

Sermon
26th August 2018
Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

Reading: Matthew 11:25-30

Last Sunday I told you about all the wild animals we saw when we were in rural parts of South Africa on our recent holiday.

Today I would like to tell you about something I saw in the city. Something equally breath-taking, but in a *completely* different way...

We've been living in Scotland for 10 years now. And although we've been back to South Africa for a holiday almost every year since we've moved here, I have never driven in South Africa again. Until this time!

And let me tell you – I was a nervous wreck! Driving in South Africa is not for the faint hearted... And to make it worse, my dear husband decided to hire a mini-van for us to drive around in, and you've all seen the size of my wee car!!

On the motorway between Johannesburg and Pretoria – one of the busiest roads in the whole of South Africa – there are 5 lanes on both sides. And people who are in a hurry will just pass you on either side. The speed limits seem to be nothing more than decorations alongside

the road, and no matter what time of day it is, that road is always busy. And worst of it all: There are notices alongside the road, saying: “Be careful: Hijack zone” / “Be careful: High accident zone”.

I was concentrating on the road and didn't look around much, but then, all of a sudden, there was a huge billboard alongside the road.

Unfortunately, I couldn't take a picture, because I was driving, but I took a picture with my eyes and saved it in my mind.

The billboard looked something like this:

Jesus loves you*

*No terms and conditions

It said: Jesus loves you. Footnote: No terms and conditions.

And that was exactly what I needed to hear at that very moment.

Because I was scared, and I felt alone – but then I was reminded that in fact, I wasn't alone at all. And I didn't have to be scared.

Because God was with me. On that road, in that car. God is with me – always, everywhere.

Even when I forget it...

Our world today is so full of terms and conditions. Every single advertisement always has a wee footnote: Terms and condition apply.

And sometimes we can be caught out by these terms and conditions! If you don't read the fine print, you can find yourself in a very sticky situation.

I know this from personal experience, because a couple of years ago I flew to London to go and help my friend settle back in at home after she had been in hospital – and I didn't read the fine-print on the car rental paperwork, so I didn't have everything I needed with me... And to make a long story short: I ended up having to take a bus, a train and a taxi to get to her... I arrived there after midnight AND I lost the money I paid for the rental car!

My own fault – I should have known better. Terms and conditions are there for a reason. Nothing is ever as straight forward as it seems.

Well, almost nothing – God's love for us has NO terms and conditions.

He loves us, even if we give him a hundred reasons not to...

And in our day and age, this seems almost too good to be true!

In the passage we read Jesus said that not everybody will be able to understand him or God or God's love for us. He says God has hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.

Now what does this mean?

A young child realises that he/she is dependent on their parent. They just know that there are certain things they can't do on their own.

They don't question their parent's decisions, they accept their love, they just go with the choices their parents make for them, and they give their own love unconditionally. They trust their parents with everything in them.

In direct contrast to this, most grown-ups want to show the world that they can cope with everything on their own and that they need nobody and nothing in life.

Unfortunately, people of the 2nd kind very often end up thinking that they don't need God either. And that is what Jesus is trying to explain here.

He says that we should be like small children. People who accept the love of God, without trying to understand it. People who trust God, even when it doesn't make sense. People who don't try and figure out *why* things are happening to us all the time, but who blindly follows our Father because we know that He will never let any harm come to us unnecessarily.

Matthew's first readers were Jews. And Jews very often spoke of the "yoke of the Law" they had to carry. With that they meant that if they chose to believe in God, that implied that they had to comply to millions of rules and perform certain rituals and act in certain ways – and this was very hard to do. It bogged them down.

But Jesus is trying to explain to them that absolutely none of this is necessary. His yoke is easy and his burden is light.

In other words, if we want to follow him, we don't have to be bogged down by all the rules that we have to follow. In actual fact – there is no fine print at all. What we see is what we get. No hidden agenda, no hidden cost.

He paid the price already. And he will give us the strength and the tools we need to have a good life.

His yoke is not heavy – because a yoke is something that needs to be carried by 2 people. If we walk through life with Jesus by our side – He carries our yoke with us! To believe in God should bring us joy and peace, not burdens.

Still, I think that we don't always live like people who realise this. We very often FEEL weary and burdened – because we allow the burdens of life to press down heavily on our shoulders.

We can get so caught up in the details of day to day living, that we just do not seem to have the time to take a wee step back and realise that we are not alone.

We have deadlines and commitments, problems and priorities, distractions and obstacles.

And although we all really want greater fulfilment in life, it so often seems to be just outside of our grasp.

No one wants their life to be just average. By nature, we want our lives to be full. Full and prosperous.

And this is easier than we think! All we need to do if we want to accomplish a full and meaningful life, is to follow Jesus.

His yoke is easy. His burden is light.

The Greek word translated with “easy” here means “well-suited” or “easy-fitting”.

It means that followers of Jesus are not exempt from work; but are given the right tools to do the job. *Have you ever tried to tighten a screw with a butter knife? It can be done; but, it is much easier to do with the right screwdriver.*

Through his life, his teachings and his presence, Christ Jesus has given us the right tools to handle every burden life can throw at us with ease.

There, alongside one of the busiest motorways in South Africa, stands a billboard, reminding people that Jesus loves them.

In our world where so many people think they don't need God anymore, where new developments appear all the time and people discover new and fancy things every day, where any company could advertise anything – some church decided that they needed to advertise the love of God.

And that is exactly what ALL of us should do too. All the time. We should be like *walking billboards* for Christ. We should be showing everybody we meet that believing in Christ is not a burden, it's a joy. It's a privilege.

Because if you believe in Christ, and life makes you weary, you will find rest. Which is not something that is guaranteed in this crazy rat-race of a life we find ourselves in.

Without Christ, this life is just a race... to nowhere. With Christ, this life is a race to a finish-line like no other.

So let's run it shoulder to shoulder with Jesus; because then – if we get thirsty, he'll give us something to drink; if we get tired, he'll give us a rest; and if we fall, he'll pull us up again.

And why will he do all these things for us? Because he loves us. NO terms and conditions!

Amen