

Sunday between July 3 and July 9

Prayer

God of invitation and rest,
you do not meet us only
in strength and certainty.

You meet us in weariness,
in longing,
in the struggle to know ourselves,
and in the quiet hope that life could be gentler than this.

When we feel divided within,
hold us together.

When the pressure feels more
than we can name, stay close.

When joy feels distant
or trust feels slow to grow,
draw near with patience.

Lead us towards what gives life.
Teach us the freedom of honesty,
the courage of receiving help,
and the peace of learning your gentler way.

Come Away, Come Rest

Some weeks feel like an invitation. These readings hold invitation, desire, inner conflict, and rest. There is change here, and choosing. There is the beauty of love drawing near, and the honesty of a life that feels pulled in two directions. And there is Jesus, speaking not to the successful and untroubled, but to the weary and burdened, offering a yoke that is shared and a way that is lighter than fear.

Threads to explore

- Invitation and response
- Weariness and rest
- The struggle within us
- Love that draws us towards life

Context

Genesis tells of Rebekah's decision to leave what is familiar and enter a future shaped by promise, hospitality, and trust. Psalm 45 celebrates beauty, joy, and royal wedding imagery, while Song of Solomon offers a more intimate and earthy poem of love, desire, and delight in newness. In Romans, Paul speaks with painful honesty about inner conflict – wanting what is good, yet finding other forces at work within. In Matthew, Jesus contrasts the responses of his generation, then turns towards thanksgiving and invitation, welcoming the weary into a life of shared burden and rest.

Connections

These readings gather around response – to invitation, to desire, to grace, to the call of life itself. Something shifts here, both outwardly and inwardly. Some responses are open and trusting; others are conflicted and burdened.

Yet the week leans towards tenderness rather than strain. Even where struggle is real, the final note is not failure but welcome. Love calls, wisdom invites, and Christ speaks peace to those who are weary and under strain.

Deepening the Word

Romans 7 is one of the most recognisable passages for anyone who knows what it is like to feel split inside. Paul names the exhausting experience of wanting to live well and yet finding other habits, instincts, and patterns pulling in the opposite direction. This is not a neat spiritual puzzle. It is deeply human. People know this feeling in all sorts of ways – the sharp word said too quickly, the old fear that returns, the behaviour that harms us or others even when we know better, the systems we resist and yet still participate in. The power of the passage is that it tells the truth without pretending that truth by itself is enough to set us free.

Matthew offers a different register. Jesus does not deny weariness; he speaks directly to it. “Come to me” is not a command barked from a distance. It is an invitation into relationship, into learning, into a way of living that does not grind people down. The image of the yoke can sound heavy at first, but here it becomes a sign of shared weight rather than crushing demand. Jesus is not offering more pressure. He is offering companionship, and a life shaped by humility, compassion, and rest.

In everyday life, this matters because many people are carrying too much. Some burdens are internal – shame, self-criticism, grief, indecision, old habits that cling. Some are external – overwork, care responsibilities, money stress, hostile systems, inaccessible spaces, the pressure to keep performing competence when energy is running out. Rebekah’s story and the Song of Solomon passage also remind us that life can still move towards beauty, desire, and new possibility. Faith is not only about surviving what is hard. It is also about recognising what draws us towards life, and having the courage to respond.

Be mindful that language about burden, obedience, or struggle can land painfully for those harmed by controlling religion, impossible expecta-

tions, or chronic exhaustion. Keep Jesus' invitation spacious and humane. The point is not "try harder". It is that grace meets us truthfully, and rest is part of holy living.

Discussion

Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30

Jesus speaks about people who resist both grief and joy, both challenge and celebration. Then he turns and offers one of the gentlest invitations in the Gospels: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens." This is a passage about spiritual resistance, but also about welcome, honesty, and rest.

Questions:

- What kinds of burdens do people carry that are not always obvious?
- What do you think Jesus means by offering rest?
- Where do you recognise people resisting both challenge and joy, as in the first part of this reading?
- How does Paul's honesty about inner conflict connect with your own experience?
- What might it mean to learn "the gentler way" of Christ in everyday life?
- What is one thing that could make life lighter, kinder, or more spacious this week?

Call to Worship

Come as you are –
weary, hopeful, restless, alive.

Christ invites the burdened.
The Spirit breathes peace.
God draws us towards life.

So let us worship the One
who meets us with welcome.

Adoration

God of welcome,
you do not wait
for us to arrive composed.

You meet us in our tiredness,
our longing,
our unfinishedness,
and still you call us beloved.

