



## Singing God's Love Song - 5th July 2020 Rev Clare Stainsby Transcript

Welcome everyone - good to be sharing with you!  
Thinking back over these recent weeks:  
We've had a time for resting, and reflecting enforced upon us.  
We've kept doing what we do, and we have existed.  
And although there have been many anxious times - it's not been too unpleasant!  
Of course that is not everyone's experience and we know that grief and suffering are very much all around us.

But now the world is beginning to turn again, stirring from the restrictions laid upon us, and little by little, the time comes closer for us to pick up our burdens - and get on with things, in a controlled kind of way - and probably a good deal different from the normal we left behind.

I think the words of today's reading from St Matthew's gospel are very apt for us. Let's listen to that now. Thank you to Andrew Slim, our Circuit Treasurer for reading the gospel this morning.

### **Reading: Matthew 11: 16 - 19. 25 - 30**

*Whoever has ears, let them hear. 'To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the market-places and calling out to others: "'We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.'" For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon." The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.'*

*At that time Jesus said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. 'All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*

*'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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.'*

Thanks be to God.

For our prayers I'd like to use a meditation - let us pray

Life can be draining.  
We are often under pressure.

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We go through times of stress and we carry difficult burdens.  
Jesus says that if we come to him, he will give us rest.

He wants to help you.

He calls to you.

When you are sleeping, weeping, keeping awake when tiredness drains,  
I am with you.

When you are crying, sighing, trying to concentrate when confusion reigns,  
I am with you.

When you are struggling, juggling, muddling through when ability wanes,  
I am with you.

Do you feel that you don't know what to say?  
I am the Word.  
Draw close to me.

Do you feel that you no longer understand the world?  
I was there when the world was formed.  
Draw close to me.

Does each step feel as though you are wading through mud?  
I, too, have walked on this earth.  
Draw close to me.

Do you feel that everything goes against you?  
I have been condemned.  
Draw close to me.

Do you feel the weight of life getting too much?  
I carried my cross for you.  
Draw close to me.

Do you feel that no-one is there for you?  
I have been alone.  
Draw close to me.

Come to me;  
I will give you rest. Amen

Let's join together and sing the song, Come All You Vagabonds

## **Song: Come All You Vagabonds**

*Come all you vagabonds, come all you 'don't belongs'  
Winners and losers, come, people like me.  
Come all you travellers, tired from the journey,  
Come wait a while, stay a while, welcomed you'll be.*

*Come all you questioners, looking for answers*

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*And searching for reasons and sense in it all;  
Come all you fallen, and come all you broken,  
Find strength for your body and food for your soul.*

*Come to the feast, there is room at the table,  
Come let us meet in this place  
With the King of all kindness who welcomes us in  
With the wonder of love, and the power of grace,  
The wonder of the love, and the power of grace.*

*Come those who worry 'bout houses and money,  
And all those who don't have a care in the world;  
From every station and orientation,  
The helpless, the hopeless, the young and the old.*

*Come to the feast...*

*Come all believers and dreamers and schemers,  
And come all you restless just searching for home;  
Movers and shakers and givers and takers,  
The happy, the sad and the lost and alone.*

*Come self-sufficient with wearied ambition,  
And come those who feel at the end of the road.  
Fiery debaters and religion haters,  
Accusers, abusers, the hurt and ignored.*

*Come to the feast...*

Ezekiel was one of the prophets of Old Testament times. He was born in Jerusalem, and he was among those who were taken into captivity in Babylon, some 600 years or so before the time of Jesus. As a prophet, he was someone who sensed that God had things to say to the people, and he was the means that God had chosen to use. He spoke words that had a great deal to say to a nation stripped of their normality in every way, and taken into exile by a foreign power. They were a people longing for their homeland and longing for God to change things for them.

