



## Sermon by Diana Johnson

Matthew 11.16–19, 25–end

St Mary and St Michael, Trumpington

5<sup>th</sup> July 2020

Trinity 4

All Age Service

The story of Pilgrim, first told by John Bunyan, is a story of someone living the Christian life. Did you see the pack on his back? It was his heavy burden, and represents all the bad things he had done in his life. Only when he was sorry, and 'repented' in a way that meant he intended to live a better life, was his burden taken away. The same story can be told different ways, which is what I want to do today. I want to give you something that you might carry on thinking about after today.

There was a great film, called *The Mission*. In this 1986 movie, Rodrigo Mendoza (played by Robert De Niro) is a mercenary slaver who makes his living off of kidnapping the natives from the Guarani community and selling them to plantations. Mendoza murders his brother in a fit of passion and is then overcome by depression after the murder. A Jesuit priest, Father Gabriel (played by Jeremy Irons), who is ministering to the Guarani, challenges Mendoza to take on a penance for his actions by carrying a large net full of heavy armour and weapons up a steep cliff along a waterfall in the South American jungle. Mendoza struggles with the weight of this penance in the rugged terrain. In a powerful scene, others seek to assist him, trying to remove the burden from him, but in the end the only ones who can offer him release are those he has sinned against. They alone can remove his burden. Once atop the cliff, he encounters a group of the very same people from among whom he had made slaves, and they cut loose the heavy net and push it into the river. His repentance and their forgiveness lead to true transformation and rest. Let's see a 4 minute clip from the film...

SHOW FILM CLIP 3.5 mins

Do you know the book called *A Christmas Carol*, by Charles Dickens? In Dickens's famous story, Ebenezer Scrooge is warned about his miserly way of life by three visiting ghosts: the Ghost of Christmas Past, the Ghost of Christmas Present, and the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. Scrooge has spent his whole life pursuing and hoarding money rather than caring for others, and these ghosts come to warn him of the dire future that awaits him for living this way. Yet the warnings are intended to change Scrooge—to stop him in his tracks and cause him to change his course. What the ghosts envision for Scrooge may not come to pass, if only he will embrace a life of generosity.



Jesus' warnings of future judgment for rejecting him are meant to function as a similar kind of deterrent for Matthew's audience. Matthew highlights these warnings (in 11:20-24, just before the passage we did read and...) alongside Jesus' offer of wisdom and rest (11:25-30) in order to provide his readers with a choice. Which path will they take? Will they respond in faith to Jesus or reject him as Messiah? Only one path leads to life and rest.

It might be useful to share Dickens's preface to *A Christmas Carol*. It illustrates the impact that the warnings to Scrooge were meant to have on Dickens's audience, and plays a little with the idea that I have used today, which is that stories can teach us truths about life. Dickens wrote that: "I have endeavoured in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly."

And just so have I today shared three stories with you. May they raise the ghost of an idea with you all too. And rather than haunt your house pleasantly or otherwise, may they give you pause for thought.

Amen.

Word count: 535 (4 mins) plus clip 4 mins Time: 8 mins  
Approx. 125 words min<sup>-1</sup>