**Sermon for 5 July 2020**

*Please read Matthew 11.16-19,25-30.*

I wonder if you ever moan or groan, or criticise things. Most of us do at times! Or perhaps people moan to you… Some people are never satisfied, are they?!

That’s the sort of thing Jesus is talking about in today’s reading. He says the people of his time – his ‘generation’ – are like children winding each other up. Not a great compliment! They are playing with each other, but can’t agree what to play:

‘We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance;

we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’

Like many children, they are playing at being grown-ups. In the Near East it was the men who played music and danced for weddings. But it was the women who did the mourning – and were sometimes paid as ‘professional mourners’. You can just imagine the girls trying to get the boys to play weddings or the boys trying to get the girls to play funerals – but they won’t budge! They just sit around, rubbing each other up the wrong way and bickering!

But why is Jesus talking about this?

**Making your mind up**

When we read the Bible, it’s always good to look at the context. What’s been happening before these verses? John the Baptist is now in prison and has some doubts about Jesus. Is he really the Messiah? Jesus tells John’s disciples to go back and report ‘what you hear and see: the blind receive sight, the lame walk…’ (v.4-5). John needs to think about those things and work out whether it sounds like the Messiah. And so does everyone else – the whole generation. They need to make their mind up.

But instead, they just moan and criticise. Verse 18: ‘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.” One is too serious and otherworldly; the other is mixing with all the wrong people! They seem so extreme.

Both John and Jesus, in their own ways, were revealing something about God and his kingdom. They are both challenging. But many people just can’t accept them. The challenge to repent is too great. The challenge to include outsiders is too great. They just want a safe, middle-of-the-road religion. But that doesn’t seem to be God’s way.

Jesus continues, ‘But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.’ What is he on about? Perhaps the deeds are the things he is doing himself, that he tells John to think about. Those will prove whether Jesus is from God – whether or not he’s the wisdom of God or demonstrates the wisdom of God. And we all have to make our minds up.

Jesus has some harsh words for some of the towns he’s visited. They’ve seen the miracles (or deeds) but not repented. (See v.20.)

But then he moves on to say some things about…

**Accepting God and his kingdom**

1. **We don’t need worldly wisdom.** Jesus says in verse 25 that God has ‘hidden these things from the wise and learned’. We do need wisdom, but not the wisdom the world normally values. Accepting God isn’t an intellectual decision. It’s something that needs to happen in our hearts. And some people, however clever they are, just don’t get it. They can’t grasp God and his ways. But little children (even though they can’t always play games together!) can get it. They can be way ahead of the adults at times. And perhaps this says that we all have trust like children. God delights to do things in this upside-down way.
2. **God reveals himself.** Twice in these verses Jesus talks about God revealing himself (see verses 25 & 27). Perhaps it sounds a bit restrictive, as if there’s nothing we can do unless God does it. But perhaps God is revealing himself all the time – through the deeds of Jesus, through the scriptures, through all sorts of things in the world around and daily life… And we just have to see it.
3. **Jesus invites us.** Just in case we thought God was excluding us, Jesus makes this wonderful appeal: ‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.’ (v.28) You may be very familiar with those words. You may remember them from Handel’s ‘Messiah’. They are the sort of words we can return to time and again for encouragement and refreshment. We may have responded to Jesus’ invitation many years ago. We may have had a wonderful moment of conversion. But conversion is also an ongoing thing. We have to come back to Jesus again and again and again. We can always enter more deeply into his life. And when we do, it can provide some rest from all the burdens of this world.

**Resting in Jesus today**

We’re all going through hard times at the moment. For some it will be much harder than for others. There are plenty of things we can worry about; plenty of things to get stressed about. You may be worried whether you’ll still have a job in a few months’ time. You may be worried about your mental health or someone else’s mental health. You may be worried about the future of our country. There are so many things that can make us feel weary and burdened. There are so many things that can make us moan or criticise.

We can’t just wish those things away. But we can take them to Jesus, and we can also focus on Jesus freshly. And then we start to learn from him – or learn a bit more from him. We become more like him. We discover the values of God’s kingdom, including ‘rest’ – letting things go. ‘Let go and let God’ people sometimes say.

Jesus uses the image of a yoke. If an animal is yoked to a plough all day it can rub them and irritate the skin – a bit like those children in the market-place again, rubbing each other up the wrong way! But if it’s a really good, smooth yoke it will be much better. The word ‘easy’ here can also mean ‘kind’. Following Jesus does involve yokes and burdens, but his are easy, kind and light. And that’s because he’s there with us – yoked to the same plough alongside us.

Jesus says, make up your mind. Come to me. Accept God and his kingdom values. And things will be easier and lighter, and life will make more sense.

*Richard Wise*