

## Rest for the Weary

Sunday, July 12, 2020

Matthew 11:28-30

Federated Church, Worship in the Park

Summer is usually the time when life slows down. The days are longer. The weather is good. The lakes are open. School is out. Vacation happens. But this year, summer feels different. With the stay-at-home order surrounding the pandemic, the pace of life changed months ago. In some ways, life slowed down back in March.

But in other ways life did not. The “to-do” list piles up even while other things get neglected, which leaves us feeling guilty or distracted. There is still a house to clean, lawns to mow, cars to fix, bills to pay, emails to answer, jobs to go to, home repairs, family to visit, and kids to nurture.

Then there is the news that discourages, confuses, or divides us. Disheartening pandemic numbers. Civil unrest. Natural disasters. Ads and promotions seeking to convince us why our lives are incomplete and how they could be made better by their product. None of these things by themselves are overwhelming, but together they run us dry and thin us out.

Our spiritual life, the thing that is meant to refresh us, ends up being a burden as well. We feel guilty for not reading our Bible more, or praying, or taking time to worship, or doing more to help in the community.

Often, because life is so busy, our mind is already on the next thing, so our devotions and prayers are distracted rather than resting in Christ.

Every week we have sins to fight, which wears us out, and areas where we fail, which piles on the guilt and sense of failure. Not to mention the other things life throws at us, like pain, the burdens and anxieties we carry, and the areas of our life where we are searching for God’s help and wisdom.

I am sure you get weary during the week. Maybe you are weary right now. In one sense, this is normal. Jesus said we will be weary (Matthew 11:28), and in this world, we will have troubles (John 16:33). Peter said we will carry burdens and anxieties (1 Peter 5:7). But Peter also tells us to cast those burdens and anxieties on God, because God cares for us and will carry them for us (1 Peter 5:7). Jesus assures us that though in this world we have troubles, our peace is found in him (John 16:33).

Jesus invites us to come find rest by resting in him. Listen to his words in Matthew 11:28-30: *“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.”*

It sounds counterintuitive, but Jesus invites us to find rest by taking up his yoke. A yoke is a farm implement that harnesses two draft animals – horses or oxen – to a plow. Together they pull the plow, sharing the load, and getting the job done. What is

interesting here, is that Jesus refers to the yoke as HIS yoke. We are invited to take up his yoke, to share in his burden, to help him carry the load. When we cast our burdens and anxieties on Jesus, we no longer need shoulder the weight alone. When we take up the yoke with Jesus, we can find a measure of rest, and help, and companionship.

As a pastor, one of the symbols of my office is the stole, a fabric rendering of the yoke. The stole/yoke signifies my partnership with Christ Jesus and my willingness to share the task of ministry. The stole/yoke is a reminder that I am not in this alone and I do not work solely under my own power. The stole/yoke is the assurance that when I grow weary, Jesus will take up the slack and help me. Sharing the burden lightens the load, eases the anxiety, and provides a measure of rest.

When we come to the table of The Lord's Supper, we are coming to find rest at a slowdown, sit-down meal where we are served rather than serving. Too often we approach food with a fast-food mentality, getting and eating our food quickly so we can move on to the next thing. The Lord's Supper forces us to take a seat with others, to pause, and to take notice of what is set before us. When we set our minds on Jesus and his body broken and his blood spilled for our sin, our souls are restored by what we have in Christ.

Though our sins are many — and though we might walk in here beat up and feeling like a failure — Jesus purchased through his death complete forgiveness and restoration. Not only is every sin

paid for but the ground of our standing before God, and knowing we are loved by God, is based on Jesus alone, not how good or how bad we were this week. **Despite our sin, in Jesus there is rest because we are forgiven and made whole.**

There is also rest in Jesus through whatever valley, trial, worry, or fear we face today. The bread and the cup are a reminder that if God gave us Jesus, the costliest gift of all, God would give us everything else we need. If God saved us and made us God's children through Jesus, if God defeated evil and our sin, then we can trust that God also has good plans for us and will carry us through what we face today. If God gave us Jesus in our sin, how much more will God take care of us as God's beloved children? **Despite our burdens and trials, there is rest in Jesus because he loves and cares for us.**

Communion is not about what we need to do but about what is already done for us. Communion is not about our inability to solve our problems but about God's ultimate ability and loving-kindness in solving them. The gospel frees us from carrying the weight of the world and the weight of our spiritual walk on our shoulders because God is taking care of us, providing for us, and at work with us and for us. I invite you to rest in God today.