# Bethlehem Lutheran Church Wagga Wagga

# 5th Sunday after Pentecost

# 5th July, 2020

# The Triune God meets with us

## Jesus says: ‘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.’ (Matt 11:28,29 NRSV)

## In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

### Amen

# We confess our sins to God the Father…

## Friends in Christ:

## Let us confess our sins in the presence of God and of each other.

### We confess to you, almighty God, before the whole company of heaven, and to each other, that we have sinned in thought, word and deed, by our own fault.

### Have mercy on us, for Jesus’ sake, forgive us all our sins, and bring us to eternal life. Amen.

# …and God forgives us

## Maythe almighty and merciful Lord grant us pardon and forgiveness of all our sins.

### Amen.

# Jesus leads us as we pray

## The Lord be with you

### And also with you.

## Let us pray for gentleness. [silence]

## Thank you, Jesus, our gentle king, that you became a servant to all, and gave up your life for us.

### As your followers, make us humble, so that, like you, we serve others. For you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

### Amen.

# 1st Reading – God speaks through his prophets

## **Zechariah 9:9-12** *The humble king*

## 9 Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!

## Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!

## See, your king comes to you,

## righteous and victorious,

## lowly and riding on a donkey,

## on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

## 10 I will take away the chariots from Ephraim

## and the warhorses from Jerusalem,

## and the battle bow will be broken.

## He will proclaim peace to the nations.

## His rule will extend from sea to sea

## and from the River to the ends of the earth.

## 11 As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you,

## I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.

## 12 Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope;

## even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.

## This is the word of the Lord

### Thanks be to God

# We respond with Psalm 145:8-14

## 8 The Lord is gracious and compassionate,

### slow to anger and rich in love.

## 9 The Lord is good to all;

### he has compassion on all he has made.

## 10 All your works praise you, Lord;

### your faithful people extol you.

## 11 They tell of the glory of your kingdom

### and speak of your might,

## 12 so that all people may know of your mighty acts

### and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

## 13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,

### and your dominion endures through all generations.

## The Lord is trustworthy in all he promises

### and faithful in all he does.

## 14 The Lord upholds all who fall

### and lifts up all who are bowed down.

# 2nd Reading – God speaks through his apostles

## **Romans 7:15-25a** *The struggle of the sinner- saint*

## 15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 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. 19 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. 20 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.

## 21 So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; 23 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. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? 25 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.

## This is the word of the Lord

### Thanks be to God

# Gospel Reading – God speaks through Jesus

## **Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30** *Jesus reveals the Father, and the weary find rest in him*

## 16 “To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

## 17 “‘We played the pipe for you,

## and you did not dance;

## we sang a dirge,

## and you did not mourn.’

## 18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.”

## 25 At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. 26 Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

## 27 “All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

## 28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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.”

## This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ. Lord Jesus, thank you for revealing the Father.

### Help us to take your yoke and find rest in you.

### Amen.

# We meditate on the hymn ‘I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say’

### 1. I heard the voice of Jesus say, “Come unto Me and rest;

### Lay down, thou weary one, lay down Thy head upon My breast.”

### I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad;

### I found in Him a resting place, and He has made me glad.

### 2. I heard the voice of Jesus say, “Behold, I freely give

### The living water; thirsty one, stoop down, and drink, and live.”

### I came to Jesus, and I drank of that life giving stream;

### My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in Him.

### 3. I heard the voice of Jesus say, “I am this dark world’s Light;

### Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise, and all thy day be bright.”

### I looked to Jesus, and I found in Him my Star, my Sun;

### And in that light of life I’ll walk, till traveling days are done.

#### Horatius Bonar

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# God speaks to us

## *The LCA provides this sermon edited for lay-reading, with thanks to the original author.*

## Sermon for Proper 9, Year A - The Text: Matthew 11:28-30

## Jesus said: Come to me, all 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 at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

## Rest and recuperation

## Something strange has happened in the way we live our lives.

## Once upon a time most people spent most of their lives doing things that were physical—working the land with hand tools; running the household with great effort; making things with hard physical labour.

