

Come to Me

Zechariah 9:9-12; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

The Statue of Liberty is a colossal neoclassical sculpture of a robed and crowned woman in New York Harbour. The copper-clad statue, a gift to the United States from the people of France was dedicated in October 1886. She holds a torch above her head the symbol of light. In her left hand is a copy of the American Declaration of Independence. Her left foot steps on a broken chain and shackle, commemorating the national abolition of slavery in that country after the American Civil War. The statue became an icon of freedom and a symbol of welcome to immigrants arriving by sea from around the world. In 1903 a bronze tablet was added, with the text of Emma Lazarus' sonnet, 'The New Colossus':

*"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

There is than an echo of the words of Jesus in that sonnet. The message seems to me to be the same: *"Come to Me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."*

Are labouring with life, or heavy-laden with duties and responsibilities? Do you need respite or rest from all that is going on, even if only for a short-time, so that you can catch your breath before going on? In these summer months when you had hoped for an easing of pace has there been no let-up? *"Come to Me"*, says Jesus.

Are you worrying about a loved? A health condition, or increasing frailty. The need for employment and a living wage? Someone gone off the rails, refusing to listen to good sense and you are at your wits' end. You want to stand back but you still feel responsible. *"Come to Me"*, says Jesus.

Is there something going on at work. A person or a situation out of control and everyone is affected. The purpose and vision has blurred or buried. You keep plugging away but it is becoming so hard to continue. *"Come to Me"*, says Jesus.

Is it the state of politics in our country and across the world. There are decent people trying to do the right thing but they're being drowned out by the selfish and the greedy and the irresponsible. Where democracy has soured and the economy is not an abstract theory but a burdensome reality as the cost-of-living cuts and cuts and cuts. And the Reflecting Pool lying between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial on the 250th anniversary of American independence is not 'American blue', but 'Algae Green', a modern-day parable? Even still, *"Come to Me"*, says Jesus.

Is it the state of the Church that worries you? *"The Church is getting smaller; and the church is becoming narrower. Those who regularly attend worship are fewer; and the church's reputation and energy are becoming associated with initiatives that are introverted and often lack the full breadth of the gospel."*⁷¹ We know we're being asked the questions, 'How do you feel about this?' and 'What are you doing about?' You've been soldiering on but you're not sure if you have the energy, let alone the vision or commitment, to hold the line and keep at it. *"Come to Me"*, says Jesus.

Albert Nolan, a South African Dominican priest, wrote in 1976: *"Jesus did not found an organization; He inspired a movement. It was inevitable that the movement would quite soon become an organization but in the beginning there wase simply people, scattered individuals and*

groups."ⁱⁱ This group, before they were called Christians, were known as 'The Way. How can we recapture the excitement and the enthusiasm of the headline news that we belong to The Way, that we are people of a Kingdom movement that has responded to Jesus' invitation, "*Come to Me*", and extend that same invitation to those in our community and beyond.

Christmas, Easter, Harvest, Remembrance, and an Umbrella Festival reveal to us that there are people, many people beyond our congregation, who still see, hear, feel that there is something that we offer, represent, embody, that remains worthwhile. Maybe they are not at the point of regular commitment, including the people who say to me without fail each Christmas Eve, "I'm a regular attender here"....every Christmas Eve. But are they somehow hearing, somehow open, to the Jesus we have heard saying, "*Come to Me*"? It may be wearying and burdensome and undoubtedly frustrating when we consider how much we do offer in this Church; but do you believe it is enough to keep you going on? In the months that are coming I believe this is a question that we will need to engage with and find some sort of answers to as we make our response to the Jesus Who continues to say to us, "*Come to Me.*"

When we come to Jesus, what then? Sitting comfortably and putting our feet up; closing our eyes for a bit; laying down responsibility and duty? "*Come to Me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.*" A rest, but to help us recharge. A laying down of a heavy load, but a picking up of the 'yoke' of Jesus so that His work continues.

In Jesus' time Who were those who were invited to hear and follow? They were the weary and the heavy-laden, those suffering the burdens of unjust and unequal yokes. They would consist of the majority poor of the land, for whom life was a daily struggle on the margins of life and death; they

would include all those who were marginalized, disregarded, rendered silent and powerless by the powers that be in their society. 'Easy' is not a good translation of Jesus' yoke; 'kindly' or 'gentle' would be better...Jesus' words sound in the present tense to all those who carry heavy burdens in our world now to the tired, to those with empty hands and hearts. The promise of a kindly yoke remains for all who have ears to hear...The road is not easy: Jesus would have those who would follow Him suffer no illusions. But the road is *with* Him; and, on the way, weary disciples will find the rest they need, and more than mere rest - the encouragement, enlightenment, love and laughter that comes from the company of the One Who has taken the way of gentle lowliness to lift the disciple high, and put a spring in (their) step for the road ahead.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Old Testament reading from Zechariah is one used on Palm Sunday, but it speaks to other times too. Yes it tells of a King and Saviour riding on a donkey. Yes He brings salvation and freedom and hope. But note these words: "*Lo, your King comes to you...*" Before Jesus says, "*Come to Me*", He first comes to us. In order that we might hear His invitation He gets within calling distance and then says, "*Come to Me*".

When what we are going through seems beyond our ability to carry, that is exactly the time when Jesus calls to us, "*Come to Me*." Perhaps our burdens seem too much for us because we were never meant to carry them alone. Might it be that we are meant to be brave enough, big enough, humble enough, faithful enough to know that we can't do it all on our own; that we were never meant to do it all on our own, and that there is One on the periphery of our vision whispering, "*Come to Me*."

Most of my pastoral ministry is spent amongst *fine* people. I'm not talking about their moral qualities or their general appearance, but the people who, when going through hard times, painful times, depressing times, anxious times, will say, "I'm fine." Jesus sees through this, and whilst not

forcing Himself, still stands, with beckoning hand, and says to weak and strong, successful or struggling, *"Come to Me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."* No shame in accepting His help. No shame in recognizing there are times when we can't do it all by ourselves or need to do it all by ourselves. But rather great faith in recognizing that we all need a Saviour Who comes with comfort enough to help lift our burdens, and offering rest and companionship on the road of life. He has come to you. What then will you do when you hear Him calling out, *"Come to Me"*?

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Amen

ⁱ Samuel Wells, *A Future That's Bigger Than The Past*, p1

ⁱⁱ Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, p163

ⁱⁱⁱ Leith Fisher, *But I Say to You*, ps149-150