

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> July.

Sermon Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30.

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, And of the Holy Spirit.**

**Amen**

Why do I need a teacher when I've got google? For those of you who aren't familiar with google, it is an internet search engine. This is the title of a book written in 2010 by Ian Gilbert who is one of the UK's leading educational innovators. More so now than ever it seems we can learn most things by ourselves through accessing the internet. In 2020 many of us probably couldn't live our lives without the internet but teachers still have a very important role in our lives. No one can overestimate the influence of a good teacher. I certainly don't remember all that my teachers taught me but I do remember the ones who were patient, kind, humble, who would listen and were good role models. It could be said that who they were made more lasting of a lasting impression on me than what they said. If you were asked off the top of your head to describe Jesus in one word, what would that word be? I asked members of the clergy and leadership teams here at St John the Baptist Hey to do just that. friend, everything where some of the replies. Saviour, Lord, Master are some of the words that came into my head. Interestingly teacher was not mentioned. Teacher might not have been the first word that springs to our minds but Jesus is the most influential teacher that ever lived. In the Gospels Jesus is often referred to as teacher or rabbi which is a Jewish teacher or scholar.

In this morning's gospel reading Jesus is in teaching mode when he says "take my yoke upon you, and learn from me. In the first century yokes were an important part of farming equipment. Being a carpenter Jesus would no doubt have made many a yoke. The yokes were made of wood and were tailor made. A yoke was a sort of harness that was hand carved to fit the neck and shoulder of the animal so that it didn't chaff causing pain and discomfort. Two animals were harnessed to the yoke whose combined strength could then work together to pull a plough or some other piece of equipment that might otherwise have been too heavy a workload for the one animal. Quite often a mature ox would be harnessed with a younger ox and initially the older ox would bear the brunt of the workload. The young ox quickly learnt that if he didn't keep pace with his partner moving in the same direction then the work became much more difficult. I have never seen a yoke attached to oxen but from the pictures I have looked at, it seems a most cumbersome and uncomfortable looking contraption. It doesn't appeal to me to have one round my neck and I'm sure it doesn't any of you either.

Taking into account what I have said about yokes it seems paradoxical that Jesus would say "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me" and then go on to say "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" Various yokes are mentioned in the bible and the study and observance of the law was often referred to as the yoke of the law. The Pharisees were a large and influential group of religious leaders that taught the people how to keep Jewish religious law. Jesus frequently disagreed with them over how they interpreted God's law. Jesus teachings could be summarised as two laws to love God and love one's neighbour. The Pharisees broke God's law into 613 rules. In doing so they lost sight of the fact that rules are not the basis of having a loving relationship with God. These rules became a burdensome load around the necks of the people who were trying to keep them. The people had to decide whether to remain as disciples of the Pharisees, living with the burdensome yoke of trying to adhere to the Pharisees laws, or alternatively, the people could accept Jesus yoke, a yoke which was not burdening but life-giving.

The Pharisees got carried away with making rules and sometimes we can all get bogged down with the burdens of life. Financial problems, unemployment, illness, anxiety, stress, are some of the problems that can weigh heavily upon us. Many of these problems are exacerbated due the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. We don't have to face these problems by ourselves. As the young oxen quickly realised once he was in step with his partner, the load got easier. We too can lighten our load by accepting Jesus yoke. Jesus isn't saying he will take away whatever it is that we have a problem with but he will share the load, he will help us carry it. When we learn to do things His way, life gets easier. Are you willing to take Jesus yoke upon yourself and learn his ways?

Amen

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