Rev Murdo Campbell: Come to Me

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[0:00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this evening, if you would turn with me to the Gospel according to Matthew and chapter 11.

The Gospel according to Matthew chapter 11. And I just want us to focus our attention upon the last five verses of that chapter.

Matthew 11 at verse 25. At that time, Jesus declared, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

But particularly the words of verse 28. Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Lord Dr Horatius Bonar, who was a free church minister during the middle to late 19th century, and he was one of eleven children, two of which were also ministers serving in the free church.

Andrew Bonar, who is well known to us, is well known for writing his memoirs of his contemporary Robert Murray McShane, and there was also James Bonar, who was another brother.

So there was Horatius, Andrew and James. And they were all colleagues serving in the free church following the disruption in 1843.

But Horatius Bonar, he first served as a minister in the rural parish of Kelso near the border. And then he served in an urban setting.

He went back to his home city of Edinburgh, and he planted a church there. But even though he was a faithful preacher of God's word, Horatius Bonar, he was fondly remembered for all the number of hymns that he wrote.

And he's often been referred to as the prince of hymn writers, because throughout his ministry he's said to have written over 150 hymns.

Of course back then the free church sang metrical Psalms almost exclusively. But Horatius Bonar, he had a desire to write children's hymns for the children in Sunday school.

And not long after that Bonar took to writing adult hymns, and he used them in fellowships and in house meetings. But one hymn in particular, which Bonar wrote during his ministry in Kelso in the borders, it's perhaps his most famous hymn.

A hymn which was not only well received in our own nation, but also in the English speaking world. And it was the famous hymn titled, I heard the voice of Jesus say.

[3:41] And what makes this hymn so appealing to such a wide audience is that its focus is on the gospel call to come to Jesus Christ for our salvation.

Because the hymn, it lifts Jesus up before us, and it urges us to come to him, and to look to him, and to drink from him, and to rest in him.

We're to hear the voice of Jesus, and obey the simple call to come to him, and find rest for our souls.

Because when we do, the promise of scripture is that we will experience true happiness. We will be blessed men and women who have this unending joy of salvation.

And of course, the basis for Bonar's hymn was the words that we find here in Matthew's gospel, in which Jesus presents to us what is at the heart of the gospel, this invitation to come to him.

[4:45] And this gospel invitation is what Horatius Bonar picked up on, and it led him to write the opening words of that famous hymn. I heard the voice of Jesus say, Come unto me and rest, lay down thou weary one, lay down thy head upon my breast.

I find this gospel invitation to come to Jesus Christ, and to find rest for your soul. It's a glorious invitation, a glorious invitation.

But what I wanted to ask at the outset is, are you willing to respond to this invitation? Are you willing to respond? Are you willing to come to Jesus in order to find rest for your soul?

Because that's what we all need. We all need rest for our souls. We all need rest for our souls in this weary and burdensome life. But what we need to see is that this glorious invitation towards sinners, it came as a result of the misconceptions of the scribes and the Pharisees.

And this is no surprise to us because there were many scribes and Pharisees who were leading the people away from the truth of the gospel. And they were distorting the gospel either by adding to it or taking away from it.

But what Jesus emphasizes here is that the invitation to come to Jesus and find rest for our souls, it doesn't depend upon our intellect or our traditions.

All it depends upon is our response to the invitation to come to Him. And what Jesus wants to make clear is that this invitation is a divine initiative.

It's all of God. As John says in his gospel, it's not of blood, nor of the will of man, nor of flesh, but of God. It's a divine initiative.

It's all of God. And with that in mind, I'd like us to see that when Jesus speaks about this divine initiative in these verses, he says three things, three things.

He speaks about a divine intellect, a divine intimation, and a divine invitation, a divine intellect, a divine intimation, and a divine invitation.

[7:08] So we'll look first of all at a divine intellect, a divine intellect. Look at verse 25. He says, at that time, Jesus declared, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. Now the context to this passage is that Jesus has been teaching and preaching in different cities around the region of Galilee.