You are present in beauty that stirs the heart,
in love that draws us towards life,
in the courage to leave what is familiar,
and in the honesty that tells the truth about struggle.

In Christ, you come close
with gentleness and strength together.
You do not load more weight upon the weary.
You offer rest,
companionship,
and a way of living that does not crush.

And your Spirit keeps opening room within us –
for trust,
for tenderness,
for change,
for joy.

To you be praise,
God of invitation,
God of patience,
God of life that is deeper than strain.

Confession

God of gentleness,
there are ways we make life harder
than it needs to be.

We resist what might heal us.
We cling to old reactions.
We keep performing strength
when we are tired through and through.

Sometimes we turn away from joy
as quickly as from challenge.
Sometimes we choose the familiar
over the freedom that frightens us.

We confess the habits that keep us bound –
harshness towards ourselves,
impatience with others,
the need to manage everything,
the reluctance to receive help.

Meet us with grace.
Not with pressure,
but with grace honest enough to change us.

Teach us the lighter way of Christ.
 Loosen what has grown tight in us.
 Lead us towards life.

Intercessions

Optional response

Gentle Christ,

give rest to the weary.

God of welcome and rest,
 you know what weighs on people,
 and you do not turn away.
 So we bring these prayers before you.

For those carrying burdens that do not show on the surface –
 grief, anxiety, pain, fear, shame,
 or responsibilities that never seem to end –
 bring rest that is real,
 and people who respond with kindness.

For those whose lives are narrowed
 by overwork, low pay, debt,
 inaccessible systems, hostility, or exclusion –
 raise up justice,
 shared responsibility,
 and practical change.

For those wrestling inwardly –
 with habits they long to leave,
 choices they cannot settle,
 or a sense of being divided within –
 bring patience, courage,
 and companions who do not shame them.

For those at thresholds –
facing change, new commitment,
uncertain futures, or the need to begin again –
give wisdom, steadiness,
and freedom for a faithful response.

For your church,
that it may not add to people's burdens
but become a place of safer welcome,
deeper listening,
and good rest for tired souls.

Gentle Christ,
give rest to the weary.

Thanksgiving

God of kindness,
we thank you that your invitation is for real people.

We thank you for rest that comes in glimpses and gifts –
a pause, a friend,
a kind word, a shared task,
a quiet breath, a moment when the heart unclenches.

We thank you for honesty in Scripture –
for words that tell the truth about struggle,
desire, weariness,
and the hope of a different way to live.

We thank you for all that draws us towards life –
love that is tender,
beauty that wakes us up,
courage to begin again,
and grace that does not tire of meeting us.

Receive our thanks,
and keep teaching us the spaciousness of your grace.

Blessing

Go gently.
You do not have to carry everything
as though you are alone.

Christ meets you in your weariness,
stays with you in truth,
and teaches a way
that does not harm.

Receive the rest you need.
Share the burdens you can.
And let grace make room
for life to feel lighter.

Visual

- Place a simple chair or bench near the front with a folded cloth or cushion, as a sign of rest, welcome, and room to pause.
- Display or speak clearly the words: “Come to me, all you that are weary,” keeping them clear and uncluttered.
- Use a branch, flower, or image of blossom if drawing on the Song of Solomon reading, as a sign of invitation, desire, and life emerging.

Creative

- **Burden Cards:** Invite people to write, draw, dictate, or silently name one burden they carry and, if they wish, place it in a basket as a quiet act of release.

- **Rest Tokens:** Give out small cards or paper circles with words such as rest, breathe, held, welcome, or gentle.
- **Threshold Choice:** Invite people to reflect silently, write, draw, or speak about one invitation in their life at the moment – something calling them towards courage, healing, or change.
- **Song of Life:** If using Song of Solomon, invite people to name, write, draw, or quietly hold signs of beauty, desire, or aliveness that help them endure.
- **Shared Support:** Offer a simple communal activity where people name practical ways burdens can be lightened – lifts, meals, listening, advocacy, childcare, rest.
- **Pause and Receive:** Create a quiet corner or moment where people can sit, pause, breathe, or simply receive stillness without needing to produce anything.

Meditation

Based on Romans 7:15–25a; Matthew 11:25–30

Take a moment to become aware of what supports you.

The chair, the floor,
 or the space around you.
 Your own breath, if that is helpful,
 coming and going
 without needing to be forced.

There are days
 when the heaviest burden
 is not outside us
 but within.

The divided heart.
The old habit.
The thought pattern that loops again.
The weariness of wanting to live well
and feeling the strain
of how hard that can be.

