

Sermon for Sunday 5th July 2020
Psalm 145:8-15, Matthew 11:16-19, 25-end

I wonder how Jesus would describe this generation, how he would describe us? Not a specific current generation - young people, the millennials or generation Y, or the elderly or the baby boomers, and not us as in how would he describe me, or you, but how would he describe this generation, us together as a society, or as a community of believers, the church?

Our verses today from Matthew's gospel see Jesus pondering with what he could compare the generation of believers of the time. He uses imagery of children singing songs, first a wedding party with joyful music, but they refused to dance, then a mournful funeral dirge, but they would not grieve. He appears to be suggesting that the people around him are a people who don't know what they want, who don't seem satisfied whatever happens.

John the Baptist had come into their midst like an old-school prophet, leading a life of self-denial and purity, urging people to repent and turn back to God, and people didn't like it – 'he must have a demon, that one'. Then Jesus, the son of man, comes eating and drinking – celebrating the kingdom, attending parties and feasts, throwing around with abandon the generous love and forgiveness of God – but no, they don't like that either.

Is that generation from a couple of millennia ago that different to the people of now? All of us, however open minded we are, however keen we are to try new experiences, no doubt have certain expectations, certain hopes about what things should be like, about what God, about what Jesus, about what church, will, or should, be like.

Lockdown has been really tough, dealing with a global pandemic and all the feelings associated with it has been a great challenge for everyone in many different ways. And, as we have seen, the church has not been exempt. The pandemic has impacted the church in a way

we have never before experienced. We have been forced to think differently, to put aside all that we expect, or like, or are used to at church. We have closed down our buildings, cancelled services and had to find new ways. And perhaps we have been disappointed at how those in authority, be that our government, local leaders and decision makers, or church leaders, or others, have responded to this crisis. I know I have found myself listening to daily briefings and longing for something different, but then a week or two later, getting that different and still wanting something else. It is, and it has been, and it continues to be, hard – and frustrating, and uncertain. We just want it to be back to normal. But, of course, we no longer know what normal is.

As we read these verses in the first part of our gospel reading today, I wonder if you hear the same tone that I assume we are to hear in Jesus' words. I hear exasperation in his tone, implied criticism in his voice. I wonder if that is fair. Is he exasperated, or is he simply describing what human nature is?

Maybe we do need to admit that we human beings have expectations and hopes about what things should be like, or how we would like them to be, and that we don't always cope that well when those expectations are not met - by our leaders, by our government, by our church, or by others. And maybe we should examine ourselves to see if we are being reasonable, rational and generous in our feelings towards others. But this isn't an exercise in beating ourselves up.

Jesus doesn't just see a community around him that he is exasperated by, or who are fickle and hard to please, he also sees a people who are weary, who are trying to cope alone with heavy burdens, who simply need someone to share the load. He sees a people who need to be reminded of what God is really like. To be reminded of the words from today's psalm and the reality of the God that the psalmist describes, 'The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made. The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up

all who are bowed down.’ Life on earth can be bewildering, it is full of change, we human beings are all different and we come with our own loads and expectations of God and of others, life is hard, especially at the moment, but God remains constant and faithful and unchanging and ever present. Jesus knows this of his fellow human beings, he has lived life with them.

And it is to them, and to us, that he says those well-known words, ‘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.’

Jesus knows that this life can be hard. He also knows that we are not supposed to carry the load alone. We need him, not to magically make all the challenges of this life disappear, but to share the load with us, indeed for us to share the load together with him. A yoke is used, often on oxen, to enable them to pull together on a load, to work as a pair rather than individually. And he offers us his yoke, he partners with us in change and fatigue and worry and uncertainty.

So today, as we ponder the coming weeks and months – undoubtedly ones of change, of uncertainty, of hope, of disappointment, of indecision and fear, of excitement and new possibilities, let's be brave enough to name our own expectations of others, even the unreasonable ones; to humbly and graciously accept when things don't go our way; to acknowledge the times when we feel let down; and to share with others when we are simply weary and heavy laden. But let's not stop there, or try to soldier bravely on alone. Hear and receive these words of Jesus, and his offer to share our load, ‘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.’ Amen