Last week I received a really encouraging email from the Youth Ministry team at the Diocese of London. I’d like to share with you some of its wise words:

Hi Matthew, I’m pretty sure I’ve observed Autumn Madness. People sprang out of lockdown determined to do something … there have been three consequences of this:

1. Everyone plans an event thinking no-one else is planning one
2. Barely anyone comes to events because there’s only so much people can do in one week before imploding
3. We’re all really tired

Do you relate to this at all? In Young Church last week, I checked in with our young members by asking if anybody was feeling tired that morning. Most of the hands in the room sprung up into the air. For everyone recently, both young and old, there has been the constant planning post-lockdown, the multiple events to go to and the creeping sense of exhaustion at the end of it all. Don’t get me wrong, it’s GREAT to be out doing things again, but perhaps we’re still in the middle of re-finding our balance after a tumultuous couple of years.

At first, the poem from our Isaiah reading includes what sounds like just another event to think about. The people of Israel are told, very insistently, to come forward and be part of the good news of a new covenant. It’s no wonder prophets were often unwelcome figures, seen as necessary in the community but not particularly liked. Isaiah says: “come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price”. It is an enthusiastic, confident command, spoken on behalf of God, to come forward and be part of a renewed relationship with him.

But perhaps we can’t blame the Israelites for holding back, for thinking like tired children: Do we have to?
The same thing, after all, happened in Jesus’ day. In our gospel reading we meet Jesus angrily telling off the people around him for not believing; and not just that but for not WANTING to believe, either:

“Yet you refuse to come to me to have life.”

Both Isaiah and then the Son of God himself had trouble getting the Lord’s covenant message across. In today’s world you can imagine them writing emails labelled “important”, sending tweets, Instagram stories, Facebook posts, doing TV and radio interviews and just not getting anywhere. In fact, that’s exactly what does happen today: Jesus asks us to listen to him, to pray and come to him with what we truly need, but often we are just too distracted. There’s simply too much going on.

What, then, can we do about our spiritual malnourishment, without adding to this feeling of everything being just too much?

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Before we attempt an answer - Which of our Young Church children would like to come up and be our busy tree this morning? You may remember doing this during our session last week.

- Please spread your arms out like the branches of a tree
- Let’s think of some of the things we are busy with ... for me, it’s school application forms for our Young Church members in Year 6. So I’m going to write that on a sticker, stick it to an apple and hang it from our tree.
- What are some of the things that you’re busy with? Can anyone tell me?

Yes! (answers: homework, violin lessons, etc)

- Please come to the front, write your answer on a sticker, attach it to an apple and hang it to our tree.
- Now I bet you’re beginning to feel very heavy now, aren’t you, tree? ... So what did we do last week? Yes, we watered our tree! Who would like to come and water our tree?
Thank you everyone, you can go and sit down now!

Can anyone remember what the water represented last week? **Yes, the waters of baptism.** And some of you are asking to be baptized and confirmed this academic year, which is fantastic, and we will be starting confirmation classes in Young Church in late January.

Back to our question, then: **What are we to do?** If we look a little closer at our readings this morning, we can see that God’s invitation is not meant to be *just another thing* we have to worry about. Instead, through accepting the new covenant, the new promise from God that Jesus offers, we free ourselves up to do all the great things we have written on our apples this morning with joy.

*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout,*

… *so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;*

That word of God is, of course, Jesus himself: The Word that John introduces his gospel with, the Word who was present at the beginning of the world and who came into the world to set us free.

This is a life-giving relationship, one that we are asked to say YES to. We do this through forgiving others and repenting of our sins, through baptism and partaking in the life of the church; and through preparing ourselves to celebrate the Eucharist each week and accepting Jesus’ call upon our lives.

This is the invitation that was prophesied in Isaiah, the food and drink he mentions becoming the very real food and drink, the body and blood, of the Eucharist: “everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!”.

As we celebrate the Eucharist this morning together, let us bring before God all those things we are struggling with, for the Holy Spirit to aid us and be with us in the week ahead. To take away whatever does not satisfy us and replace them with wine and milk without money and without price.       Amen.