

**SERMON FOR THE SUNDAY CANTATE**  
(Cape Town - 10 May 2009)

**Text:** <sup>25</sup> At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. <sup>26</sup> Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. <sup>27</sup> "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. <sup>28</sup> "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:25-30)

On this Sunday *Cantate* we are called upon to glorify God by the songs that we sing. But you know as well as I do that as a congregation we are musically not very gifted. Despite all effort in the past years we have never managed to put a choir, a band, or a small orchestra together. Erica, our organist, battles most of the time on her own. And unfortunately I myself and my family are musically also very limited. Martina isn't too bad. She joined the school choir and has played the recorder occasionally here in church. I on my part simply try to sing the songs I choose for us to sing as loudly as I can. But fact is I have no rhythm. Years ago I bought a guitar. But I just can't get the rhythm right. And even if my rhythm should improve, I am missing a finger on my left hand these days. Musically our family is a bit of a disaster.

Just to confirm let me tell you what happened the other day. On the 30 of April (one and half weeks ago) my dad-in-law turned 80. As a family we decided that for his birthday we would go to the Rehab center where he is recovering from his stroke and sing one of his favourite songs. It is a very simple song called *Gott ist die Liebe* (God is love).

We were a bit nervous about singing it, so we practised the song for a few days in our morning family devotions. But because I was leaving for Johannesburg on the morning of his birthday, we went to the rehab center the night before. As my dad-in-law isn't alone in a room, we decided to go 15 minutes *before* the visiting hour started. But for whatever reason the other visitors were early as well. We had an audience! But as we had practised, we decided to sing anyway. Martina who is most probably our best singer got all emotional - and couldn't really sing. Peter's voice seems to be breaking at the moment, so he wasn't really helping us with his cracking voice. And my mother-in-law... well, I am not going to say anything about her. But I can tell you it was a bit of a disaster. That was the first time since the stroke that my dad-in-law almost got out of bed and walked out of the room.

Only joking, of course. I think he appreciated it. You see, singing to the glory of God is not a matter of displaying your musical skills (it is never "entertainment"). It is an expression of gratitude. It is a way that you declare the wonders of God. And that is what counts. And therefore also here in church, even if you cannot sing well, make an effort to sing as well as you can. A heart touched by the great deeds of God, always breaks out into song.

Now the sermon text gives us two good reasons to sing, It highlights two of those great deeds of God that can form the basis of our song and fills our hearts with a melody.

I

The first one is that God *reveals* himself to the *little children*.

Revelation of God, understanding God and grasping the great wonders and mysteries of his Kingdom that is not something you usually associate with little children. The Pharisees and the

scribes they were the learned and wise people of ancient Israel. But when Jesus came and preached the joy of God's kingdom, guess who were there people that followed him? It wasn't the learned people and the wise, the scribes or the Pharisees. The people that followed Jesus and were touched by his message of love and forgiveness, were the ordinary, mostly illiterate people.

When Jesus grasped what was happening around him, he started praising God. He said: "***I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.***"

At first glance this praise seems a bit unfair. Are the little children favoured more than the wise and learned? Does God exercise a choice for one against the other to whom he wants to reveal himself? But that is not the essence of Jesus' praise. His praise is an *observation*. In order to be touched by God's message, you don't have to be wise and learned. All that is needed is a heart of *dependance*. Little children are dependant on their parents. And people that are dependant on God start to experience the wonders of his kingdom.

That is what Jesus observes. He himself might initially have thought: Surely the wise and learned who studied and knew the Scriptures would be the first to recognise him and the most receptive for his message. But that is not what he saw. What he saw was God's love embracing people from all walks of life. He saw the lives of normal, illiterate people being changed.

And his heart is filled with joy: God is revealing himself *to all*. Nobody is excluded. The doors of God's Kingdom are wide open. There are no limits.

## II

And it is in view of this, that Jesus makes his *open invitation to come to him*, which is the second source of our God praise.

Jesus sees those that follow him, but then he looks beyond them to the rest and says: "***Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.***"

This invitation includes you: Whoever you are, rich or poor, learned or not, you can come to Jesus. The burdens of life cover all sectors of society. Are you weary? Do you need somebody to take the burden from your shoulders? Do you need somebody to give you rest and peace? Jesus says: "Come to me"

The invitation is repeated, intensified, in the form of a picture, an illustration. Jesus says: "***Take my yoke upon you and learn from me... My yoke is easy and my burden is light.***"

We live in Cape Town and maybe you don't know what a yoke is. A yoke is wooden beam that is used between a pair of oxen to pull a load. It has two primary functions. On the one hand it spreads the weight. Instead of having just one spot to which the chain pulling the load is fastened, the load can be spread along the beam. But more importantly, if the load is too heavy, two oxen can be yoked to share the load.

That is exactly what Jesus says. He says: "There is no reason for you to pull your load alone. We will do it jointly. Allow us to be yoked together. I will share your load with you."

The loads we carry vary. One load that most of us seem to carry (a common load) is that of anxiety. Some worry about the future of our country, both politically and economically. Others have more personal anxieties: A bond that needs to be repaid, sickness, family worries. And your imaginations runs havoc. You can't sleep. But always worrying about the past or the dark future

that lies ahead, that is not the way God designed us.

Worrying is a sign of God separation. And because we are separated from God, independent from him, we tend to live in the worries of the past or the future, but never in the present (the presence of God). This last week during my travels I eventually managed read the book entitled *The Shack* (maybe you have read it). Mack the main character in the book, a troubled and worried man, is in conversation with Jesus. And Jesus says to Mack: "The imagination is a powerful tool, Mack". And then he asks him a question that struck me personally as well. The question is: "Where do you spend most of your time, in your imagination, in the present, the past, or the future?" Mack says: "It should be in the present, but it is the past or future." And Jesus adds a second question. He says to Mack: "If is in the past or future do you ever see *me* there?" Mack's answer is "no" - and that is why he worries.

The nature of God is that he is present. We experience him now. His grace is for today. He is yoked to us today. In the "Lord's Prayer" he teaches us to pray: "***Give us this day our daily bread***". Today he will share our burden. Tomorrow is another day. And tomorrow he will invite you again: "Come to be if you are weary."

And this is, by the way, the reason why Jesus' yoke is so light. It pulls the load of one day only. Our core problem is "independence" of God. We want to be in control. We want to determine our destiny, our future. But the load is too heavy. Grace lies in daily God-dependance. Grace lies in the family setting, where the little child calls to the parent: "What are we eating today, mom?", and knows my parents always provide.

There is joy in a live "yoked" to Jesus. There is joy in dependance on God. And where there is dependance, there is *cantate*. People that depend on God for their daily provision, sing of God's marvelous deeds. They sing of the God who never deserts them.

God hasn't deserted the others either. But they don't always sing, because they don't know the presence of God. Therefore the invitation by Jesus: "***Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.***" And if we all come the choir singing God's praises will grow in number and in volume. I believe that one day the roof of this church will be lifted in song. Maybe the choir won't be better than our family choir at the rehab center. But there will be singing because people have discovered God's love even in the most dire circumstances.. Amen.