

Dear Friends,

Thank you to all those who have already responded to the question the Circuit Leadership Team have asked about our priorities for reopening. For those who haven't seen it we are being asked what should be our first, second and third priorities when we can reopen our buildings. All further responses will be gratefully received.

In this week's gospel reading Jesus talks about bearing heavy loads and finding rest. Many of us do have loads and burdens that we're carrying. The burdens we carry come from a variety of different sources. Some of them are inherited, some of them come from our past, we are who we are because of our background and upbringing.

Some burdens are inherited, some are imposed on us by others. We can be frustrated by the rules and regulations imposed on us by the government or by the local authority. Other burdens are ones that we take on voluntarily. We want to help and support others and so we willingly take things on. We bear burdens for many different reasons.

It was to those who were bearing heavy burdens that Jesus spoke. The offer of rest and inner peace and security must have been a huge thing for those who were facing great trials and carrying heavy burdens. Jesus speaks of rest, he offers rest to those who were weary and weighed down. He doesn't say there won't be a burden, but it will be manageable, it will be bearable.

Jesus says that his yoke is easy and his burden is light, but we need to take care not to misunderstand what he means. We need to remember the role of the yoke which enabled oxen to carry and pull heavy loads. An American preacher, Mark Pearse, preached on this subject and after the service a man came up to him. The man said he wished he'd known he was preaching on the subject as he could have told him something about it. He said when he was a boy he used to drive his father's oxen. The yokes were made heavier on one side than the other. They did that so they could put a weak bullock alongside a strong bullock, the light end would be pulled by the weaker one and the heavier end by the stronger one. He said that's why the yoke is easy and the burden is light because the Lord's yoke is like that and he has the heavy end.

Jesus offers us rest, but what sort of rest? One type of rest is the rest of putting our feet up after a hard day's work. After a long walk we can be fit for nothing else but having a lie down. I remember on a day off a few months ago going for a lengthy walk even though I knew I was expected to play badminton in the evening. I felt I couldn't let the others down by not turning up to play and of course I enjoyed it as well. It wasn't a hardship but it certainly wasn't rest.

But the rest Jesus is talking about isn't exactly putting our feet up because the burden and the yoke are still there. The burden may be light and the yoke may be easy but they're both still there. The burden is easy because we don't carry it on our own, God is there with us. The work we are called to do we do together, but of course we do it with God's help and that makes all the difference.

I don't want to be part of a church that puts unnecessary burdens on people. I don't want to be part of a church where people are weighed down by the burden of arguments and disagreements. We are part of the church family because God has called us to be part of what he is doing in our community. We are to give evidence of the love of God, to allow that love that we have received to be reflected in our lives and in our church community.

With best wishes,

Mark