

## Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2020: 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity.

### Collect:

O God, the protector of all who trust in you,  
without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy:  
increase and multiply upon us your mercy;  
that with you as our ruler and guide  
we may so pass through things temporal  
that we lose not our hold on things eternal;  
grant this, heavenly Father,  
for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

Amen

### Epistle - Romans 7:15-25a:

<sup>15</sup> I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup> But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

<sup>21</sup> So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand.

<sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, <sup>23</sup> but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. <sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

## **Gospel Reading - Matthew Chapter 11, verses 16-19, 25-30:**

A reading from the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Saint Matthew:

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

<sup>16</sup> 'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,

<sup>17</sup> "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;  
we wailed, and you did not mourn."

<sup>18</sup> For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; <sup>19</sup> the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.'

<sup>25</sup> At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; <sup>26</sup> yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>27</sup> All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

<sup>28</sup> 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

This is the gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

Upon that lucky night  
In secrecy, inscrutable to sight,  
I went without discerning  
And with no other light  
Except for that which in my heart was burning.

It lit and led me through  
More certain than the light of noonday clear  
To where One waited near  
Whose presence well I knew,  
There where no other presence might appear.

*~John of the Cross ~*

There is in all visible things an invisible fecundity, a dimmed light, a meek namelessness, a hidden wholeness.

This mysterious Unity and Integrity is Wisdom, the Mother of all, *Natura naturans*<sup>1</sup>. There is in all things an inexhaustible sweetness and purity, a silence that is a fount of action and joy. It rises up in wordless gentleness and flows out to me from the unseen roots of all created being, welcoming me tenderly, saluting me with indescribable humility. This is at once my own being, my own nature, and the Gift of my Creator's Thought and Art within me, speaking as *Hagia Sophia*<sup>2</sup>, speaking as my sister, Wisdom.

I am awakened, I am born again at the voice of this, my Sister, sent to me from the depths of the divine fecundity.

*~ From 'Hagia Sophia' by Thomas Merton ~*

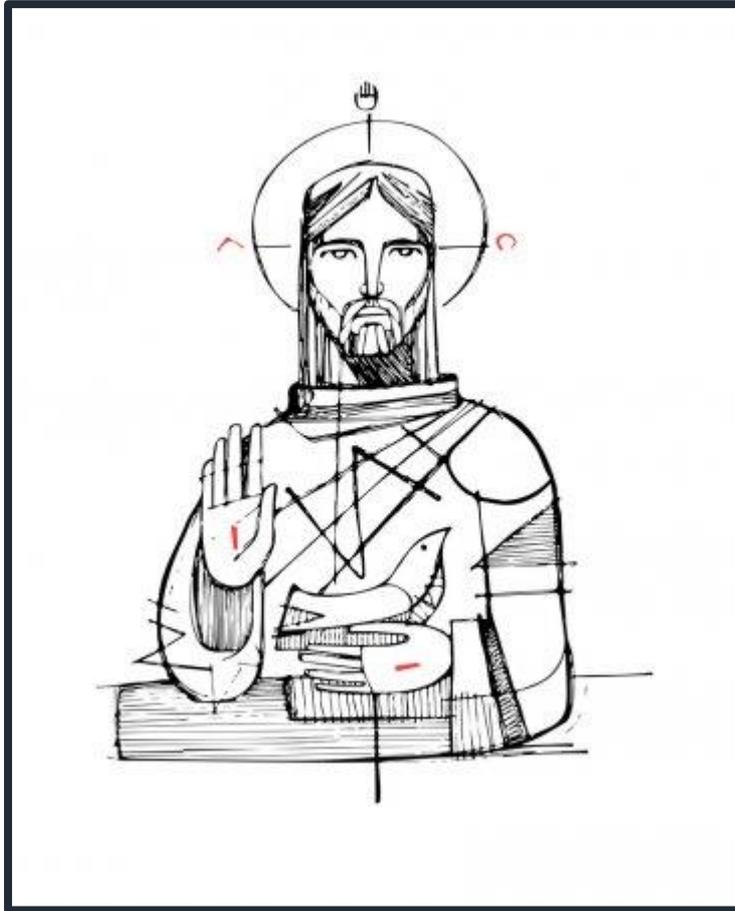
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<sup>1</sup> 'Nature naturing', or 'nature doing what nature does'. Nature as a creative force or process; the essential or divine creative power.

