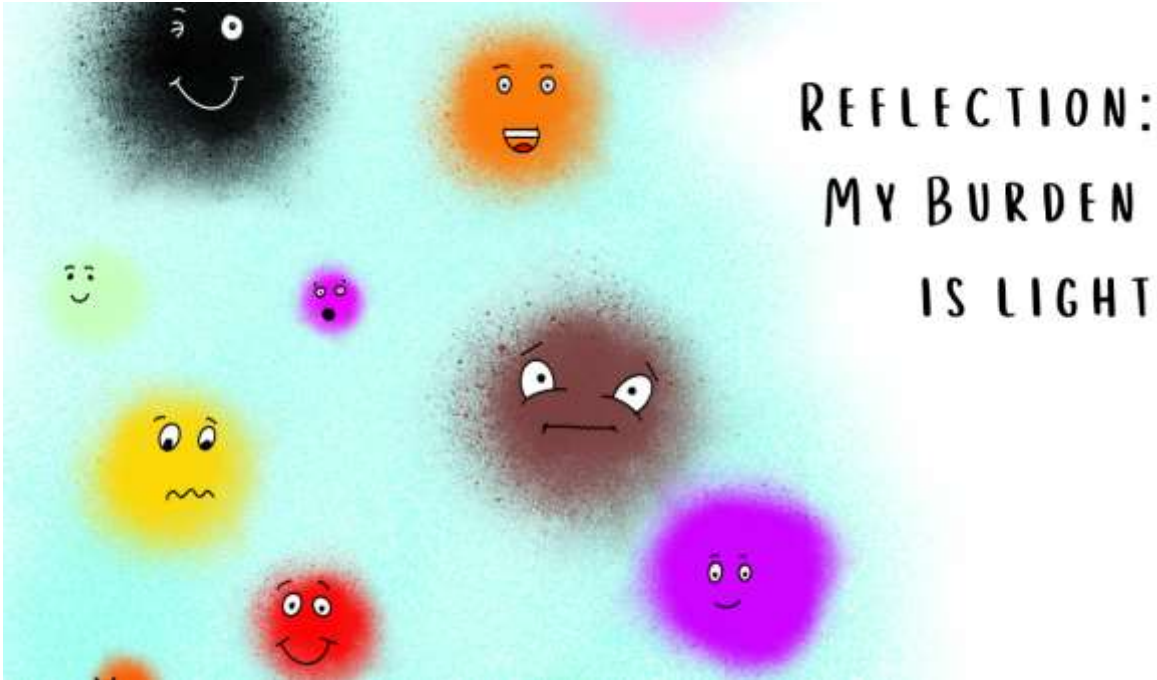




Sermon preached by Revd Dr Alex Clare-Young on 9th July 2023
Readings: Zechariah 9:9-12; Romans 7:15-25a; Matthew 11:16-19,25-30

Reflection: My Burden is Light



Please pray with me: May our thoughts and words and actions be inspired by the living God whose yoke is easy, whose burden is light. Amen.

One of the amazing things about all of the people that I meet out and about, and about the members of Solidarity Hub, is that they are constantly teaching me new things. Some of the things I am learning are about the world, about how people experience their lives, and about how we can better journey with people every day as members of the body of Christ. Some of the things I am learning are about God, who God is, how people connect to God, what church sometimes does or has done that makes people feel disconnected from God and from other people, how we we might connect to God in ever more authentic and freeing ways. And some of the things I am learning are about myself, who I am, what matters to me, what burdens me, and how I might gradually down some of those burdens.

I'd like to consider some of those learnings today as we reflect on scripture. I'm also going to use some 'I wonder...' statements, and leave some pauses for us to wonder together in silence. Now and then, we will sing as we reflect: but not quite as many times as it says in our order of service. Each time, I will sing through this short chant twice, feel free to join in if and when you would like to do so.

Come bring your burdens to God, Come bring your burdens to God,
Come bring your burdens to God, For Jesus will never say no.

Slide: Those who need the most love will often ask for it in the most unloving of ways.



The people at the beginning of today's Gospel reading were not being very loving. Jesus might have never said no – although I'm going to deconstruct that one a little bit later – but he certainly did call people out sometimes for not being loving. In the context of this chapter of Matthew's Gospel, John the Baptist has just been imprisoned, leading him to doubt Jesus, and Jesus has sent some of his disciples to reassure John.

Jesus then praises John and calls out the unloving behaviour of those who treated John, and treat Jesus, badly. He points out that people literally demonised John for fasting, and people called Jesus a glutton and a drunk for eating and drinking with the people who, in their social context, were judged. Those who need the most love, will often ask for it in the most unloving of ways.

I wonder who acts unlovingly towards us today...

I wonder how we can show love whilst also calling out injustice...

I wonder who we demonise in Cambridge...

I wonder how much change we might enable if we were more loving to ourselves and to each other...

Slide: This has always been passed down, but not any more.



