

Rest for the Weary

Matthew 11:25-30

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At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, God, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, 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 you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Matthew 11:25-30

Friends, I am weary. A lot of people I know are weary. Our nation is weary. And we are carrying heavy burdens. And our stamina may be wearing thin. And the noise around us and within us keeps shouting, Urgency! Vigilance! Take action!

Come to me, Jesus says, and I will give you rest.

Rest.... In this season of the pandemic stay-at-home sheltering in place for ourselves and each other, we have had more time to rest. And yet there is an urgency too in this time in history.

Maybe rest is a luxury reserved for a less urgent time. When is this hypothetical "less urgent" time? When we are not in the largest refugee crisis since World War II? When black and brown bodies are no longer getting shot in the street by police and others? When scientists' words about the polar ice caps and our changing global climate don't feel as ominous as they do on this gorgeous, 82 degree day in Marin County? Seriously, Christ, nice sentiment, but what able-bodied, sharp-minded grown up person today can afford to really rest? We may take more naps while we stay at home these days, but it may not feel like rest.

Rest is a problematic concept for us as a culture. We believe rest is something you have to do when you absolutely cannot keep going, when you're forced to stop and catch your breath so you can amp back up again. We reserve rest for the sick and utterly depleted, for those recovering from surgery or Covid 19.

Athlete, trainer and fitness writer, Jonathan Angelilli, writes, "From a young age, we're bombarded with the message that to be successful, we must work overtime, sacrifice our health, friends, even happiness and sanity to achieve what we want." Dr. Meyer Freidman, the doctor who first identified the type-A personality trait, calls this western disease "the hurry sickness....Exhaustion...is a status symbol in our culture." (1)

Maybe this is changing in this new world of flattening the curve, staying home, working from home, fewer tasks to juggle. One possible positive of this pandemic.

We know what it has been like. A friend told me about a youth ministry leader a few years ago who has lupus. He rests. After a youth retreat or trip, he takes a day off. He said, "I am afraid my illness is seen as a legitimate excuse for rest. I don't know how to invite other people to rest without them feeling like it doesn't apply to them." He has an excuse. His rest is sanctioned. "Oh he HAS TO rest, or he would get sick."

But we all would. If we did not rest, if we do not sleep, if we never stop, we will get sick.

We have been a restless nation. I wonder if part of the push to reopen the economy and businesses, that in addition to helping people get back to work and make money to provide for themselves and their families, is that people do not want to rest any more. They don't know how to have Sabbath time, to go deeper into the quiet, a gift.

Our text comes in the middle of a long rant of Jesus' about how the people are missing the gift right in front of them. And we began with the part where Jesus pauses in talking to the people, and raises his face to the heavens in one of those mid-argument prayers, like an exasperated mom, he blocks out the whining for a minute, heaves a dramatic sigh and intones, *Oh, Thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants...*

So what do infants get, that the brilliant and learned don't grasp?

To be an infant is to be vulnerably and simply *you*.

At the very most core –babies still seem completely connected to the truth that that we belong to God and we all belong to each other.

They rest in their reality:

My needs will be met.

I can sleep when I am tired.

I can eat when I am hungry.

I can trust.

I can close my eyes without fear.

I am held.

I belong to these people. They belong to me.

The world is filled with beauty, wonder and love.

Jesus doesn't say, *Come to me you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you extra energy and the strength to power through. I will give you an edge, a do-over or a bump up. I will promote your agenda or satisfy your desires.*

Jesus isn't offering a strategy to win, or to overcome our humanity and need. Jesus is inviting us to tell the truth with our lives, to live how we were made to live. A return to the truth – that we belong to God, every one of us, in this together.

Great! So how do we do it? How do we actually put down what is weighing on our minds, pressing on our souls, clogging up our lives?

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me” Jesus says. A yoke is a wooden crosspiece that is fastened over the necks of two animals and attached to the plow or cart that they are to pull. “Take *my* yoke upon you.” This is a straight up trade. Jesus says, *I will release you from your work and give you a different job altogether. I will unhook you from all the you are dragging around, and connect you up to me, and what I carry into the world instead.*

What are you weary of?

What heavy burdens are you carrying around?

These are what he will ask you to lay down.

But these are also the things we sometimes think define us, or think can't happen without us. These are the things that scream at us: Vigilance! Urgency! Now is NOT the time to stop!