<sup>2</sup> *Hagia Sophia* – Holy or Divine Wisdom.

## Sermon/Reflection. Title: Wisdom's Feast

*(All biblical quotes are from the 'New Revised Standard Version' unless otherwise stated)*



In today's gospel reading Jesus extends an invitation to us... '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.'<sup>3</sup>

It is, perhaps, an integral part of the human condition that we all carry heavy burdens; inherited burdens, acquired burdens, burdens that have

been imposed upon us, and burdens that we impose upon ourselves. We find ourselves 'yoked' to them, and often we feel that we carry them alone. Some of them propel us to places we don't want to go, and others encumber our growth as we drag them behind us like Marley's 'ponderous chain'<sup>4</sup>.

Today's words attributed to Jesus speak of what Paul described as 'the meekness and gentleness of Christ'<sup>5</sup>. Meek and gentle he may be, but Jesus doesn't promise us a free ride. We can find rest for our souls but there is still work to be done, there is still a yoke to be taken, and a burden to be borne.

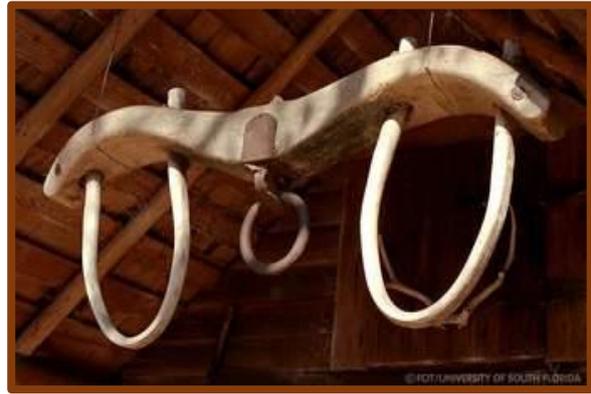
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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 11:28-30

<sup>4</sup> From: Charles Dickens 'A Christmas Carol'.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:1

A physical yoke is a wooden brace that joins two animals together at the neck, often oxen, and is linked to a plough or cart (the 'heavy burden'). The two animals are then able to work together as a team making the 'burden' lighter. 'There is a legend that Jesus made the best ox-yokes in all Galilee, and that



from all over the country men came to him to buy the best yokes that skill could make. In those days, as now, shops had their signs above the door; and it has been suggested that the sign above the door of the carpenter's shop in Nazareth may well have been: "My yokes fit well."<sup>6</sup> When Jesus talks of his 'yoke' he's using the word as a metaphor of course, but a metaphor for what? What is the 'yoke' that Jesus invites us to take upon ourselves, and what is the burden we have to bear?

Some may understand Jesus' 'yoke' from a soteriological perspective. Soteriology concerns the doctrine of salvation, salvation from the consequences of sin through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. From this viewpoint, the 'yoke' may be understood as discipleship. As disciples, we are obliged to believe in Jesus, receive him by faith, commit ourselves to him, submit ourselves to his authority, and surrender to his will. We must serve him, obey him, worship him, and seek his forgiveness for our sins. These obligations becomes our 'burden' and, in return, Jesus becomes our strength, he bears the weight of our sinful nature, forgives our sin, and through him we find salvation and rest.

So, from a soteriological perspective Jesus' 'yoke' could be discipleship and our obligations as disciples become our 'burden'. But I'd like to consider 'yoke' and 'burden' from a different perspective, a sophiological perspective. Sophiology has its roots in the Christian wisdom tradition, and the word 'wisdom', in Greek, is 'Sophia'. The sophiological perspective sees Jesus as a wisdom teacher, one who taught the path of transformation, the transformation of human consciousness. Here, Jesus

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<sup>6</sup> Barclay, W. (2001) 'The New Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 2'. (Third Edition) Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, p. 20.

embodies not just 'the Word of God'<sup>7</sup> but also as 'the wisdom of God'<sup>8</sup>. Just as the Word 'was in the beginning with God'<sup>9</sup>, so 'the Lord created (wisdom) at the beginning of his work'<sup>10</sup>. Wisdom, we're told, was formed 'before the beginning of the earth...before the mountains had been shaped'<sup>11</sup>. Wisdom was there when God 'established the heavens'<sup>12</sup>, and she was God's 'delight'<sup>13</sup>. Wisdom calls us to find her and find life<sup>14</sup> and this, I am suggesting, is what Jesus is inviting us to do through him, find wisdom, find life, and 'find the knowledge of God'<sup>15</sup>.