Ezekiel explained to the people how they had failed God and how they had deserved their punishment. That can't have been a popular message! He also shared messages of God's anger against those who had uprooted his people and destroyed their homeland. But most importantly he shared messages of encouragement and hope. We thought about one of those messages just a few weeks ago: how Ezekiel prophesied that the dry bones of a nation who had lost everything, including their freedom, would live again: a message of real hope.

I'd like us to hear now another passage from Ezekiel, as he challenges the people to really listen to what God is saying to them. We can sense in these words, a certain cynicism among the people: God has let us down and now this prophet is trying to build us up again with encouragement - nice words - but is it real?



Let's hear this reading from Ezekiel now. Thank you to Beryl Emery for reading it to us.

## **Reading: Ezekiel 33: 30 - 33**

*'As for you, son of man, your people are talking together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, saying to each other, "Come and hear the message that has come from the Lord." My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to hear your words, but they do not put them into practice. Their mouths speak of love, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice. 'When all this comes true – and it surely will – then they will know that a prophet has been among them.'*

The prophet speaks God's words but the people are not really listening to the message - they admire his voice but find it hard to grasp the meaning in his words.

In the middle ages, troubadours were travelling musicians, whose arrival in a community would cause everyone to come out and listen. There would be great excitement when the Troubadour appeared in town. Everyone was eager to hear his singing and his playing. They might say: "this man plays so well, or sings so beautifully." But would they really hear his words.

Was it like that for Jesus? Was Jesus another great prophet? Well he was, but of course he was much more than that also. But he caused great excitement in the communities he visited. People came out to hear him speak. But how many people saw past the excitement, the miracles, the great stories, the charismatic personality, to the real love of God; the life changing, world changing love of God in his message.

Listen to, or if you wish sing along with a song which reflects on both Jesus and Ezekiel, as the singers of God's love song, and is entitled Troubadour. It was recorded some years ago by the young people of my worship band, Chapter and Verse.

## **Song: Troubadour**

*Come and hear the singer of the love song of the Lord,  
Let your heart be open to his word,  
He's singing of your freedom in the kingdom of God's reign,  
So put aside your burdens, and listen to the Troubadour again.*

*He sings a song of love for you, his voice of flawless gold,  
Music that can purify your soul,  
But his truth will hold a mirror to reveal your heart of greed,  
He knows your every secret  
And wants to meet you at your point of need.*

*Don't hide your restless heart behind a smile,  
Sit down and rest and listen for a while,  
I have words that lead to freedom,*

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*In my heart I share your pain,  
Just come and hear my love song once again.*

*When God's people's mouths express devotion to their King,  
But their hearts are closed to everything,  
Then the beauty of the music carries tears like Heaven's rain,  
Turn back, my child I love you,  
Please turn around and love me once again.*

*Don't hide your restless heart behind a smile,  
Sit down and rest and listen for a while,  
I have words that lead to freedom,  
In my heart I share your pain,  
Just come and hear my love song once again.*

As a musician I love the image of Jesus, as a singer of love songs. His ministry on earth was to tell of God's love, and to point people on a pathway of following, through living a loving and caring life, a life in which other people's needs matter.

Out of the ministry of Jesus, and the events of his death and resurrection and ascension and the coming in power of his Holy Spirit - all the things we've thought about in recent weeks. Out of all of this the church was born.

The church grew and spread as the love song of God's promises were shared, accepted and shared again and again and again. God's love song is still winging its way around this earth, and it speaks deep into the heart of each person who accepts that love for themselves, so that they too can become a singer of the song of God's love.