This meme is about intergenerational trauma – about the burdens that are passed down from generation to generation: sometimes through kin, sometimes through communities, and, yes, sometimes through churches. The meme shows that it only takes one person to say no, to move to a more compassionate way of living.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus is like that person holding the umbrella, blocking the chain of intergenerational trauma. The thing that Jesus seems to be talking about when he says that his yoke is easy and his burden is light is a new way of being more compassionate and undoing some of the chains of trauma inflicted on people by an unyielding religious and cultural reliance on ownership, on tradition and on law.

We encounter some of that trauma in our reading from Zechariah who witnesses to the problems of unjust power, of the vehicles and weapons of war, of the divisions and borders and unequal distribution and taking of land, of the with-holding of food and drink. Zechariah observes the way that, in the midst of trauma, hope can be like chains, weighing us down as we struggle with violence and injustice. Zechariah prophesies a day when power will be held with humility and justice, when the vehicles and weapons of war will be destroyed, when there will be no more borders or ownership of land, when there will be enough food and drink for us all.

Do we not long for that day today? Well, Jesus says that his yoke is easy, and his burden is light. Admittedly, that imagery of yoked oxen is hard for us to compute today. Robert Ogden, who facilitates our Synod Faith in Action Network, put's it like this: 'I think that Jesus was stripping away the rituals and the created straightjacket of religion. He was getting us back to the simple, direct relationship with God. A relationship that is not defined by how we keep rules but by a personal relationship which allows us to prioritise mercy and love. Going back to basics with God.' I agree with Robert and would add that a person's relationship with God should never be controlled in a way that inflicts trauma but, rather, should be a personal journey into compassion, made by one who is released into the freedom of the body of Christ.

I wonder what chains of trauma and control we hold the keys to release...

I wonder where we are too unyielding...

I wonder what straightjackets we still wear...

I wonder how much change we might enable if we more compassionate to ourselves and to each other...

Slide: To be kind is more important than to be right. Many times what people need is not a brilliant mind that speaks but a special heart that listens.



Jesus says “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 think that Jesus had – and the body of Christ should have – a special heart that listens.

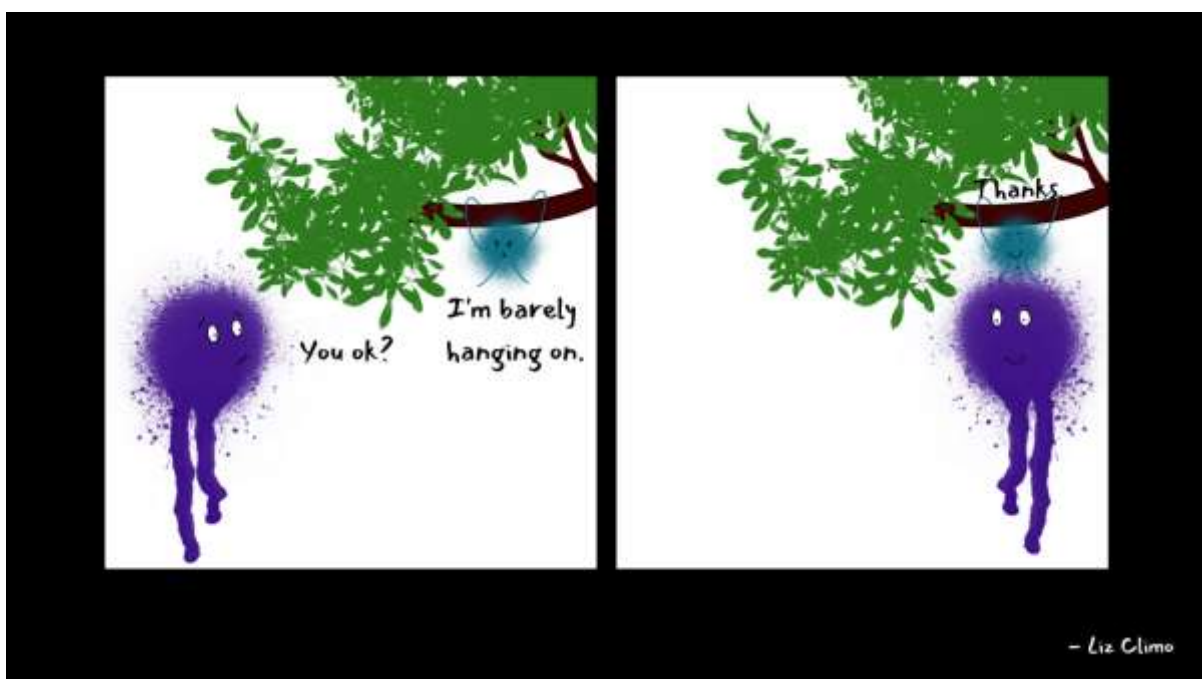
I wonder what church might be like if we learnt to think more about being kind than being right...