He's been going around cleansing lepers and giving the blind their sight, making the deaf hear, raising the dead to life, and he's been preaching about the good news of the kingdom of God.

And because of all these miracles that Jesus is performing and the eloquence of his preaching and the authority with which Jesus taught, there were many people who began to follow this man, Jesus.

And as they listened to him and as they saw all these miracles being performed, they were becoming more and more curious about this man, Jesus, and they began to inquire if this Jesus was indeed the Christ or shall we look for another one?

[8:22] And Jesus, in the passage, if you read it, Jesus explains to them that John the Baptist was that Elijah figure. He was the one of whom the Old Testament prophet Malachi spoke about, that will be the forerunner to the coming of the Christ.

What Jesus says to his people, who were the Jews, he said, you didn't accept him. You didn't receive him. You put John in prison. You beheaded John.

You silenced his voice. He came to you preaching a baptism of repentance and yet you said that he had a demon. And then speaking about himself, Jesus says down in verse 19, he says, the son of man came eating and drinking and they say, look at him.

Look at him. He was a button and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinner. And with this Jesus, he goes on in the following verses to condemn all these cities who heard the gospel, saw the miracles and yet refused to come to him and find rest for their soul.

And Jesus pronounces words of woe to them, words of judgment. He says, woe to you, Chorazin, woe to you, Bethsaida, woe to you, Capernaum.

[9:40] I tell you, it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you. And you know, we might think Jesus's words, well, they're a bit harsh.

They're a bit extreme. But his words are fitting because Jesus came to his own people and they did not receive him. And the Baptist came preaching the arrival of the gospel and they rejected it.

Jesus came as the gospel and they rejected him and they rejected the revelation of God and the message of Jesus and they did it because they were intellectually and spiritually proud.

They thought they knew better. They thought they knew better than God himself. And this is why we find Jesus praying to his father in verses 25 and 26 here.

Because in this short prayer, Jesus acknowledges that his father is the Lord of heaven and earth and that he has made himself known and he has made Jesus known and he has made the message of salvation known, not to the wise he says and not to the understanding those of intellect he says, but to children.

[10:58] He has made it all known to children. And what Jesus is emphasizing is that salvation and rest for our souls, it can't be attained by our intellectual ability or our spirituality.

And this is one of the great stumbling blocks for the scribes and the Pharisees. This is what got them because they prided themselves on their biblical intellect.

They prided themselves in their scriptural knowledge, their knowledge of the laws of Moses and their knowledge of God's covenant and God's ways and the way that God dealt with his people.

And by all their intellect and knowledge, they thought they knew God. They thought that their knowledge of God and their biblical understanding of God was what made them right with God.

They thought that their intellect was enough. But it was actually their intellect that was keeping them from Jesus and hindering them from finding rest for their souls.

[12:00] And the truth was they were trusting in their own wisdom rather than trusting in God. And you know, that's what intellect and wisdom often does.

Because when someone is intellectual, it often makes them feel superior to others and they place their trust in that wisdom and they rely upon it. And as a result, their self-sufficiency often means that they refuse to trust in the Lord and rest in his salvation.

But Jesus doesn't mean that those who are intellectuals can't be saved. That's not what he's saying. What Jesus does mean is that intellect, knowledge and understanding has never saved anyone.

Because it's only simple faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ that saves a lost soul. My friend, it's not what you know that saves you.

It's who you know. And we have to know Jesus. We have to know Jesus because it's only by coming to Jesus and resting in him alone that we will find rest for our soul.

[13:17] And so when Jesus highlights the error of the scribes and the Pharisees, he's saying that knowing the truth doesn't mean that you're living out the truth.

Having biblical knowledge doesn't mean that you're biblical. Possessing a scriptural intellect and wisdom doesn't imply that you are resting in Jesus for your salvation.

In fact, it implies the opposite, that you know it already and you don't need to be told. And I wonder, are you doing the same?

Are you doing the same? Because like the scribes and the Pharisees, many of you, maybe all of us in here, we've had the privilege of being brought up with the gospel.