## We can think of God’s word to Adam after he was thrown out of the Garden of Eden: Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. By the sweat of the brow you will eat food, until you return to the ground.

## People would work hard all day, and by the end of the day they were exhausted. People would work hard all their lives, and by the time they were old, their bodies were worn out.

## Then people started to get cleverer. People invented all sorts of machines that took over many of the hard tasks - machines for the household, and for working the land, and for manufacturing things in the factories.

## I think that most of you would agree that our lives today are much easier than the lives of previous generations. Much of the burden of hard physical labour has been lifted off our shoulders.

## But then something strange happened. We have realised that we need physical activity. We need physical exercise to keep us healthy. We need to do things that make us tired.

## So what did we do? We invented some more machines, machines that we use to exercise, and we put them in gymnasiums, and sometimes in our own homes, and we use them, not to take away the physical efforts of life, but to give us the sort of physical effort that will help us to stay healthy.

## Our text today talks about hard work, about the burdens of life, that leave us exhausted, worn out. It talks about relief from your burdens, and rest, and refreshment, and recuperation.

## But then it also talks about a new burden, a new exercise that you need for the good of your health.

## Jesus says: Come to me all you who are weary and weighed down with heavy burdens. Jesus promises: Come to me, and I will give you rest, and refreshment. But then he challenges us: And now pick up my yoke, and learn from me. Learn how to live a life that is healthy and strong.

## What are the burdens that weigh people down? What makes you tired?

## Do you get tired physically? For all the labour-saving devices that we have, life can still be physically demanding. At the end of the day we may feel tired and worn out.

## Our bodies have their limits, and when we have been doing physical work, we reach the point where our bodies tell us. If we are ill, if we are carrying injuries, then we become even more aware of our physical limits. We feel tired. We need rest.

## As you grow old, you become more and more aware of the loss of physical strength. You cannot do the same tasks you used to do. You appreciate rest and quietness more and more.

## But there are other kinds of burdens and other kinds of weariness.

## Today, when we spend less time and effort on physical work, our levels of mental stress have grown at least as much. As life has become more and more complicated, our emotional stress keeps going higher. We talk about the pressures of life. There are pressures all around us—we are expected to succeed, to be able to manage new tasks, new technology, and we often get to the point when we cry out: I can’t cope with it all. Give me a break.

## We have financial pressures—all the things that we want to get, the security we hope for. We struggle to make ends meet.

## We have relationship pressures. We want to love and be loved. So often our relationships become difficult and we carry disappointments and regrets.

## There are pressures within us. We want to be successful. We want to be able to manage. We want to be independent. But again and again we are reminded of our own limitations. We feel that we have failed.

## But the greatest pressure, and our greatest failures, are spiritual.

## If we are honest, we know that we are not the people that we would like to be. We do not live the life that we know that we should live.

## I know that I am not the person that God wants me to be, and expects me to be, and commands me to be. I know I should obey my God, and I should live according to the life that God has set up for me. But I don’t. I fail. I disobey God, and I break God’s commands. The greatest burden we carry is our moral failure.

## We try to get around it and think that as long as we do our best, that should be OK. But it does not work. We carry a great and terrible burden of guilt. We have sinned against our God.

## If we think back to Paul’s words in Romans 7, it is one of the most honest cases of facing the guilt within our human hearts: I am a prisoner to the law of sin which is at work in my body. What a wretched man I am! We can hear his frustration, his anger, almost despair. If we are honest, we know that we all share in the same sort of struggle.

## I once shared this passage with a person who was struggling with addictions—gambling addiction, alcohol and drug addiction, sexual addiction. This person wanted to break free, but the reality is that an addiction keeps grabbing you and dragging you back.

## So you have the burden of terrible frustration and guilt. You want to do what is right and healthy, but the urges to do something to satisfy your desires is so great that it keeps dragging you back.

## Sin is an addiction. We don’t want to sin – but we do. Those desires to do something, even if we know that it is hurtful—they keep grabbing us and dragging us down.

