The Gathering: July 2nd 2023 Matthew 11:28-30 Jer.6:16-17 Operating from a place of Rest

For those of you in the know, the article I wrote for this month’s newsletter entitled ‘operating from a place of rest’ is loaded with irony as I completed it at 2am on Thursday. 6 hours later I was heading down the A1 for a course at Church House, Leeds where the opening exercise was to find a partner and spend 2 minutes telling them what you did last weekend. I told my partner that I couldn’t even remember what I did yesterday let alone last weekend! And anyway; the course was for clergy many of whom have not experienced a weekend in decades.

We all experience times of stress and busyness in our lives and measured amounts of both are ok and can be quite good for us but problems can arise when these times of stress and busyness become longer, more regular, more intense and with shorter interludes in between. I have and have always had a large capacity for work and my stamina levels have always been quite high and for this I can give thanks to God whilst it remains, but just as it can be helpful it can also create me problems.

I recently read a book called ‘The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry’ by John Comer. I confess it had sat on my shelf for over a year as I found myself too busy to read it! Please hear me when I say that hurry is the great enemy of our spiritual lives. It interferes with our relation with the Lord and with others around us. Hurry is different to busy. We can have plenty to do but yet possess a lack of hurry. What really matters however, is not how full our lives are, but how fruitful and to be fruitful, we need to operate from a place of rest but that doesn’t mean having a long nap before we begin anything.

In the newsletter I refer to several examples that have occurred to me over the last 10 days. They all took place within very full days but because my spirit was at ‘rest’ in God I was able to handle them (I hope) with the time and care that they needed. We all need to be ready to be used by God at the time that it is needed and we can only be in this state if we are walking with him. I know I miss many opportunities to speak and minister God’s love just because my spirit is not in the right state of rest with the Lord. I have to repent and pray that the Spirit might guide someone else more in tune with the Lord to cross their path. This is why it’s so important that we keep spending time with the Lord so that others don’t lose out.

Jesus tells us how to do it and the imagery he uses was instantly recognised by those who were listening to him. Jesus speaks of a Yoke.

The purpose of a Yoke is to make things easier. A Yoke connected two animals together so that they could work as one. A Yoke controlled their steps and speed and enabled them to share the burden. Here’s an interesting detail. A traditional Yoke was individually made.

It was measured and crafted to fit the animal who would be wearing it. Bespoke. Now transfer that image to Jesus and ourselves.

Jesus invites us to be yoked with Him. To be yoked with Jesus is to be walking in step with him. To be yoked with Jesus is to not get ahead or behind of Him To be yoked with Jesus is to share the labours, desires, delights and disappointments of life with Him To be yoked with Jesus is to experience the forgiveness of our sin, to be made righteous before God - at peace with God, to be secure in our eternal destiny, to have a new identity in him, to receive strength and wisdom and grace from him … the list of benefits goes on and on and on

***“Keep company with me”*** – is the invitation from Jesus. But many, just like those in our reading from Jeremiah decide that they don’t want to; they want to be free to make their own decisions. It’s a social truth that every generation makes its own mistakes and seeks to move away from the past into something ‘new’ – the invitation from God is to look to the old paths – the paths that lead to wisdom and freedom.

The reality is we are all yoked to something and if it’s not Jesus it’s something or someone else. To money, to work, to advertising, to drugs, to alcohol, to ambition … and these are all taking a heavy toll on our lives.

According to WHO data, cases of depression and anxiety have risen globally by over 25% in the last 2 years. We see it in our classrooms, Universities, streets, workplaces, families and friends and in our own lives.

The promise of Jesus is that he will never lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on us. His yoke is made to measure. His yoke is light. His invitation is to live lightly and freely.

How?: First by accepting and trusting in who Jesus is and inviting Him into our lives. Then by walking with Him. Living our lives with Him. ‘Keep company with Him’ – reading and studying His word – The Bible. Lots of good study guides and podcasts available. If you’re not sure where to start ask me. Download the Lectio 365 app and start and end your day with scripture and prayer.

Be encouraged and encourage others by gathering for worship with your church. Chat with the Lord throughout the day – ask him for help, give thanks regularly as go about your day – pray – spend time with Him. Read your Bible. That’s where you will find the help you need in the promises of God. **Feed your spirit**. If you only fed yourself for one hour once a week your body would soon be sick. We cannot expect an hourly injection of God on a Sunday will keep us fit and healthy for the next 167 hours of the week.

Spending time with God gives rest to our spirit – everything changes – try it. It works.

What are you going to do to give rest to your Spirit?