But has the church mislaid its path a little? Have we seen it as sufficient to sing the songs of God's love to each other, behind closed doors? Have our songs reverberated in spaces dedicated to the purpose of singing those songs, sending waves of praise to God, which God has no doubt accepted and appreciated? And have we wondered, have we even complained that no one seems to appreciate the song we sing; that people ignore us as irrelevant and never set foot within our walls, except very occasionally? Have we felt like Ezekiel felt, that the love song he was singing was being ignored? But perhaps we have failed to realise that the timbres of our songs have been lost within the fabric of our buildings, and never penetrated beyond its walls. And perhaps we have failed to recognise that the love song we sing is much more than a selection of notes and lyrics blended together in perfect harmony. It's a song with an imperative for action. Jesus didn't merely stand on street corners and sing. He moved around, he spoke, he healed and he touched many lives with gestures and actions. He demonstrated the active love of God in countless ways. And so did the early church! It didn't remain in Jerusalem, it didn't build a large edifice to represent that moment of Pentecost that people could revisit regularly. It flowed out from that place into every place, and grew and flourished, and even though the times were hard, and the opposition to its world-changing message was potentially violent, it carried on sharing that message. It was a movement for welcome, for inclusivity, for putting the needs of others first, for care in the community, for mutual support, and for the recognition of the living God in the midst of all life. It was a movement for leading others to the heart of God's love.

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So can we get back to a place, where the singing of God's love song in this world is an imperative for action?

We've laid down our burdens for a time, to a great extent. We haven't been able to do many of the things that we have generally have done as churches. Toddler groups, lunch clubs, The Listening Post, gatherings to talk about faith have largely ceased during lock down, though some things have continued to a degree online. Worship has gone on line, and we've had to be creative in many ways, in order to continue to be church, without our buildings. The work of the foodbank has continued, and been a vital resource for many: for which we should all be grateful. But our buildings have largely been abandoned as we have been required to do. The care offered across families of our churches has been wonderful, and I hope that everyone has received from that web of mutual care. God's love song for this world hasn't come to a standstill, even though most other things have. But the time will come when we need to pick up our responsibility of sharing in that love song in a more visible and active way.

We heard words from Matthew's Gospel: words I've always loved: Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Maybe you feel weary and burdened. Maybe you did before this pandemic. Maybe you, like me, feel that through the strangeness and challenges of lockdown, that this has been a time to lay down burdens, and to find rest in God. But that passage continues: '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.'

I feel encouraged by these words, but we need to think about yokes in order to make sense of them. My image of a yoke is probably one you might see in an image from the Twelve Days of Christmas - eight maids a milking - with milk maids each carrying two heavy pails of milk, using a simple wooden structure across her shoulders. If you've ever carried a heavy bucket you know what a weight it can feel. Perhaps like me you have filled a watering can and carried it around the garden. A heavy bucket in each hand, or a pair of heavy suitcases can be challenging. But the yoke - the wooden structure that spreads the weight - makes something really heavy much easier to carry over a distance. Another image might be a yoke of oxen - a similar wooden structure enabling two beasts to pull a heavy cart or plough, again by spreading the load. Neither of those images are part of our daily experience, as they might have been for a first century audience, and so Jesus' words, though beautiful and encouraging, need a bit of explanation.

Jesus is saying, come to me and rest, but also, I have work for you to do. However, know that it won't be work that will be impossibly heavy or difficult for you. I have a yoke to help you spread the load. In fact, you will share the weight of the burden of what I call you to do with me. We'll do it together, yoked as one, and together we will carry the weight, and make things happen. And even though my work is of great importance and I need you to share in it, I will be shouldering the responsibility alongside you, and together we can make it happen. We are yoked for action to the God we worship. The greatest power in all of creation is sharing the weight of responsibility with us. My response to that is simply Wow!

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We can't say yet when our buildings will be reopening, or how we can use them for the building of God's kingdom here. We will be moving slowly, and taking advice as it appears from the Methodist Church leadership. Everyone's safety is paramount! But we will also be thinking about how we can best use our resources and energy for God's work. Remember what I said earlier about the early church: it was a movement for welcome, for inclusivity, for putting the needs of others first, for care in the community, for mutual support, and for the recognition of the living God in the midst of all life. It was a movement for leading others to the heart of God's love. We need to ask ourselves, how we can best use who we are and what we have in order to be the church God is calling us to be here and now. I will be sharing my thoughts on that with you soon. I hope you will also share your thoughts with me.

