace within themselves and therefore not at peace with their neighbours. Jesus compared the people to John the Baptist, a man who neither drank alcohol or ate to excess. The people claimed John had a demon – a personal attack on someone when you don't want to have to respond to the content of the message that all people need to repent and turn to the Messiah to be saved. Jesus was criticised as a glutton and drunkard for sharing meals, and also for associating with sinners and tax collectors.

Clearly, the people did not understand Jesus' teaching that a doctor administers to the sick, not to those who are well. Jesus made the profound statement that wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.

Wisdom, aka the Holy Spirit, guides and prompts people to live a fruitful and good life.

This passage of Matthew's gospel ends with three verses that mean so much to me, and I think can be a clarion call to all who are not at peace in themselves, or with others, who maybe realise they are searching for something beyond what our secular and consumer society has to offer, and for those who are yet to realise that is what they are looking for.

The text reads:

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who 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.”

Is that not what many people need to hear; not just need to hear, but also respond to? It is a generous and compassionate invitation into a relationship with Christ; to offer up all that burdens us, and rest in the loving arms of Christ. If we choose to take on the yoke of Christ, it is not one like oxen have, instead it is comfortable, and helps guide us to follow the ways of Christ, and it will not ever feel a burden.

Following Christ is meant to be one of personal growth, being able to reflect on what constrains us and stops us from living to our full potential, and learning that the love God has for us is not for us to selfishly cling to, but to share with others.

For many years, these three verses have been my go to verses in times of stress and grief, and sitting with them, meditating on them, and in silence being open to the Holy Spirit, has helped me so much.

I wonder whether these words speak to you, and how they may not just help you personally, but help you explain something of the nature of Jesus, the Christ, and therefore the nature of God, to others?

In these troubled times, offering a way for people to receive something of the peace of God, and have their burdens lifted from them is, I believe, what we are called to do. And to do it as we feel guided by the Holy Spirit, using our own unique God-given gifts.

May you all know the easy yoke of Christ, be guided by his teachings and his life of compassion, care, and love for all, and share that gift of love and peace with others.