

“Come to me, all who labour...”

Mt.11.25-30

Both Zechariah and Matthew use the word "come": "Behold, your king comes to you;" "Come to me." It wouldn't sound the same, if they had said: "Behold your king goes to you;" and "Go to me."

"Come" implies presence and proximity - the prophet speaks to the people where they are, and the king comes to the people where they are. Jesus invites his hearers to be close to him where he is, not to go to find him somewhere else altogether.

So, before his death, he promised the disciples: "I go to prepare a place for you, and I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also." Even when he did say "Go into all the world and preach the gospel," he immediately followed it with: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age," thus providing the assurance that, wherever we go, we go with him.

"Come" is a word that we use when giving invitations. "Come to me," says Jesus, "all who are weary and carrying heavy burdens." The criterion for coming is simple: being weary and burdened. No wonder people who come to Jesus find themselves with other people who are worn out, under pressure, and at the limits of their patience, and, therefore, not always easy companions.

Why come? So that Jesus can give rest. But Jesus says more: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me." Rest is part of what Jesus offers people who come to him, but so, too, is the opportunity to keep in step and learn from him.

Jesus's words of invitation were spoken to people who were completely unpleaseable, as we all can be in our worst moments. They would neither dance when there was music, nor cry when there was mourning. John the Baptist's strict ascetical life was too conservative; Jesus's joyful life too liberal. Whatever God offered was wrong.

If the so-called wise missed the point entirely, who had got the message? The infants, the ones who did not know to do anything other than to trust the goodness of their heavenly Father. It is in that context that Jesus invited the weary to come to him for rest.

Zechariah's message to the dispirited people of Israel was, essentially, similar: "Your king comes to halt the warring, to restore hope." He spoke of people being prisoners of hope - a powerful image of being simply unable to escape hope, bound to and with hope. It makes you wonder what a world imbued with unpreventable hope might look like.

This king is a rest-giver, a hope-giver, who comes to us. What is the incarnation, if not God's coming among us? What is Jesus's ministry, if not coming to the people in villages and towns that were largely overlooked, even despised, by Jerusalem?

What would it be like to live as if no one is overlooked, as if our king has come to everyone to offer rest and hope? What would it be like to dedicate our freedom to God's service, so that all people, even exhausted people in forgotten backwaters, may come to the glorious liberty of the children of God, who calls them to come? Perhaps, this week, we can let our imaginations wander and wonder.