And you know the gospel inside out. You know it all in your head. You know all the Bible stories, you know about the creation, about the fall, the flood, you know the birth of Jesus, the parables of Jesus, the miracles of Jesus, the cross of Jesus, the empty tomb of Jesus, the ascension and the second coming of Jesus.

You know all that. You know it all in your head, but not in your heart. You know the catechisms, they can just roll off your tongue.

You know them all. Man's chief end, glorify God, enjoy him forever. All these catechisms, you know them because you went to Sunday school and you were brought up with maybe family worship at home.

You were given the greatest privileges as a child. But as you grew up and as you gained knowledge of the world and as you increased in your intellect, dare I say, you became self-sufficient in which you began to learn more and more about your biblical knowledge and you began to lean upon all your doctrinal intellect and your upbringing rather than simple faith in Jesus Christ.

And maybe now in your 40s or 50s, 60s, maybe even 70s, you're so like the scribes and Pharisees because you reject the gospel message of Jesus.

You reject the plain and simple invitation to come and find rest for your souls and you cling ever more to your biblical intellect and your Sunday spirituality.

[15:39] And somehow you've come to the conclusion that that will be enough to get me into heaven. But the truth is, it's actually keeping you from receiving and resting upon Jesus Christ alone for your salvation.

And Jesus, he puts it so perfectly down in verse 19 because he says their wisdom is justified by her deeds.

Wisdom is justified by her deeds. And what Jesus meant is that through biblical wisdom, through biblical intellect, through biblical understanding, it responds.

And it responds by becoming like little children. Now, what Jesus means by this is that to become like a little child doesn't mean that you have to be naive or immature or gullible or innocent in order to be saved.

Now, what Jesus is emphasizing is that little children are not self sufficient because there's one thing about little children and that is they are completely dependent upon someone else, completely dependent.

[16:51] In order for that little child to grow, they are dependent upon their parent to do everything for them. They can't do anything for themselves. They can't pay for their food.

They can't prepare meals. They can't feed themselves. They can't wash themselves. They can't dress themselves. They can't do anything for themselves. They're not self sufficient. They're completely dependent.

And all they can do is just throw their arms wide open and cry for help. And Jesus says that's the same with salvation because salvation is not about doing for ourselves.

When it comes to salvation, we can't earn it. We know that. We can't work for it. We know that. The only thing that we can do is completely depend upon what Jesus Christ has done on the cross, throw our arms wide open and cry to Him for mercy.

That's all we can do. That's all any of us can do. Whether we are starting our journey as a Christian or we have been on the road for many years, it's complete dependency.

[17:59] And Jesus says that's divine intellect. That's divine intellect. Divine intellect is having childlike faith, complete dependency upon the Lord.

It's simply coming to Jesus in faith and resting upon Him and Him alone. And it begs the question, do you have divine intellect?

Do you have childlike faith? Not do you know your Bible or your Catechism or have you been to church so many times in the last month, but are you resting upon Jesus Christ alone for your salvation?

Have you come to Him and are you resting in Him? And so we see that when Jesus speaks about this divine initiative of God, he says that we need to have a divine intellect.

We have to have childlike faith. But secondly, in this statement of divine initiative, Jesus issues a divine intimation, a divine intimation.

[19:05] He says in verse 27, all things have been handed over to me by my Father and no one knows the Son except the Father. And no one knows the Father except the Son.

And anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. In this verse, Jesus addresses us by intimating that all things have been handed over to Him by His Father.

All things have been delivered into His hands by His Father. And this word handed over or delivered. It was often used by the scribes in terms of handing over tradition.

It was used in terms of passing on tradition from one generation to the next. It would be the handing down of biblical knowledge or different traditions, traditions like the ritual washings and cleansings, the prayers, tithing, giving to the poor, conduct, the rest code.

And Jesus uses this word here in order to indicate what the scribes in the Pharisees were doing and what was actually keeping them from finding rest for their souls.

[20 : 20] Because the problem many of the scribes and Pharisees had was that they held to these traditions so tightly and so rigidly that they followed them so obsessively to the letter that it was to the detriment of God's word.

