

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” This verse from the gospel that was read today, is one of the four verses used in the Book of Common Prayer in the Rite 1 liturgy in a section famously called the Comfortable Words. It was called so because in the old version of the Book of Common Prayer, the section would begin with “Hear what comfortable words our Saviour Christ saith unto all who truly turn to him.” These words provide the comfort of the gospel to those who are tired and are carrying heavy burdens.

In Jesus’ time, people had been bearing all sorts of burden. There was the political burden of Roman oppressive rule. There was the religious burden of the complex of duties that the religious experts prescribed. There was the burden of ordinary life, that all of us experience, of sickness, of lack, of failure, of broken relationships, of loss of loved ones and many such experiences. Come to me, said Jesus. Come and I will give you rest. I will refresh you.

In today’s reading from Genesis we read about the ancestors of Israel, Isaac and

Rebecca. Through its history, Israel particularly preserved a memory of Isaac’s life as one having his own share of burdens. His life story was not a smooth one and was filled with complications. He was born as a miracle child to his parents in old age. As a toddler when he was found playing with his teenage half-brother Ishmael, the family separated them both for fear that the inheritance would have to be shared. His father tried to kill him as a sacrifice to God. As a young man he lost his mother. Rebekah, his wife, was found for him from a distant land. Like his mother, his wife could not conceive. Isaac earnestly prayed and eventually they had twin boys.

As the boys grew up, Isaac loved the older boy and his wife the younger one. Isaac did prosper in agriculture. Had bumper crops and became quite wealthy. However, as he aged, life had still more burdens for him. The older son’s marriages were a source of constant grief to him & his wife. In old age he became blind. And this was taken advantage of as he was cheated by his wife and his younger son, to ensure that the blessing of inheritance goes to the younger

son instead of the son he loved. Eventually Isaac died and was buried by both his sons.

That was Isaac's life. In fact, that was the form of all of Israel's three great ancestors. Israel called its God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Each of them had similar lives, with their own shares of trouble. There were no heroic deeds. They struggled, fell, and had their share of complications. Yet, their life stories were foundational in the way Israelites remembered their origin.

The naming of the God of Israel, as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, carried on even in the New Testament. When Jesus said the gospel was for everyone, he proclaimed: "I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." When teaching that death is not the end of human life, for those who die in God live in God's presence, Jesus says: "And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?" He is God not of the dead, but of the living." In one of the earliest sermons preached by Jesus' disciples the message was proclaimed: "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus."

What was so special about the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that God's identity is tied to these men? I think it was nothing more than the fact that they were those foundational people who received God's promise and experienced God's providence. They were simply ordinary burdened people whom God chose and made a covenant with. They were simply people who experienced God's faithfulness in their lives. God was part of their lives even as they struggled through all the confusions and contradictions of their lives.

Even as we go through life, with our own shares of burdens, whether individually or as a society, may we remember Jesus' promise: Come to me and I will give you rest. This coming to Jesus, is coming not to a system of doctrines nor to a religious institution. It is coming to a person, the person called Jesus, and learning to live from him. It is coming to Jesus and learning to love like him, to forgive like him for in this there is rest. Amidst all the trials of life, there is nothing better than coming to Jesus and depending on him. The God of the Ancestors, is the God of us. Not because either they or we are heroic, but because God is faithful and loving.

May we experience the comfortable words of the gospel as truth in our lives. May we come to Christ and find life. Amen.