

2025 ALL-AGE TALK, LENT 1, MATT 28:28-30 & ISAIAH 30:15&18

JESUS' INVITATION TO REST

Here's a thought-provoking story I read this week. It's a story about some friends. About a family with children coming to visit a young couple. And there was great excitement about this visit, on both sides. The family with children were travelling quite a distance, so when they arrived there were the usual big greetings, screams & hugs. There were lots of new things to see for the family visiting. Lots of plans to make about what they were going to do together. The young guy who was welcoming the family saw the 2 year-old son disappear into the lounge, after all the welcomes. So he followed this toddler, expecting that he was looking for something new & fun to do. A game to play. Or simply looking to explore his new surroundings. But he was surprised to see what this toddler did. This two-year old boy, just went and sat on the sofa. Sat still on the sofa. He didn't do or say anything. He just sat there. The young guy felt it was right to go & sit with the child. He didn't say anything. He didn't offer him a toy to play with, or something to explore. He just sat with this child. He was led by the child's behaviour. He mirrored what the child was doing – precisely nothing. He spent time with him in complete silence...

That young guy is Sam Hargreaves, who led the retreat I went on this week. Sam is part of the Engage Worship team, who lead training for church leaders. He comments on this experience in the latest book produced by Engage Worship. The book is called, 'The Rest is Worship'. And this is the book which our Lent series, over the next four weeks at least, is based around this year.

Sam reflected on that experience with that toddler. The expectation was that this child would want to be doing lots of things. He was expecting to have a lively interaction with him. But what happened was, Sam felt, a picture of how God is with us... God simply enjoys being with his children. In our world, there is always this pressure to be doing, to be talking, or listening to someone else talking. But God is the great 'I AM'. God does not pressurise us into being productive. God delights in nothing more than to be with us... God is amazingly patient about giving us space & time. Jesus usually made a point of allowing others to set the pace. Jesus even invites us, at times, to set the agenda. He asks some people in need of healing: 'What is it you want...?'

This brings us to our 2 Bible readings 4 today. Jesus words in Matt. 11 describe something we all want to experience: true rest. The deep rest of Ps. 23 ...

What profound gentleness & kindness. Our Saviour, Jesus, is always truly person-centred. He offers each of us a yoke that is designed for us. Bespoke. Tailored for us. Jesus works with us, not against us. He wants our spiritual experience to be 'ergonomic' ... Ergonomics is the study of how to make our work environment as friendly & shaped around each individual as possible. So our work can be health-giving, not constantly chafing, painful & stressful.

Jesus words here in Matthew exactly echo God's invitation to his people centuries before. The prophet Jeremiah wrote this... (If you walk with God) 'you will find rest for your souls'. What does this tell us? It tells us this call to find rest with God is a constant theme, from Adam & Eve to today. It tells us that Jesus knew his OT scriptures... yes!... It tells us that God is consistent. God has always & will always offer us real rest. God will be true to his promise to give both people & his creation genuine rest.

But the story of Jeremiah & Isaiah 30 also reveals something else. Like the people of Israel, we tend to resist this offer of the blessing of rest. One of the pictures I felt God give me at the retreat day on Thursday was this. It was a picture of me, carrying some v heavy bags. In both hands. I already had a full load. But here was me welcoming other bags being added to this collection. I know I have a tendency to do this whenever I'm taking bags of shopping out of the car, for example. I like to be able to prove I can do it. That I'm strong & capable of carrying heavy loads. But God was making it clear to me: 'You can't carry this kind of load for very long... Not without some disaster...'

There's something in me, something in all of us, which resists other's help. Which resists **God's** offer of helpful rest... Something in us which always wants to be doing. We can end up working for too long & too hard, in a way which is not healthy for us, or for those around us. We are fearful of being unproductive (especially right now, when it's hard to find employment & we feel we need to be doing even more to keep our bosses happy)... The wonderful thing about establishing a healthy rhythm of rest is that – guess what? - it makes us more productive, not less. Who knew ? I often find, that when I am truly rested, I can get the same jobs done quicker, than if I had tried to do them when I was tired.

The 1st Sun in Lent we often think of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Instead of doing 'mission action', Jesus was led into being alone in silence with God. A scary place the wilderness, a place of 'doing nothing'. What is it about rest, about being silent & alone with God that most frightens us? Why do we resist? Isaiah reminds us: God still graciously longs to meet with you & me...