In which all these man-made traditions, they became more important and they were elevated higher than God's inspired and inerrant word.

And this is what caused many of the scribes and the Pharisees and the Jews themselves. This is what caused them to rest upon their intellect and their spirituality and their devotion to all these man-made laws.

This is what kept them from coming to trust in Jesus Christ. This is what kept them from coming to know God the Father and resting in Jesus the Son.

The traditions which were handed down from generation to generation, it led them astray. And you know traditions, they're still having the same effect upon the church today.

[21:27] Traditions are still keeping us from coming to know God the Father and resting upon Jesus the Son. Because we can only come to know God the Father and rest in Jesus the Son by trusting in His word.

Not by trusting in our biblical intellect or our Sunday spirituality or even all the traditions that have been handed down from one generation to the next and we don't even know why we do these things but we do them anyway just because they were always done.

And you know, in fact I hate associating church with a word tradition or traditional. Church should never be traditional.

Church should always be biblical. Everything should be based upon the Bible because a biblical church that trusts in God's word and submits to God's word and knows that God's word is living and active and everyone is being shaped by that word, that's a biblical church.

But you know like the scribes and the Pharisees, the problem many of us have as congregations and churches is that people criticise and grumble others who don't live according to the standard of tradition.

[22:41] And the reason they criticise and grumble is because they don't know the Father and they're not resting in Jesus the Son. But in this divine intimation, Jesus says that the only way to know the Father is not by biblical knowledge, it's not by catechisms, it's not by traditions but simply trusting in Jesus the Son.

Not anything else. Christ alone. And we're to trust in Jesus the Son because he knows the Father. He knows the Father.

All things have been handed over to me by my Father and no one knows the Son except the Father. No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.

And you know Jesus often spoke of this intimate relationship and this union which exists between the Father and the Son. And John in his Gospel, he makes that one of the great emphases of his Gospel.

He says at the very beginning of his Gospel, right in the prologue of his Gospel, John believed that the only way to know God the Father is to rest in Jesus the Son and John says no man has seen God at any time except the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father.

[24:04] He has revealed him. And then in chapter 6 you go through John's Gospel and John says about, well this is what Jesus says, this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day.

And then in chapter 10 Jesus says, I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me just as the Father knows me and I know the Father and I lay my life down for the sheep.

And then in chapter 14, those well known words, Jesus affirms the intimacy between himself and the Father by saying, I am the way, the truth and the life.

No man comes to the Father except through me. And so my friend, the only way to claim God as your Father is to rest in Jesus the Son.

But what makes Jesus or what Jesus makes clear here is that knowing God the Father can only take place if Jesus the Son chooses to reveal him to us.

[25:25] Now for many people and maybe for you, these words of Jesus are a great stumbling block, they're either a stumbling block or an excuse as to why you are not yet resting in Jesus the Son.

Because maybe you say when you read a verse like that, that if it's up to Jesus to reveal himself to me then I can't do anything.

It's not up to me, it's up to God. And so I'll only become a Christian if I'm in the elect. I'll only become a Christian when God reveals himself to me.

I can't do anything else. I just have to wait around and wait for it to happen. I just have to hope that one day everything will fall into place. I hope that one day I'll just be struck by something in a sermon and everything will fall into place.

My eyes will be opened and I'll see the wonder of who Jesus is and I'll know that I'm a Christian. But until then I just have to live my life as best as I can, keep going to church, be a good person, try my best and hope that one day God will accept me.

[26:31] And you know so many people in our communities and in our island, they think like that. They hide behind the doctrine of God's sovereign election.

And they say well if I'm going to be saved I'll be saved and there's nothing I can do about it. But that my friend is probably the most unbiblical statement ever.

Because it's not true. And it's not the message of the Bible. Yes, God is sovereign. No doubting that.

Yes, God knows the end from the beginning. No doubting that. Yes, God knows everything. No doubting that. Yes, God knows who will be saved and who will not be saved. No doubting that. Yes, there is an elect.