I wonder whether getting too used to Christendom has damaged our gentleness and humility...

I wonder how we might journey more lightly, more easily...

I wonder how much change we might enable if we just let go...

Slide: You ok? I’m barely hanging on. Thanks.



Compassion is about action. Zechariah doesn't just say that war is wrong, he talks about the action of destroying the tools of it. Jesus doesn't just tell people that they are free, he undoes the chains that bind them.

I wonder what we might need to do to support those who are barely hanging on...

I wonder what we might need people to do to support us when we are barely hanging on...

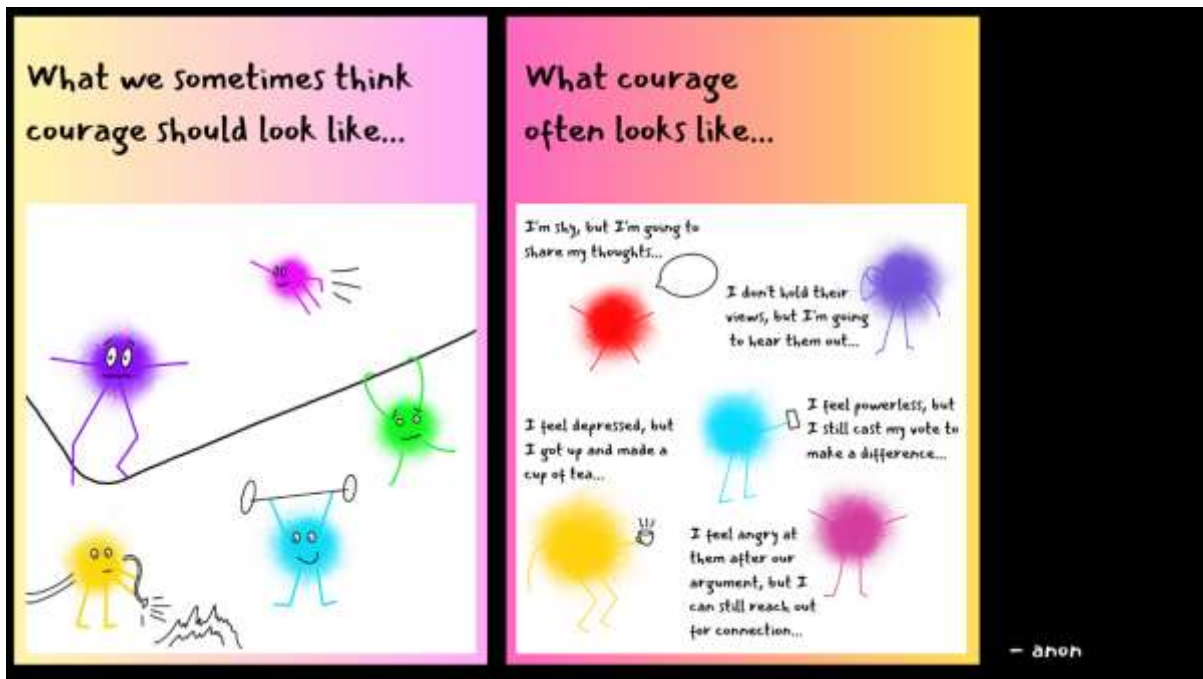
I wonder how we might learn to ask for help?

I wonder how much change we might enable if we prioritized learning to notice the support that people need before they asked for it?

Slide: The most powerful force in the world that can change the lives of millions is compassion.



Slide: And finally: What we sometimes think courage should look like ... What courage often looks like:



I'm shy but I'm going to share my thoughts. I don't hold their views, but I'm going to hear them out. I feel depressed, but I got up and made a cup of tea. I feel powerless, but I still cast my vote to make a difference. I feel angry at them after our argument, but I can still reach out for connection.

For me, and I think for several of those I journey alongside, this is what a light yoke and an easy burden looks like. It's not about doing everything, or being a superhero. It's about doing what we can, and being honest about what we can't or, frankly, don't want to do. It brings us right back to the beginning of the braving inventory: boundaries. We can't have a light burden or an easy yoke if we say yes to everything. Each of us is only one person, and we all do what we can. The reason that we can sing that 'Jesus will never say no' is not because that is an example for us to follow. Absolutely not. Learning when and how to say no is essential, and is very much a journey that I am still pretty near the beginning of.

Rather, the resurrected Jesus is lived out in the whole body of Christ. The body of Christ doesn't have to say no because each of us bring our own identities, experiences, gifts, burdens, and tools to release burdens to that body. Learning to be church compassionately is not about thinking that we can do everything, but about being willing to let go sometimes and celebrate the good work that someone else is doing.

I wonder how we might relearn the art of rest...

I wonder what vulnerabilities needs we might be being called to be more open and honest about today...

I wonder how each of us might better support our own boundaries, and the boundaries of all those who we meet...

I wonder how much change we might enable if we were more gentle with ourselves and each other...