**Sermon 5.7.20**

.“You just don’t get it do you?” You just don’t get what’s going on at all do you? How can you be so obtuse?” Not my view, but a paraphrase of Jesus concerning his own generation; first they critique John the Baptist for his austerity, claiming he must be demon-possessed to go on like that, and then they critique Jesus for his hedonistic party-going bonhomie. You just don’t get it. You can tell who in a generation doesn’t get it – they’re the ones categorising everyone else – as demons (like apparently Dominic Cummings) or as friends of sinners (like apparently anyone who dares utter words such as mercy and forgiveness to those beyond the pale). And they’re categorising others because they don’t belong to their group, their herd.

Herds are as a rule, not especially wise, and you see quite a bit of herd mentality in the social movements around these days that claim “we get it”, we get what’s wrong, what needs sorting, what needs calling out. The tricky thing is that while often what’s being called out is indeed in need of fixing – environmental abuse, police brutality, gender pay gaps etc, the herd is not best-placed to fix anything. The herd doesn’t stand still – it travels, wanders, migrates; and worse, as a herd of human beings we have powerful cravings for novelty and unanimity – you could call it solidarity, or you could call it bullying into conformity. It’s the attitude that screams “you must attend to what I’m attending to, now” and if you don’t you’ve got a demon or you’re a friend of sinners. These days it’s unlikely to be a powerful religious lobby screaming ”you must attend to the sabbath” or “you must honour God’s holy Jerusalem temple”, but there’s plenty of pressure to say Je suis Charlie, to take the knee or sign off with #climatechange. None of which is bad – of course – but the problem when this manifests as the herd mentality is the hatred, the hatred generated for anyone who won’t — for any reason — join that herd. If Jesus is anything to go by, it can get you crucified. Whether it’s Je suis Charlie, #Metoo or Black Lives Matter, you had better be FULLY on board says the herd, and if you’re not on board with whatever next September is on trend, boy you are gonna pay for it.

Again please don’t misunderstand me, I’m not suggesting we shouldn’t address society’s injustices – but I am suggesting that we take Jesus seriously when he warns “you just don’t get it”. And he addressed this to some of the wisest, most upright and pious citizens of his day. If Jesus is right, we are **very unreliable interpreters of the present; what we think is happening is — though we may not realize it till some time later — not what’s really going on at all. This time might be the start of something truly momentous we can’t foresee right now because we’re scared to death. Given this uncertainty, we might at the very least be careful about how we wear our ‘being right’, recalling that for human beings one of the most difficult things is to be right without hurting someone, to be right without hurting someone. Nearly everyone I’ve ever met wants to be good, but I have to say not a few of them were ready to do some bad stuff and to give you an explanation why – being a good person – it was necessary for them to do it.**

So where at a time like this is wisdom to be found? Well funnily enough Jesus goes on to talk about that – saying “you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and revealed them to infants”. Hmm. Let me give you an example, a true story, from these times of pandemic.

Jason Denney was so ill with Covid-19 he had just received the last rites as he lay in a pressurised room in hospital, having said goodbye to his family on facetime. When he had been less ill, the hospital ward cleaner, Rosaura, had struck up a relationship with Jason – and as she went about her business in PPE she could see the fear in his face. Jason didn't want to be sedated or incubated, and was in unspeakable pain, focusing on surviving five minutes at a time. So Rosaura kept talking to him.

"I don't think she realized at the time what she was doing for me," Jason said later. "She was saving my life. It was such a relief to talk about something other than my illness. I was sick and tired of hearing about what bad shape I was in."

Later Rosaura said simply " I wanted to make sure that he knew he was not alone. I told him his life was in good hands, both the doctors' and God's."

Recent research suggests “invisible workers” like Rosaura can save lives – as one researcher, Dr Jane Dutton put it, "It only takes [40 seconds of a caring interaction](https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/the-compassion-crisis-one-doctors-crusade-for-caring/) to change a patient in a way that affects their whole health prospects"

I was especially struck by Rosaura’s words to Jason “you are in good hands”. It’s a phrase I came across recently when I heard how in an interview just before he died the distinguished scholar Huston Smith was asked what he had learned in six decades of studying, teaching and living the great religions of the world and he replied “What have I learned? I have learned that we are in good hands”.

Jesus as usual was way ahead in valuing key-workers. He says some people get it – and they’re often infants – so as followers of Jesus, it might be a good idea to understand ourselves as just infants, beginners.

So if we’re in danger of not getting it, and we know that wisdom is found in the most counter-intuitive of people, in “infants”, then how are we to live wisely? Well again Jesus has something to say in our gospel. If we’re weary and carrying heavy burdens whether it’s the burden of fear of the pandemic, the burden of expectations or of work or any other burdens he says “come to me”, intentionally come to me. And then? Then he says, take my burden, my YOKE upon you. Which again appears counter-intuitive. No rest here, no down-time, no air bridge to sunsville, but being yoked to Jesus.

Recent research by Barna notes three words that Church leaders use to describe their situation: “tired”, “lonely” and “overwhelmed”. Yet Jesus tells us that in and with him there is ease, lightness, rest. There’s something unhooked here – something unhooked from the yoke of Jesus that we need to re-hook.

A yoke was a work tool for an animal – oxen typically. The younger ox has to get used to the older ox – if he works too hard he takes all the weight himself and can’t last, if he drags his feet he’ll eventually fall. When Jesus says take my yoke upon you, He’s telling the disciples and you and I to come and be joined to him, walking and living and moving and breathing with him.  We can look at this as all burden – but Jesus suggests this isn’t burdensome, but living in and with him is in fact restful, easy and light. How come? Well for instance because noone is saying “I am holding on to anger and this is working out great for me”. Because no one is saying “I refuse to forgive and it’s a really good decision!” Because no one is arguing “bitterness is a real tonic” when its eating them alive. And much more.

I haven’t got time to say more, but what seems clear from the drift of Jesus’ teaching today is that we may well not get what’s going on; if so, that’s ok, let’s take care not to hammer others with our righteousness, let’s pay attention to the little ones in this world, let’s learn this littleness and let’s ensure, whatever we do, that we yoke yourselves to Jesus.