

Matthew 11:28-30
"The Burden of the Weary"

Rev. David Pierce
May 5, 2019

"Come to me all you that are weary, and I will give you rest."

"Come to *me* all you that are weary, and I will give you rest."

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It's an invitation worth hearing more than once, wouldn't you agree? Anyone want to R.S.V.P. to this one? Come to me all you who are weary, and I will give you rest.

To be honest, it feels a bit foolish to be up here preaching right now. Invitations are not really meant to be talked about. By virtue of what they are, invitations can't be explained. To try and explain an invitation misses the whole point of an invitation, which is to get us to just show up. We'll find out when we get there.

Don't overthink it, my mother would often say to me when I was a kid and an invitation to a birthday party would arrive in the mail. But not overthinking it was hard to do. Who else do you think will be at the party? Where is the party taking place? Is that a place I want to go? What are we going to be doing at the party? Do I even like doing that? What else do we have going on that day? Why do you think they invited me? We're not even really friends. What if another invitation comes along that I like better, and now I'm locked in? Then what?

I seem to be hearing this last one more and more every day. Maybe it's that we live in a day and age of such immediate satisfactions that we don't have the patience to wait for things anymore. "What's the date on the invitation say?"

"Two weeks from now."

"Oh, no, I can't do that."

On the other hand, if you want to ask me today to do something tomorrow, I might be able to come.

Or maybe it's that we are so driven by our jobs and the need to achieve and impress that we're afraid to step away from what we are doing for even an afternoon to go and do something else. "You want to do what? Go for a walk? In the woods? Who's going to notice me doing that?"

Don't overthink it, my mother would say. Trust the invitation and go. You'll see when you get there.

"Come to me all who are weary, and I will give you rest."

What makes this invitation so compelling and so intriguing, perhaps, is that it's an invitation at all. For what does it say about the person who needs to be invited to rest?

Written into the theological code of both Judaism and Christianity (and probably of Islam and other religions too, though I don't know) is the belief that those who do not rest, do not trust. When we rest, when we sleep, we put away all our defenses and inhibitions and allow ourselves to become vulnerable. We entrust ourselves and all we are to someone else's care for a while. We allow for the very real possibility that the world can continue to go on without us.

The word Jesus uses to describe those who are able to rest is gentle. They are gentle and humble of heart. They do not think so highly of themselves that they can't allow for someone else to do the work. The risk, of course, in resting is that someone else might call you lazy, uncaring. There's a difference, though, between what it means to rest and what it means to be just plain old uncaring. And it should turn our heads to know that in the original Greek translation, the word humble is the word meek, and it is the meek—Jesus says elsewhere in Matthew's gospel—who shall inherit the earth. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Did you catch that? It is not, says Jesus, those who work the longest and hardest, who bank the most, that in the end will get the earth. Rather, it is those who rest in the words of the Psalmist: "The earth and all that is in it belongs to God."

"Come to me all who are weary, and I will give you rest."

Last Saturday, Mark Lamontagne, Carolyn Williamson, and I attended the spring meeting of our denominational body, the *United Church of Christ*. Part of the meeting was an hour-long presentation and discussion on the state of affairs in the church today, and when I say "church" I don't mean this church or any one church in particular. I mean churches in general.

It probably doesn't come as a surprise to hear that in the U.S., church membership and church giving is on the decline. Present company not included, it would seem fewer and fewer people are showing up on Sunday mornings. There are all kinds of theories for why this is. Some blame what is being labeled "The Rise of Secularism." There are just too many other things now also taking place on Sunday mornings. "It's the fault of my kid's soccer coach that I can't get here on Sunday mornings." Others blame the churches themselves. If churches were more interesting and relevant more people would want to be a part of them. Whatever the case, what this often translates into is, we the church need to work harder. We need to get more people to come, so we'll have more money, and then we won't be on the decline so much.

Honestly, I don't want to work harder. And I don't think you do either. Could we stand to be challenged beyond our comforts and status quos? Redirected in our passion and play? Are there times we need to be realigned, to be told once again, the first shall be last and the last shall be first? I won't speak for you, but the answer for me is, yes, yes, and yes. Work harder though, just to build a bigger church and a bigger budget? You won't hear it from me.

"Come to me all who are weary, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

This is the thing with Jesus: he doesn't say, "My burden is none." He says, "My burden is light." With Jesus, there is work to do—hard work even; heavy work; be light in the darkness; love your enemies; turn the other cheek; deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me all the way into the tomb. With Jesus, there is a burden to bear, but it is a joyful burden because we do not bear it alone. Jesus bears it with us. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me." We are yoked with Jesus. Like two oxen teamed up together, we stand inseparably together. When we step, we step together. We work together to pull some great weight in this world together. We look out for one another. Bound to one another, we neither compete nor fight with one another. We do not say, "I'm going this way," while someone else says, "I'm going that way."

If this is what it means to be yoked though, Jesus says it is something we must learn, because being yoked does not come naturally to us. Trust does not come naturally. We are trained to be individuals, to get ahead, to point fingers, to apply blame, to say, it's your fault we're not getting anything done. If you would just pull your weight we could get somewhere. How often we hear this coming out of our churches and politics and relationships these days.

One of the people I have come to enjoy reading is Rachel Held Evans. Rachel was a young, prophetic voice who died just yesterday at the age of 37. In her short life, she went from being a conservative thinker who read the Bible literally and upheld the silence of women in church, to being a staunch advocate for the full inclusion of women and the LGBTQ community in the church. In her book, *"Searching for Sunday,"* she once wrote, "There is a difference between curing and healing. *To cure, you don't have to get close to the sick. You only have to diagnose, prescribe, and then isolate them.* But I believe the church is called to the slow and difficult work of healing. We are called to enter into one another's pain, to anoint it as holy, and to stick around no matter the outcome."¹

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¹ *Italics mine.*