Paul tells the truth about this.
He does not tidy it up.

And perhaps
you do not need to tidy it up either.

Simply name what feels heavy today.
No fixing yet.
No judging.
Just truth.

Now receive Christ's words,
not to the polished
but to the weary:

Come to me.

Not:
sort yourself out first.

Not:
carry it better.

Not:
pretend you are fine.

Come to me.
Stay there a moment.

What would it be to believe
that rest is not failure?
That gentleness

is not weakness?

That being helped

is not the same as being less faithful?

Breathe in, or pause quietly:

“Receive my weariness.”

Breathe out, or pause again:

“Teach me your rest.”

If it helps,

repeat those words slowly.

When you are ready, return gently

with this truth:

Christ does not tower over you

with more weight.

Christ stays beside you

and says,

“Let us carry this differently.”

Performance

A spoken reflection: “The Lighter Way”

There are ways of living

that make everything heavier.

They can settle into a whole life:

the body under strain,

the mind trying to solve tomorrow

before today is finished,

the spirit worn down

by carrying too much.

Sometimes the heaviness comes from outside –

work, responsibility,

systems that ask too much,
people who keep taking.

Sometimes it comes from within –
the old habit, the old fear,
the part of you that knows what is good
and still struggles to choose it.

And then Jesus says,
“Come to me.”

It is such a small sentence,
but it opens a world.

Because he does not say,
“Come and be inspected.”
He does not say,
“Come and prove you are worthy.”
He does not say,
“Come and carry more.”

He says,
“Come and learn from me.”

And what do we learn?

Not domination.
Not performance.
Not religious strain.

We learn that gentleness can be strong.
That humility can tell the truth.
That rest can be holy.
That a yoke can mean a burden shared
instead of a burden piled on.

Perhaps that is why
this still feels like good news.

Not because life becomes easy.
 But because we do not have to live it
 the hardest way possible.

There is another way.
 A lighter way.
 A truer way.
 And Christ is already walking in it.

Practice

A practice of shared burden

Choose one ordinary moment each day this week that already belongs to your routine. It might be when you make a drink, open your laptop, settle for the evening, begin a new part of the day, or prepare for rest.

Pause for one breath, or one quiet moment if breath language is not helpful. Name one pressure, responsibility, or burden that is present today. Keep it simple and truthful. Then ask: What kind of support might help?

The answer might be rest, asking for help, one smaller task, a pause, a boundary, a prayer, a conversation, or an act of kindness towards yourself.

Use this short prayer if it helps: “Christ, meet me here. Teach me the lighter way.”

At the end of the day, remember any moment when the burden shifted, even slightly. Let that be enough.

Digital

- Post a simple question: “What helps you rest when life feels heavy?”
- Share a text-on-image line, with alt text or the same words in the caption: “Come to me, all you that are weary.”

- Invite people to name one word they associate with rest, welcome, or gentleness.
- Post a short reflection: “Grace does not add to our burden. It helps us carry life differently.”
- Share a community prompt: “What is one practical way we can make life lighter for someone this week?”

Explore

These readings can be especially helpful for people who are tired, conflicted, or carrying more than others realise. They show that faith is not about pretending to have everything sorted out. Paul speaks honestly about inner struggle. Jesus speaks gently to the weary. It can help to say that the Christian life is not meant to crush people. It is meant to lead people towards truth, rest, and a more life-giving way of living.

Discover

- Genesis tells of Rebekah choosing to leave what is familiar and enter a new future.
- Psalm 45 and Song of Solomon both speak of love, beauty, delight, and joyful invitation.
- Romans describes the struggle of wanting to do good while feeling divided within.
- Jesus invites the weary and burdened to come to him and find rest.
- Together, these readings hold invitation, struggle, and the promise of gentler living.

Reflect

Many people know what it is like to feel pulled in different directions. These readings suggest that God meets people there. Faith can include desire, uncertainty, honesty, and weariness. It is not about never struggling. It is about being drawn towards life and learning a gentler, truer way to live.

Connect

You might recognise this in everyday life when someone finally asks for help, when a person chooses rest over relentless pressure, or when kindness makes a difficult day lighter. These are not small things. They can be part of how grace becomes real.

Think

- What burden do you most long to carry differently?
- What helps life feel gentler, more truthful, or more spacious?

Do

Do one thing this week that makes life lighter – for yourself or for someone else. Share a task, offer encouragement, make a space easier to use, take a proper pause, or ask for support. Afterwards, reflect on what changes when burden is shared rather than hidden.