## That is what Paul is speaking about, and we feel it too: I don’t understand what I am doing, and why I keep on doing it. I don’t do what I want to do, but I do what I hate. I know that God’s law is good, and I want to do what is right. But sin is living in me, and I keep on giving way to sin. I have the desire to do what is right, but I do not have the strength to carry it out. ….I don’t do the good I want to do, but I do the evil I don’t want to do.

## We hear his great frustration, and we share that frustration. Who will rescue me from this body of death?

## But Paul also has an answer. Paul knows where to go for relief, for release, for rest. Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

## That is also the answer that Jesus himself has given. That is the invitation that Christ gives to us: Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened. Come to me and I will give you rest.

## One of the great gifts of God is rest. Rest is peace, relief, refreshment. When we have rest, our bodies, and our minds, and our spirits, have the opportunity to recover, to gather strength again.

## When we are tired, we just want to stop, to put our feet up, to crawl into bed, to go to sleep. When we are rested, we are ready to start again. Our energy and our strength have returned.

## We have been made in a way so that while we rest we are made strong. Our bodies and our minds are refreshed and rejuvenated. If we are sick, often a good rest is the best medicine, so that your bodies can heal themselves, and overcome fevers and infections.

## There is a beautiful psalm verse: “In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for God grants sleep to those he loves” (Psalm 127:2)

## Jesus Christ offers rest. But now it is rest that brings health and recovery from our spiritual weariness, from our burdens of sin and guilt. Jesus Christ offers to take our burden. Jesus Christ has taken the burden of our sin and guilt all the way to the Cross. He has carried that burden and he has paid for that guilt with his own life. So Jesus says to us that we do not have to try to prove your own goodness—not to God, nor to ourselves, nor to anyone else. Jesus takes away that pressure.

## And Jesus tells us that as we come to him in repentance, he forgives us. He takes away our sin. He sets us free from the burden of guilt, and that terrible frustration when we can never avoid following our human sinful desires.

## Jesus gives us that deep rest and peace, for we know that our sins are forgiven. With that rest we are refreshed, rejuvenated, recuperated. We are ready to live again, with the strength and energy that comes from God’s Spirit.

## But just when we think that all of our problems have been solved, Jesus comes back and says: But now I have something for you to carry. Take my yoke on upon you. A yoke is the big heavy beam of wood that was placed over the shoulders of a team of oxen, so that they could pull heavy loads. Jesus is putting a load on us.

## Is it easy to be a Christian, to follow Jesus, to live for Christ? No, because Jesus also has very high expectations on us. Jesus calls on us to be totally dedicated to our God, to serve God with our bodies, minds and spirits. That is demanding, and it can mean a huge effort, a deep sacrifice.

## Has Jesus lifted off one burden, and replaced it with another? Yes—and no! Jesus takes away the real burdens that wear us out and threaten to destroy us. But remember how we spoke about another sort of effort, about work, about exercise, which is part of healthy living that creates a healthy tiredness.

## That is the sort of task and challenge that Jesus gives us. Jesus says: 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.

## If you look at a yoke, you will see that it is not meant to be carried alone—it is always carried by a pair of oxen. Jesus tells you, I am giving you a burden, but I am not expecting to carry it by yourself. I am not plonking it on top of you to weigh you down and oppress you and destroy you.

## No, I am gentle and humble in heart. I am giving you something that is going to help you and build you up.

## Jesus says that he is carrying that burden with us. Learn from me. When you share the tasks and challenges of Christian life, you are sharing in the life of Jesus Christ. You are sharing the life that comes from God. That is a privilege, not a burden. And it is a challenge that makes you stronger, that builds up your faith. The more you respond, the more you grow, and you appreciate more and more what God is doing through you and what God is doing in you.

## With Jesus Christ, this yoke is easy, this burden is not too heavy. As you commit to God’s tasks, yes, you do get tired. You know that you have been putting your body and mind and soul into it. But it is a healthy tiredness. It is the tiredness that brings refreshment and new life.

## Until you finally have finished all of your tasks. Then you have a new rest and an eternal peace. Then you are living in the peace of your heavenly Father. For Christ has given you the rest for your souls. Amen.

