



## *The new*SHOFAR

*Ordinary Sunday 14*

Hosea 11:1-4 - Matthew 11:25-30

### **Not all who claim to be Christians actually imitate Christ**

Today's text is one of the clearest statements about Jesus that has been made by Matthew in his Gospel. It follows on from the earlier problems that Jesus was having with the towns and villages of Galilee, along with his growing difficulties with the Jewish religious leaders and the elite of the nation. It begins with Jesus giving praise to God for the ways in which his Father engages with creation and involves himself in human history. It is through these divine actions that God reveals his divine way to those who are open to receiving him. God reveals himself in human history and in human actions. The God of whom Jesus is speaking is the *Lord of Heaven and Earth* a title that is meant to declare his absolute power and might. These are the reliable hands in which all things remain and not even the rejection of Jesus by God's Chosen People (by the religious traditions of the time) can stop this power and might from achieving what God wants achieved.

### **How mysterious are the ways of God!**

The *wise* mentioned here are those like the Galileans and the religious leaders. They see Jesus, experience his actions and his words and yet are unwilling to allow room for him in their lives. They refuse to change anything in the way they are living. In contrast to these stand the *children*. The word here includes not only small children, but also the poor, the oppressed, the needy and those who struggle in any way or live in despair. It is because they need something or someone beyond themselves that they look for the God, the God who is already seeking to reveal himself to them. All of this is now brought to a head in Jesus. Faith will only grow and prosper when men and women accept human limitations.

### **In all things place God in the centre**

The power of this story is to be found in the response Jesus makes to rejection and alienation. When the very people who should be able to hear his words and respond by changing the way they are living (*the wise and the learned*), when they turn their back on him and even begin to persecute him what does Jesus do? He turns to God his Father and gives him praise and thanksgiving. There is no complaining; no whinging; no seeking of revenge; just a turning to his Father, to the source of his strength and the heart of his ministry. Angry responses will change nothing. On the other hand, Jesus sees those who are like little children as being the bright spot in his ministry. Jesus does not focus on the others who reject him. From Jesus' own perspective, rejection by some does not change the key elements of our human existence because God remains the *Lord of heaven and earth*. While God remains God, all is well. He is instructing his people to forget those who persecute them and rejoice instead in all that God is achieving – even if it is not all that we would like God to be doing.

### **The final say is always in the hand of God**

Evil men and women may sometimes seem to be all powerful and they may be able to bring down all kinds of calamities and suffering on believers. **But**, and this is why it is called Good News, in no way do they have the final say. God remains in control and it is this divine activity that becomes the source of hope for all believers. How do disciples access this new

life, this hope, strength and rejuvenation? In Jesus Christ and only in Jesus Christ. The only way to find and experience this *God-at-work* in our world is through the intimacy of our union in Jesus. It is Jesus alone who *knows* the Father and it is the revealing of the *Father-at-work* that forms the primary focus of the ministry of the Son. Matthew is urging his own faith community to continue their collaboration with what God is doing and achieving in their lives and in their world and to leave the rejection, the pains and the burdens of life in God's hands.

### **Bring it all to Jesus – the Gospel in a nutshell**

One of the truly fabulous things in today's Gospel is how we do not see Jesus just inviting disciples to follow after him. What he is doing as well is inviting us to *come to me*.

In the context of the present verse, Jesus is addressing in particular those who are exhausted in their efforts to keep the Law. They struggle in this way because they want to live in a right relationship with God. They are overwhelmed by the impossibility of it all. The truth is that all men and women struggle in their lives, at various times and in various ways. All people need God and yet few actually manage to find him. This is because the Law and our religious traditions can easily become a burden, an obstacle to faithful living. In coming to Jesus, people will find *rest*. This *rest* includes the notion of salvation but is much more. It is about a refreshing new beginning to the way we live our lives and struggle with what is happening. This happens because of the invitation of Jesus to *take my yoke upon you...* The yoke is the instrument that is used by farmers. It enables them to carry larger burdens than their cattle would otherwise be able to manage. Thus, Jesus is presenting himself as our yoke. Not replacing the need for the people to carry the burden of obedience to the Law but making it possible for them to be refreshed and to have a whole new way of doing the will of God. This is not a promise that there will be no burdens in life. The promise is that all burdens are now shared with Jesus. Having Jesus as a part of life makes it possible to take up our burdens with a new freshness. In Jesus, burdens are carried in a different way.

### **God is always alongside us, in good times and in tough times**

One of the fascinating insights we have into the message of Jesus, is that he does not say to people who are suffering and staggering under their burdens, can come to him and he will give them a holiday on the coast! Nor does he offer them revenge on those who are harming them. What he offers is a farming implement, a tool for working and for carrying burdens! The Gospel message is not a message about an easy life, about a life free from worries and woes. Jesus does not teach a Kingdom in which someone can hide from the realities of our fragile human existence and the natural difficulties of human relationships.

What Jesus is offering is the presence and power of heaven. It is as they suffer; it is while they are trying to carry their burdens that they find God with them, alongside of them, within them. This God is not some observer who stands back and encourages them in their work. The God revealed in Jesus is the God who lends a hand with the hard work. As the yoke bears the burden of the load being pulled by the bullock, so Jesus helps bear the burdens as we go about the work of living as disciples. The farmer straps the yoke onto the beast of burden and the disciple brings Jesus alive in the way they live. If a disciple wishes to find God, all that is needed is to look into the face of Jesus, for where Jesus is, there is God at work. This is why in our creed we proclaim that Jesus is *God from God, light from light, true God from true God...* No longer is it necessary to go to our "temples" to find God; to leave behind our lives and all that is going on around us if we wish to find the grace of God. It is as we live in Christ and model our lives on life and teachings of Jesus that we enjoy the blessings of his yoke. The Gospel does not get better than this reassuring and earnest request from Jesus: *Come to me, all of you and I will give you peace.*