



Call to worship

Jesus says: 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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.'

Let us come to the Lord Jesus.

Let us seek his rest.

First hymn StF 455 All my hope on God is founded Watch on YouTube <https://youtu.be/W3LCGh02Vew>

All my hope on God is founded; he doth still my trust
renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth, only
good and only true.
God unknown, he alone calls my heart to be his own.

Human pride and earthly glory, sword and crown
betray our trust; what with care and toil we fashion,
tower and temple, fall to dust. But God's power, hour
by hour, is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness aye endureth, deep his
wisdom passing thought; splendour, light, and life
attend him, beauty springeth out of nought. Evermore
from his store new-born worlds rise and adore.

Daily doth the almighty giver bounteous gifts on us
bestow; his desire our soul delighteth, pleasure leads
us where we go. Love doth stand at his hand; joy
doth wait on his command.

Still from earth to God eternal sacrifice of praise be
done, high above all praises praising for the gift of
Christ his Son. Christ doth call one and all ye who
follow shall not fall.

*Robert Bridges (1844–1930) (alt.) based on Joachim
Neander (1650–1680)*

A prayer of adoration

God, you are the source of creation, the giver of life. Christ, you are the one who embodies the freedom God offers, embracing life as it should be lived. Holy Spirit, you are the inspiration and motivation to live the kingdom life here and now. **Amen.**

A prayer of confession

Lord, we confess that we sometimes see religion as a rule book; especially for others, when we expect them to behave as we think they should. Forgive us when we live as inmates of an institution, rather than children of your open and welcoming Church. We confess that we are often blind to the life Jesus revealed, failing to recognise his revolutionary ways; for he didn't behave as people thought he should, but turned the world upside down with his lifestyle choices. He lived simply, freely, with compassion and forgiveness, fulfilling the essence of grace rather than the letter of the Law. We are sorry for the yoke with which we burden ourselves and others, and we turn to Jesus as our example and guide. **Amen.**

Assurance of forgiveness

Although we mistake your ways, O God, being rigid instead of righteous, steeped in rules and regulations rather than love and light, yet still you forgive us and lead us, by Christ's example, to a life of freedom and grace. Thank you, God, and to you be all the glory for this blessed forgiveness that frees us to live and love in the liberty of your kingdom life. **Amen.**

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

Father, we thank you that Jesus emerged in captive Judea when those who trod your path had made it a dry and dusty trail; a wearisome wilderness of restrictions and rules, where religious regulations were a burden, keeping ordinary people from truly knowing you. We praise you for his revelation of a different life, another way to live, to pray, to love; and we thank you for the community of care to which we belong,

the Church, and the life it encourages us to live – one with you, one with Christ and the Holy Spirit, in a lifestyle of love and light by which we aspire to live more fully, day by day, in your name. **Amen.**

1st Reading: Romans 7.15-25a

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. **AMEN**

2nd Hymn StF 322 How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

Watch on YouTube : <https://youtu.be/JXyHMMMy4YyY>

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear! It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds, and drives away our fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole and calms the troubled breast; 'tis manna to the hungry soul, and to the weary, rest.

Dear name — the rock on which I build, my shield and hiding-place, my never-failing treasury, filled with boundless stores of grace!

John Newton (1725–1807)

Jesus! My Shepherd, Brother, Friend, my Prophet,
Priest, and King,
my Lord, my Life, my Way, my End, accept the
praise I bring.

Weak is the effort of my heart, and cold my warmest
thought; but when I see thee as thou art, I'll praise
thee as I ought.

Till then I would thy love proclaim with every fleeting
breath; and may the music of thy name refresh my
soul in death.

The Gospel: Matthew 11.16-19,25-30 - Jesus Thanks His Father

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

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; 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 Word of the LORD. **THANKS BE TO GOD!**

Sermon: 'It's no yoke!'

Jesus says: 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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.'

Let us pray...

Wonderful God, life can get so heavy, so many worries to carry.
Gentle Lord, **lighten us through your Holy Word, Amen.**

This week we examine Jesus' invitation to lay down our burdens and take on his way of life instead. Religious leaders in Jesus' time had many rules for people to follow and you would be excluded from worship if you missed any. Jesus offers a far more grace-filled way for us to follow.

And so, it is that time of the year – holidays! And those contemplating holidays at this time of the year may be thinking about how great it will be to get away from the stresses of everyday life, to go to a place where we can unwind, chill out, kick back and do what we like for a couple of weeks. Often at a triple the cost.

Life is full of pressures – work, family, running a home. And often church adds to those pressures – being on rotas, running home groups, trying to be what we think God wants us to be. Romans 7 and Matthew 11 can help us to reflect on what it is that Jesus offers as he calls us to himself – something other than the stresses of church life and trying to live up to an image of ourselves that is unrealistic.