# We confess our faith in the Triune God

### I believe in God, the Father almighty,

### maker of heaven and earth.

### And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,

### who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

### born of the Virgin Mary,

### suffered under Pontius Pilate,

### was crucified, dead, and buried.

### He descended into hell.

### The third day he rose again from the dead.

### He ascended into heaven,

### and sits at the right hand of God, the Father almighty,

### from thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.

### I believe in the Holy Spirit,

### the holy catholic\* church,

### the communion of saints,

### the forgiveness of sins,

### the resurrection of the body,

### and the life everlasting.

### Amen.

#### \* ‘catholic’ here meaning 'universal'

# We meditate on the song ‘Life Overflowing’

### 1. I have come to bring you peace,

### I have come to call your name.

### I have come to lead you out

### And bring you life over-flowing.

### 2. I have come to tell you the truth,

### I have come to sow the seed.

### I have come to take your hand

### And show you life over-flowing.

### *Why steal your way in?*

### *Let me open up the gates.*

### *Let me call you by your name*

### *And give you life over-flowing.*

### 3. I have come to lead the way,

### I have come to give you sight.

### I have given up myself

### To bring you life over-flowing.

### 4. Will you take the peace I give?

### Hear me when I call your name?

### Take my hand and walk with me

### And drink this life over-flowing.

### *Why steal your way in?*

### *Let me open up the gates.*

### *Let me call you by your name*

### *And give you life over-flowing.*

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# We give of ourselves

## Thank you, Lord, for coming to us as a gentle king and bringing us victory over sin and death.

### Make us more and more like you, humble and gentle and serving others.

### Amen.

# We pray for others

## *God has given us his Spirit, and by the Spirit we pray to him as our Father. So let us bring our requests to God.*

## Heavenly Father, you are gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. We thank you for your daily forgiveness of our sins, and your guidance and love in every struggle we face. Open our eyes and ears to your presence in our daily lives; and open the eyes of our hearts to your Son through your word.

## Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer**

## We thank you for your church, the body of your Son – in whom we receive grace and mercy. Bless and protect your church throughout the world so that all people may hear the gospel and be saved. Equip the leaders of our church. We commend to you our Bishop John Henderson, and our District Bishop Robert Bartholameus. By your Holy Spirit enable them to carry out their callings with joy, strength and wisdom.

## Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer**

## Guide the leaders of the nations that they speak the truth, halt the spread of misinformation and act with justice so that all your family may know healing. We thank you for ordering our country and society by means of our government and elected leaders. Bless those in positions of responsibility that they may willingly strive for truth and justice, and so be your instruments of care and protection.

## Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer**

## Sustain all workers and business owners who suffer loss of livelihood due to shut-downs, quarantines, closed borders, and other restrictions. Protect and guard all those who must travel.

## Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer**

## Grant your healing and peace to all we know are unwell or undergoing medical treatment. Today we commit to you *(insert names).* Watch over them, give them confidence in your good and gracious will for them and guide the surgeons, doctors, nurses and other health professionals who care for them. Comfort those who are lonely and those who mourn the loss of loved ones.

## Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer**

## Heal our world, heal our bodies, strengthen our hearts and our minds, and in the midst of turmoil, give us hope and peace.

## Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer**

## Almighty and merciful Father, hear us, your children, as we bring our prayers to you. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

### Amen.

# We pray the prayer of Jesus

### 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. *Matt 6:9-13*

### For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

# The Triune God sends us out with blessing

## May Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, shine on us and make us ready to meet him when he comes in glory.

## And the blessing of almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be with us always.

### **Amen**.

# We meditate on the song ‘May the Lord Bless You Today’

### May the Lord bless you today,

### and may he keep you in his care,

### giving his peace to your soul

### even when times are hard.

### May the Lord’s love flow through you,

### just like a never ending stream

### knowing his hand will be there

### when you call on his name.

### May he always shine on you.

### May the Lord bless you today,

### and may he keep you in his care,

### giving his peace to your soul

### even when times are hard.

### May the Lord’s love flow through you,

### just like a never ending stream

### knowing his hand will be there

### when you call on his name.

### May he always shine on you.

#### Words and music: Sharny Russell-Schlencker

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# Announcements