

Matthew 11:16 – 19; 25 - 30

“But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

At that time Jesus said, “I 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; yes, Father, 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. 30For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God, our Father, and the Lord, Jesus Christ who opens his arms in love and compassion for all that we may find guidance and rest on our journey. Amen.

I don't know about you but I am tired – tired of paying attention to be sure I walk the right way in the grocery store aisles; tired of hearing over and over the numerical statistics of cases and deaths from the coronavirus yet also still wanting to know; tired of wondering when I will feel safe to go places and not wonder if someone nearby has the virus. I am weary of protests that at times seem to be all about senseless destruction and not enough about taking real action to address the systemic racism in our nation. I am weary of hearing about another shooting, another killing, and more nursing home deaths. I long for ways to calm my anxieties, to find rest from the burdens of this time in which we are living and peace.

Where do you go when you are weary of life's struggles? In what ways do you find peace?

For me, the peace of the beach with water lapping at the shore and the gulls calling above offers a calm that I can't find anywhere else. Thus this morning our worship slides have Cape Cod beach pictures in the background from days Norm and I spent there. We have spent enough vacation days at the Cape that I can close my eyes and almost be there. I also have music cds that weave together the sounds of the ocean with hymns. Music, a quiet walk in the woods or on the beach, sitting quieting in one's backyard feeling the breeze blow and listening to the birds – all these things may bring moments of peace and a break from life's burdens.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” These words of our gospel text this morning are like a salve for our weariness, pain and feelings of being overwhelmed. They paint a picture of Jesus reaching out his arms from heaven, wrapping them warmly around us and letting us lay our heads on his shoulder, close our eyes, warm and secure to settle into that comfortable sense of security – like a young child rests in its mother's arms.

But is this calming picture truly the sum of what Jesus wants us to take away from our gospel text this morning? For sure our loving God knows that at times we need rest for our weary bodies, a break from our worries and peace for our troubled hearts. In Genesis 2 we read, “On the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested...from all the work. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it.” But Jesus request to come to him is so much deeper. Like those to whom Jesus is speaking, we mustn't fail to see what is right in front of us.

Our lesson in Matthew begins with Jesus description of a generation that doesn't see the truth when it is right in front of them. They fail to recognize John the Baptist as the herald of the Messiah foretold in scripture, calling him a demon.

Zechariah tells us, “your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey...” Yet, when the Son of Man, the long anticipated Messiah is right in front of them, they label him a glutton and drunkard looking down on him because he befriended tax collectors and sinners. The people are looking for a king within the context of their day – one who will lead an army to create change. That isn't what they see so they choose not to believe. Matthew tells us early in chapter 11 Jesus has finished instructing his disciples and went out to teach and proclaim his message in their cities. Many have seen him restore the sight of the blind, cleanse lepers, restore the hearing of the deaf, raise people from the dead and bring good news to the poor, yet

even John isn't really sure Jesus is who he is. From prison John sends his followers to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another!" One wonders if Jesus was weary of trying to get his message across.

The context within which we hear a text makes a difference. I have long loved these words in Matthew but I know that I heard them differently in the past than I do today. Today they come within the context of a pandemic and what is now months of physical distancing, mask wearing and yet now again ever growing numbers of cases. Some ask what good did it do to wear masks, how did it help to shut down our economy – COVID is still here? I want to say, 'How long, O Lord, how long?' Jesus says, 'Come to me.'

People's pent up anger, frustration, stress and sadness is bursting forth all around – in our cities, in rural areas, anger leading to destruction, even death. Both as a nation and individually we are faced with the reality of senseless deaths and racism and as one member of this past week's Working Preacher podcast presenters said, a restlessness born out of the question many of us ask ourselves [quote], 'How are we still in this place?' [end quote] How did a country celebrating its 244th birthday as a nation, a nation whose declaration of independence says, "*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*?"

Amidst this backdrop Jesus says, 'Come to me.' Remember whose you are, turn to your faith – faith in the one sent by God to bring us salvation. Faith built upon God's amazing free gift of grace. Faith built upon learning from the Son of Man, from walking in his steps, following his precepts, living by the commandment to 'love our neighbors as ourselves.'

Listen to Eugene Peterson's interpretation of the last paragraph of today's gospel from 'The Message' – "*Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll 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'll learn to live freely and lightly.*"

'Keep company with me.' Remember Jesus words in Matthew 28:20, "*I am with you always, to the end of the age.*" In all times Jesus says to us 'follow me.' Come away and

join me in prayer – anguishing in the garden, seeking the Father on the hillside, on the mountaintop, in your car, alone in your room, before dinner, after dinner, when you rise, before you lay your head on the pillow. Learn from me – regularly read scripture to hear again the stories of healing and resurrection. Walk with me – as I walk by the Sea of Galilee, along the Jordan River teaching my disciples; sit with me on the mountainside. Listen for the word of God throughout your day, seek the places where God’s presence is made know. Heed my teachings and ‘Keep the commandments;’ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength... love your neighbor as yourself.’ [Mark 12:28 – 31]

Simply Jesus calls us to trust in the presence of God. He doesn’t just call us to a place of rest and no responsibility. He says, *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. 30For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*” Christ calls us to pause and think, ‘what would Jesus response be in these times?’

A yoke, a type of wooden frame, was often placed over the necks of two or more animals so that together they could do the work of plowing a field. There is a choice individuals can make in these times. Jesus asks us to yoke ourselves to him to learn from him. We can choose to shut others out, to retaliate or lash out in anger or we can live as Christ did – *gentle and humble in heart*; forgiving, letting ourselves become vulnerable, speaking justice and reaching out in compassion, love and peace. We can choose the wisdom of Christ. In *The Applause of Heaven*, Max Lucado shares a reflection of looking out from a summit with Jesus who confides, “*Just remember: You’ll go nowhere tomorrow that I haven’t already been. Truth will still triumph... The victory is yours...*” Lucado calls it “*The sacred summit. A place of permanence in a world of transition.*”

As his faithful followers we can respond to Christ’s command to ‘*go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.*’ When two animals are yoked together it lightens the work load that one animal would have to do alone. Yoking ourselves to Christ, He will bear our burdens. And he will sustain us and lead us to be his witnesses in today’s world. As the psalmist says in Psalm 55 verse 22, ‘*Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.*’ Jesus will provide ‘*rest for our souls.*’

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Trinity, Herkimer
Matthew 11:16-19;25-30 / Zechariah 9:9-12
Psalm 145:8-14 / Romans 7:15-25a

Amen.