How does that compare with what Jesus offers in terms of rest, recovery, and a relationship that might offer some of what we try to get away from, all year round? 'Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me — watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.'
(verses.28-29, *The Message*)

Jesus' words in today's passage take aim at the culture and politics of his time as much as at the actions of individuals. Israel, in Jesus' time had layers of authorities and rulers: some religious and some put in place by the Roman Empire. This made life harder and more complicated for ordinary people to navigate. At the same time, religious expression had developed more and more rules as 'fences' to ensure the people did not deviate from worshipping Yahweh as they had before the exile to Babylon.

Some of these stringent expressions of the Law prohibited work on the sabbath; the religious leaders would say, 'If an item has no use on sabbath, don't even handle it!' This meant that the people were less likely to break God's Law, but it also meant that the Law itself had become a burden of yoke around their necks. It led to people missing God's messenger in John the Baptist – because of his fasting – and to being in danger of missing God's message in Jesus because of his eating and drinking with those he was reaching out to.

Jesus' suggestion that we put on his yoke is unique to Matthew. The 'yoke' was a structure, usually made of wood, that could be worn over the neck and shoulders of animals or humans and was used to make it easier to pull or carry heavy loads. It was an object of oppression. However, some Jewish writings used it to speak of putting oneself under God's instructions for life in the Torah (commonly translated 'Law')

This week's reading calls us to look at ourselves: are we set in ways that complicate what God wants for us or asks of us, ways that make it harder to know that we belong to God? And the other side of that coin is for us to consider whether, as church communities, we lay burdens on people as they come to faith. Do we give people extra rules to follow beyond that simple call to keep in step with Jesus? How do you think we can avoid complicating our gospel for ourselves and for others?

It is no yoke! the religious leaders around worship 'fences' had become the focus, rather than the God of love who was at the heart of things. Jesus mocks the religious leaders and invites all Israel to accept a new 'yoke' from him, not one of burden but one that they will be able to manage and that will allow them to know God as was always intended.

In the second part of this reading, there is a reminder that the wisdom of God is revealed to the most unlikely people – the very people whom Jesus exhorts to find rest in him. There's also something fun in that passage that speaks of contrariness – one which reminds of the words of Maya Angelou:

*“Laugh as often as possible. You must.
Because the world will offer you every reason to weep.
So, as often as possible, you laugh.
That, I think, is part of the Great Love.”*

The gospel reinforces the message by reminding us of God's invitation to rest. God invites us to throw off the heavy yokes that the expectations of others place on us and to take on the lightness of God. God bids us rest not so that we can simply regroup and replenish but so that we can be reminded of His love and desire to hold us close; until, resting in Him, we find healing and strength that enable us once more to be open and vulnerable.

*So “Laugh as often as possible.
for that, I think, is part of the Great Love.”*

May the Lord bless you and bless you kindly with these words, Amen.

Prayers of intercessions

What situations in your life at the moment do you feel under-resourced in and overwhelmed by? Offer them, asking God to multiply your gifts and meet your needs so that you can face all that lies ahead with more confidence.

Bidding Response:

Lord God, we lift your children before you. ***May they find rest for their souls.***

We pray for all in authority, that they will be respectfully conscious of the weight on their shoulders, and that they will act responsibly for the people they serve. We pray for them in their personal lives, with the worries and cares that only they see.

Lord God, we lift your children before you. ***May they find rest for their souls.***

We pray for our friends, family, colleagues. We pray that as we walk alongside them, you will use us to bring them close to you, and they will learn of your love.

Lord God, we lift your children before you. ***May they find rest for their souls.***

We pray that we might be sensitive to the needs of those around us – the people we see every day, perhaps as fleetingly as at the shops, or in the bus queue. We have no idea what burdens they are carrying, or if they need a kind word from you that only we can give.

Lord God, we lift your children before you. ***May they find rest for their souls.***

We pray that we will see the positive in people, even when it's hard, and reach out to encourage them.

Lord God, we lift your children before you. ***May they find rest for their souls. Amen.***

The Lord's Prayer

Contemporary

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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. **Amen.**

Final Hymn StF531 What a friend we have in Jesus

<https://youtu.be/Prthhmlly0Gg>

What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!
what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry everything to God in
prayer!

Have we trials and temptations,
is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged:
take it to the Lord in prayer.

Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness:
take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge —
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
in his arms he'll take and shield you,
you will find a solace there.

Joseph Medlicott Scriven (1819–1886)

A sending out prayer

Loving Lord Jesus, we take your yoke upon us now. Lift from of us any burdens we are carrying, any expectations we are trying to meet that are not from you. Give us rest, and lead us to those good works that you have prepared for us to do this week. Be glorified in us as we walk with you. **Amen.**

And the blessing of God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This service contains resources from Sing the Faith, Rootsontheweb, Church of England, YouTube,
<https://bible.oremus.org>