**Wisdom's Feast:**

'Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed'.

(Proverbs 9:5)

In the Apocryphal 'Book of Ecclesiasticus'<sup>16</sup> there is a passage, speaking of the search for wisdom, which bears a striking similarity to the gospel passage in Matthew. In these verses, the pronouns 'her' and 'she' refer to wisdom partly because, in Hebrew, 'wisdom' is a grammatically feminine noun, but also because, in Christian theology, Divine Wisdom is personified as the Divine Feminine, 'Sophia' in Greek or 'Chokmâh' in biblical Hebrew. The passage reads... 'Come to me, you uninstructed, take your place in my school. Why complain about lacking these things when your souls are so thirsty for them? I have opened my mouth and spoken: 'Buy her without money, put your necks under her yoke, and let your souls receive instruction; she is not far to seek. See for yourselves: how slight my efforts have been to win so much peace.'<sup>17</sup>

<sup>7</sup> John 1:1

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:24

<sup>9</sup> John 1:2

<sup>10</sup> Proverbs 8:22

<sup>11</sup> Proverbs 8:23,25

<sup>12</sup> Proverbs 8:27

<sup>13</sup> Proverbs 8:30

<sup>14</sup> Proverbs 8:35

<sup>15</sup> Proverbs 2:5

<sup>16</sup> Sometimes known as 'The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach'

<sup>17</sup> Ecclesiasticus 51:23-27 (The Jerusalem Bible)

Jesus invites us to take our place in his school, the school of wisdom, where we are invited to receive his instruction, to follow his teachings, and to learn from his example. The wisdom tradition is concerned with transformation and, in this sense, his yoke is the transforming yoke of Divine Wisdom, and the 'burden' is the path of transformation, the transformation of our mind so that we too can 'have the mind of Christ'<sup>18</sup>, as Paul puts it in his first letter to the Corinthians. It is, as Jesus tells us himself, a light burden, when compared to the burdens of religious legalism with its endless rules, regulations, and laws, or to the 'yoke of this world'<sup>19</sup> with its relentless tests and challenges, its myriad imperfections, and its evident brokenness. It is a different burden, it is the burden of the spiritual path, and the burden of spiritual practice, practice that moves us to seek God within ourselves. Engaging with this path opens the door to the journey within; the journey that leads us beyond faith and belief towards the primacy of experience; the journey that leads us from *believing* in God to *knowing* that God 'is', the journey into a mysterious yet deeply transformational encounter with the divine ground of our being. This is the path that leads us to a deeper realisation of our true nature, the path that enables us to 'discover (our) real identity in which (we) can be free from all burdens and find inner rest in (our) lives'<sup>20</sup>. This is the path that opens us to, and prepares us for, the ultimate goal, the mercurial gift of contemplation, that 'direct and intuitive awareness of God'<sup>21</sup>, which is pure grace. It is this path that will give us 'the bread of understanding to eat, and the water of wisdom to drink'<sup>22</sup>.

In her essay 'The Aesthetics of Silence', the American writer Susan Sontag wrote 'every era has to reinvent the project of "spirituality" for itself'<sup>23</sup>. Within the Christian church of our era, if any reinvention is required, perhaps it might centre on re-engaging with the interior spiritual path, the spiritual path that Jesus lived and taught, the spiritual path that Jesus invites us to walk, the spiritual path that enables us to consume Wisdom's feast. This is the path that leads us to experience the mystery

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<sup>18</sup> I Corinthians 2:16

<sup>19</sup> Davidson, J. (1995) 'The Gospel of Jesus: In Search of His Original Teachings'. Shaftesbury: Element Books Limited, p. 956.

<sup>20</sup> Sahajananda, J. M. (2003) 'You are the Light: Rediscovering the Eastern Jesus'. Alresford, Hants: O Books, p.159.

<sup>21</sup> Huxley, A. (1974) 'The Perennial Philosophy' London: Chatto & Windus Ltd., p. 337.

<sup>22</sup> Ecclesiasticus 15:3-4 (The Jerusalem Bible)

<sup>23</sup> Sontag, S. (1983) 'A Susan Sontag Reader'. London: Penguin Books, p. 181.

we call God and to find rest for our souls, the path that enables to pass through the things of this world that are temporal and hold fast to those things of God that are eternal.

Amen.