What is the choice before us, when Jesus is offering a different way.

One way, one script, is the way of fear, says life is about self-sufficiency and success, and those around us way, are competition.

The other way, the other script, is the way of God, says life begins in abundance and gift. Life is for sharing, there is enough to go around, and no matter what it looks like at any given moment, it's all heading toward connection and wholeness. This is what Jesus carries, bearing *this* is the work that Jesus is inviting us to join him in.

A few mornings over the last 3+ months of sheltering in place during the Covid 19 pandemic, I have woken up with a strange feeling. I would wake up in the morning and feel like I was putting on a yoke. I strapped myself into the job of fixing, convincing, worrying – which is simply rehearsing fear over and over.

The yoke I was carrying said *We are divided! Hatred is rampant! Lies are the loudest noise every day!* The phrase that coming to me was - *What if!* The worst thing happens! *What if!* pain and suffering...*What if*, separation and helplessness... I felt a lump in my throat and tears I my eyes.

I wanted to take off that yoke, to be free.

I wanted to step out of that way of being in the world and pick up a different way of being in the world, I wanted a different way of participating in life.

I longed for the yoke of trust, that says,
Even if..., even if... all the things I fear happen, and more,
Still.

Still God is God.

Still, abundance and gift.

Still, enough to go around.

Still, all meant to be shared.

Still, love is the truest, biggest thing.

Still... all heading toward wholeness and connection, even when I can't see it.

Still, I belong to them and they belong to me.

"Coming to Jesus" isn't a hypothetical thing.

So this is what I did and what I do.

I take a deep breath and then another

I sit very still.

I hold the ones I love before me in my mind. Love mixed with despair. Love mixed with sadness.

And I hold them there.

And I'm still.

Still.

Until the despair loosens its grip.

And the disappointment diminishes.

And the sadness turns to compassion.

And it's mostly just love remaining.

I really do trust, when I let myself trust (i.e., rest) that we all belong to God and we all belong to each other. And this ancient and eternal truth is what I long most to live from, live in, live towards.

*So I see faces before me, those I love,
and I grieve. And I forgive. And I seek to understand. And I let go.*

And the stillness holds me here in love.

And now I can begin my day again.

My yoke is easy and my burden is light! Jesus says, Come to me. I will give you rest.

It means we rest, in other words, we practice trusting God.

Being a congregation that practices Sabbath means when Jesus says *Come to me*, we answer, *Yes. OK. We will come. We will lay down our burdens and our pride; we will admit our weariness, and we will welcome your rest. We won't wait until we are sick or dying or exhausted. We won't let rest become a last resort, a contingency plan, a life-saving measure. We will come now. We will begin here. Yours is the way and work we choose.*

I love that in the Jewish understanding of Sabbath, the day begins at sundown. Rest is where your being and your belonging begin.

In the honesty of rest,

My needs will be met.

I can sleep when I am tired.

I can eat when I am hungry.

I can trust.

I can close my eyes without fear.

I am held.

I belong to these people. They belong to me.

The world is filled with beauty and wonder and love.

When things feel most urgent, most pressing, most despairing, this is not the time to panic, talk faster, run harder, do more. I know there is so much work to do. We are called to work on anti-racism, protecting the environment, policies for just immigration and much more. This is such important work and we choose where to put our energy and effort.

And it is also a time to stop. To be still. To rest.

To reorient your being to the one who loves us. This is what Sabbath is for. God's way is not our way. All true transformation, healing and newness comes through deep places of connection to the Holy and each other.

I invite you to hear the words of Jesus' invitation to you: Matthew 11 verses from The Message.

“Are you tired? Worn out? Weighed down by heaviness? Come to me. Get away with me and you will recover your life. I will show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you will learn to live freely and lightly.”

Amen.

1) Jonathan Angelilli, “The Massive Fitness Trend That's Not Actually Healthy at All,” The Greatist, 9/29/2014
https://greatist.com/connect/militarization-fitness?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_content=story1_cta&utm_campaign=daily_newsletter_2016-05-03_mails_daily_new_header#1

2) Rev. Kara Root, “This is Time to Stop,” 11/6/2016 inthehereandnow
<https://kara-root.blogspot.com/2016/11/this-is-time-to-stop.html>
I am grateful to Kara Root for inspiring this sermon and for her reflections on all the ways rest and Sabbath are woven together.