So we laid aside our burdens for a time, and rested in God, and soon, somehow, we will take them up again, rested, refreshed, having had time and space to re-think our purposes. I hope and pray that we can be focused, realistic and excited at the direction in which God is leading us for the next era of his church here.

Jesus says: 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.'

Rest, be refreshed, find renewal, be re-energised, accept the realism of now and re-gather yourself for the next step.

Then Jesus says: 'Take up my yoke. pick up your responsibilities to work with me for the building of my kingdom. Let's do it together. I am harnessed with you and I will share the weight of responsibility, so that all that you are called to do and be, is never going to be too onerous for you. You will work with me, as I shoulder the weight, to build with me for the future; the immediate future, and years ahead. And I love you so much that the load you bear will never exceed what is possible for you, for we shall bear that load together.' Amen

So now let's turn to our prayers for this world in all it's needs, and God's church in all the challenges it faces. Prayer is a burden in which we can all share. and so let's pray, using words on the screen with some music that may be familiar to you. Let us pray

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened.

Come to me all who are burdened with anxiety for the state of this world.

We pray for...

- those making decisions that affect the lives of every person on the planet.
- clear vision and wisdom in our world leaders.
- justice to flow across this earth.
- those in poverty and who exist on the margins of society.
- peace across nations and in communities
- our commitment to pray regularly for these things.

Come to me all who are burdened with concern for this earth.

We pray for...

- this earth suffering in many ways from human abuse.
- places experiencing the worst effects of climate change.

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- ourselves that we may find ways of living and existing which respect the resources of our planet.
- all people to share in making a difference for now and for future generations, turning our burden of concern into practical action.

Come to me all who are burdened with the responsibilities of care.

We pray for...

- health and care workers across the whole system of care in our nation.
- those caring at home for loved ones.
- all those who care to have the strength to face each day, and the patience to fulfil their responsibilities.

Come to me all who are burdened with pain and fear and sadness.

We pray for...

- those whose lives have been devastated through the effects of the virus.
- those suffering from other illnesses, made more difficult through the limitations of this time.
- all who are overwhelmed by their loss of a loved one.
- a real sense that you are the comforter.

Come to me all who are burdened for the next steps in the life of your church.

We pray for...

- patience as we await the right time for re-opening our buildings.
- wisdom in our decisions and planning.
- consideration of the needs and safety of all.
- your Kingdom purposes to be at the heart all we are and do, and plan and envision in the days ahead.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened.

Come and share in my work, through prayer and action for my kingdom.

Walk with me and learn my ways. Let me lead you forwards, one step at a time.

And now we share together in the prayer Jesus taught us.

Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your Name,

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,

Now and forever. Amen.

Our final hymn is one of the oldest in our hymn book, and is a prayer that God will be our vision, that we will know God's presence and wisdom in our lives, that God will be our protection, and our hope, today and always.

Let's sing Be Thou My Vision

## **Hymn: Be Thou My Vision**

*Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,  
Be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;  
Be thou my best thought in the day and the night,  
Both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.*



*Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,  
Be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord ;  
Be thou my great Father, thy child let me be ;  
Be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.*

*Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;  
Be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;  
Be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:  
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.*

*Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise :  
Be thou mine inheritance now and always ;  
Be thou and thou only, the first in my heart;  
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.*

*High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,  
O grant me its joys after victory is won ;  
Great Heart of my own heart, what ever befall,  
Still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.*

A blessing from the Northumbrian Community.

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you,  
wherever He may send you.  
May He guide you through the wilderness,  
protect you through the storm.  
May He bring you home rejoicing  
at the wonders He has shown you.  
May He bring you home rejoicing  
once again into our doors.  
Amen

Come All You Vagabonds - Mark Edwards, Phil Baggaley & Stuart Townend

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