No doubting that. But God never, ever tells sinners to stay where they are and do nothing. Never.

[27:30] No, the divine initiative of God is that he's not willing that any should perish but that all will come to repentance. The divine initiative of God is to invite sinners to enter into this relationship with them, the relationship between the Father and the Son, the divine initiative of God is to invite sinners to come to know God the Father and rest in Jesus the Son.

And that's what we see in these closing verses of this chapter. Beautiful verses that present to us this divine invitation.

We've seen a divine intellect. We have to have childlike faith. We've seen the divine intimation. We need to know God the Father, rest in Jesus, the Son, not in our Bible knowledge, not in our cataclysm, not in our traditions, but because of God's love for us.

There is a divine invitation, a divine invitation where he says, come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

[28:54] My friend, how can you ever say that God hasn't revealed himself to you? How can you say that?

Because he has. So we were singing about his revelation earlier on in Psalm 19, which the heavens they have been declaring and proclaiming and revealing the glory of God since the beginning of creation, since God spoke into the darkness and said, let there be light.

It's the longest sermon ever preached and God has been revealing himself to us by the beauty of all that surrounds us. All the sunrises, all the sunsets, the stars, the skies, the moon, the power of the waves, the strength of the wind, the beauty of everything that has been made.

God has revealed himself. But more than that, we sang that he's not only revealed himself through creation, but also through his word.

The word of God that we have in our own language readily available for us in every type and format and version possible. We've never had so much access to the word of God, whether it's in paper form or digital form, whether in book or phone or iPad, whatever it is, we've never had so much access to the revelation of God in his word.

[30:18] And so we have no excuse. And we can't say that God hasn't revealed himself to us because he has. And we are privileged people who've been brought up surrounded by God's word.

But you know what's even more? Is that you know in your heart that God is speaking to you.

You know it. You know that God is revealing himself to you. You know in your heart that the creation reminds you of the wonder of who God is, the beauty of who God is.

And you know in your heart that the Bible, this old book, you know that it's still speaking to you and it speaks to you directly, personally and intimately.

And it speaks to you, to you. And as Jesus says back in verse 26, this is the gracious will of the Father.

[31:28] This is the gracious will, this invitation that you will respond to the divine invitation by coming and resting in Jesus, the Son.

And what we must see is that this divine invitation, it's full of divine imperatives. Because Jesus says, come, take, learn.

Come take, learn. And that only emphasizes that we're not to sit and wait for God's divine salvation to come to us because it has come to us in the Persian of Jesus Christ.

And we are being bitten in the gospel to respond to this divine invitation by taking on board and responding to all these divine imperatives.

And you know that's why we read in Isaiah 55, beautiful chapter about the Lord's compassion towards sinners. And it's full of divine imperatives in which the Lord is saying to us, compassionately saying, everyone who is thirsty, come.

[32:38] Come to the waters and drink. And if you have no money, still come. Buy and eat, yes, come. And come without money, come without price.

Because why are you going to spend your money on that which is not bread? And why are you going to labor through your life for that which will never satisfy? He says, listen diligently to me.

Incline your ear. Come to me here and your soul shall live. And the Lord says, do it now. Do it now while you have time, whilst you're on mercy's ground, while you have breath in your lungs, seek the Lord.

He says, while you may be found, call upon Him while He is near. My friend, this is a divine invitation and it's full of divine imperatives.

Come, take, learn, come, come, listen, incline, hear, seek, call, come.

[33:39] Not one of these divine imperatives says, stay where you are. Not one. Not one of these divine imperatives says, sit and do nothing.

Not one of these divine imperatives says, wait for something to happen. Not one of them says, wait for the bright light. Wait for the voice from heaven.

Nothing of that. No, my friend, they all invoke and encourage and appeal to you to respond to this divine invitation of Jesus to come and find rest for your soul.

Rest for your soul. But you know, this divine invitation, it's only for certain people.

Jesus says that the divine invitation, it's only for those who labor and are heavy laden. It's not for those who are righteous and worthy.

