

## SERMON FOR JULY 9, 2017

Burdened? Loaded down with worry? Carrying a heap of sorrow? Or shame? Overwhelmed by fear for yourself or your dear ones or the world we live in? Buckling under a burden of busyness? If this describes life right now or if it is a familiar picture of the past, then here is the graceful, hopeful, compassionate invitation that you need to hear:

“Come to me,” says Jesus to those who are weary and burdened. “I will give you rest.”

You may need to hear that invitation today. Or you may be remembering a time when this gift of relief saved your spiritual life. Or you may be holding onto friends or family who are bending under a load that feels overwhelming and those strugglers need to know compassion and release. In one way or another, we have all had to carry a load of concern and we have all needed to have strength and peace added to us.

“Come to me,” says Jesus to those who are weary and burdened. “I will give you rest.”

What does that really mean? We know that it was spoken in the context of face-to-face relationship and that makes sense to me. Jesus was in the company of his disciples. He was in the presence of crowds of people whom he could touch with tenderness. When we are in the company of those whom we trust, we can share the burdens that get loaded on us. We listen. We empathize. We share our best wisdom. We provide a safe place for another's vulnerability.

We release the valve on this pressure cooker life we lead, and in the company of one another, we create peace.

We know Jesus was on the scene in Matthew's story. We know he is not on the scene in ours. So, what does it really mean for us when we hear the invitation to come to him? Many, many times over the years of my pastoral ministry, I have been with people who needed the invitation to come and find rest, who tried to find Jesus' peace in their lives only to feel abandoned and unworthy. It is as though what they have believed in over the years failed them when they needed it most. The result? Cynicism at best, and loss of faith at worst. We need to figure this one out.

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How do we "come to Jesus?" I have two responses to this question that have come from my experience. Maybe they will be helpful to you when your burdens call you back to the one who showed us that transformation is possible.

The first is contemplative prayer. Every morning before even the dog is awake and raring to go, I spend about an hour in the mystery. I sit in my favourite chair after having set my cell phone timer for an hour. I make myself comfortable and I breathe deeply and slowly. And I let my mind shut itself off and I breathe. I don't know exactly where I go or whom I meet or what I learn. It is as though I am full of empty.

I do know that something is going on in me or through me or with me. I feel my body relax, especially my shoulders, the burden-bearing part of me. And I feel my forehead tingle. The forehead is the place where spirit enters us. We baptize there. That is where anointing happens. The forehead is the spirit-blessing place. When I sink into holy silence, time is meaningless. It is as though I am in eternity. My morning hour of contemplation is as close to peace as most days bring me.

I honestly do not know what happens in that silent time. Often, after my hour ends, I write in my journal for a few minutes. Sometimes, as I write, I get a glimpse of where my spirit has been or whom I have met. But often, my coming to awareness is more mysterious. I find I have settled a question that has been haunting me. Or I get clear on what I want to say to someone who is struggling with a particular burden. Or I find that my anger at someone or some situation has evaporated. I don't understand how these things happen; I only know they do. Over the long haul, I have come to trust that my contemplation is holy meeting. It is where my burdens are lightened. It is my experience of rest and grace.

When I hear the words, "Come unto me," I remember the gift of my morning contemplation and scripture finds a home in my life.

The second way we come to Jesus is through one another. This passage introduces us to the image of the "yoke." There are single yokes made for one animal. But most yokes are double ones, the harness that connects two oxen or

water buffalo or horses together. The yoke keeps the pair in tandem, so that the work is shared equally and they don't waste energy pulling against one another. More gets accomplished when animals are yoked. Burdens are shared. Partnership is what eases the burden. I believe we come into the spirit of Jesus when we are yoked to one another. When we choose to be on the same team, we offer ourselves to one another and share the burdens at hand, burdens like making justice, caring for the earth, making peace, taking a stand, being there with one another and for one another. This is marriage. This is parenting. This is being church. This is friendship. This is seeing Jesus in one another. It is being Jesus for one another. It is being the one that someone else comes home to for care, for nurture, for comfort and support. When we are yoked together, life has the capacity for holiness. Interestingly, the closer we are to one another, the more room spirit has to work.

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Jesus' invitation to come is an invitation into the holy. It is not an invitation to easy street, to a life without burden or challenge. It is an invitation to a way of being that makes the burdens bearable and hope possible. When we are yoked to one another, we do not go at our own pace. We keep pace with our partners, always in their company and never alone. That is what today's scripture calls the unforced rhythms of grace. That is the easy yoke and the light burden.