[34:43] You often hear people saying, I'm not worthy. That's who Jesus is addressing, the not-worthies. Jesus tells us that he didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners, the unworthies, every single one of them.

Because the righteous, well, they don't need rest in him. They're resting in themselves. They're self-sufficient. But Jesus says that he's come to call all his come to call the weary of this world.

Jesus come to call those who have been laboring and struggling since the fall of Adam. We've been heavy laden, says Jesus, with the curse of sin and death.

A curse that has left us sorrowing and sighing and burdened with guilt and disappointments and illnesses and worries and anxieties and heavy of heart.

But Jesus says, whoever you are, whatever your past is. Whatever you've gone through in your life, you are invited to come to me and find rest for your soul.

[35:49] And my friend, when we come to Jesus, we are to take his yoke, he says, upon us.

And the imagery of the yoke, it's a double yoke in which two oxen would be yoked together in order to pull a plow. Jesus says, take my yoke upon you, come under my yoke.

Free yourself from the yoke of Adam, from that bondage, that yoke which you received at the fall when Adam sinned and plunged all mankind into the darkness of sin and death.

Jesus says, take my yoke upon you. Take it upon you. Free yourself from the burden of sin that suppresses you and weighs you down in life.

That burden of sorrow and sadness and hardship and trial and tribulation and death. Take my yoke upon you. And when you do, he says, you will learn from me that my yoke is not the yoke of Adam.

[36:56] My yoke, you'll learn because I am gentle and I'm lowly in heart. I will not deal with you as you deserve.

Stay in Adam. You will be dealt with as you deserve. Come under my yoke. I will not deal with you as you deserve. In fact, Jesus says, I will take the yoke of Adam upon myself.

I will bear your griefs and carry your sorrows. I will be wounded for your transgressions. I will be bruised for your inequities.

I will be chastised so that it will bring you peace. By my stripes and my beatings and my crucifixion, you will be healed.

And so come to me, he says. Come take my yoke upon you. Learn from me because my yoke is easy and my burden is light because I'm taking the weight, taking it all.

[38:02] And so Jesus says, come to me, come to me! I can see that you're restless. Come to me.

I can see that you're weary and burdened. Come to me. I can see that you're sorrowing and sighing. Come to me. I can see that you're searching for answers in life.

Come to me. I can see that you're seeking the meaning to life. Come to me. Come to me. Come to me. It's a divine initiative. It's all of God.

It's all of God's love. It's all of God and Jesus is saying to us, come to me and I will give you rest.

I will give you rest. And so we've seen that we need to have a divine intellect. Oh, not a biblical intellect, but shine like faith.

[39:03] Not dependency, not self-sufficiency, but utter dependency. We've seen that God has issued to us a divine intimation. We need to know God the Father, not by our traditions, but by resting in Jesus the Son.

And because we are loved by God, he's given to us a divine invitation. And this divine invitation, it's a personal invitation. Has your name on it?

And Jesus is saying to us today, come unto me. And you know, when we consider a passage like this, it becomes more and more apparent as to why Horatius Boner wrote that beautiful hymn.

Because as we said, the purpose for writing that hymn was to lift Jesus up before us. It was to make us see Jesus and invite us to come to him, to look to him, to drink from him, and to rest in him.

And he said in that hymn, I heard the voice of Jesus say, come unto me and rest. Lay down thou weary one, lay down, thy head upon my breast. I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad.

[40:25] I found in him a resting place, and he has made me glad. I heard the voice of Jesus say, behold, I freely give. The living water thirsty one, stoop down and drink and live.

I came to Jesus and I drank of that life giving stream. My thirst was quenched, my soul revived. And now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say, I am this dark world's light. Look unto me, thy mourn shall rise, and all thy days be bright.

I looked to Jesus and I found in him my star, my sun. And in that light of life I'll walk.

Till traveling days are done. And in that light of life I'll walk. Till traveling days are done.

[41:31] My friend, you have heard the voice of Jesus today. You have heard his voice. And now it's time to come to him.

Don't put it off any longer, because he's saying to you in the Gospel, come to me, and I will give you rest.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray.