

Scripture: Romans 12:1; Matthew 11:28-30
Message: Ripples of Resting
March 1, 2020; Bethel CRC, Brockville, ON
Pastor Jack Van de Hoef

Lent 1

Are you tired? A working Mom, coming home from work to take care of a busy family, making a meal, finding time to squeeze in doing the laundry?

Are you tired? A working Dad, putting in some overtime and trying to juggle a couple volunteer commitments?

Are you tired? Tired of pain? Tired of conflict? Tired of depressing news headlines? Tired of being tired?

Sometimes this verse from Matthew has been quoted for people who are physically tired from running around, from trying to keep up to the demands of daily life, and from dealing with a lack of sleep. It's the idea that "life is hard; you need a rest."

And rest, in that context, is sleep. Or permission to no longer serve on a committee. Or a vacation. Or send the kids to grandpa and grandma and just veg out in front of the TV for 3 days straight. This idea of rest is to have a relief from all responsibilities and do nothing for a while.

This morning I will ask you to set aside that interpretation of this passage. "Come to me and rest" has nothing to do with a nap on Sunday afternoon, or during the sermon on Sunday morning. The meaning of rest in this verse is not sleep or vacation or freedom from responsibility.

The offer of rest begins with an invitation: "Come to me," says Jesus. It's worth noting that Jesus does not say, "come to God" and you will receive these promises. Jesus is God and he is able to come through on the promises of God, because that's who he is. He says as much in the previous verse about knowing the Father and the Son revealing the Father to others. Jesus invites all troubled person to himself. In Jesus, God gets a face.

Jesus invites to himself people who are having a hard time of life, those for whom life is hard work and who feel overwhelmed. The hard work comes from trying to be good enough, trying to meet high standards, trying to meet the standards of other people and never quite getting there. And that can wear a person out.

Martin Luther says that Jesus is saying, in effect, "my kingdom is a hospital for invalids." Or John Calvin says that Jesus invitation to 'all' is important to note, "lest anyone should shut

the door on themselves by a perverted doubt.” All are invited to come, even those worn out by their questions and doubts about being worthy or acceptable.

Come to me, *all*. Look around and look within and see that there are people for whom life is a struggle. These people are serious but discouraged; they want to be good, to please God, and to help people, but they feel kinda selfish, not quite up to the task, quite inadequate, and finally, failures. Calvin says, “Failure makes us fit to receive his grace.”

To those burdened with guilt and inadequacy, Jesus offers an invitation to rest and refreshment. But it’s more than a vacation or sleep. Responding to Jesus’ invitation includes taking and using the equipment Jesus offers for carrying future burdens and duties.

“I will refresh you. I will give you rest.”

“Here, take my yoke.” A yoke is a work instrument. Tired workers don’t need a mattress or a vacation, but a yoke. The most restful gift Jesus can give the tired is a new way to carry life, a fresh way to bear responsibilities. Life is a succession of burdens; we cannot get away from them. Jesus is not offering escape; he offers equipment.



Take my yoke and learn from me. It’s not just a matter of taking the teaching of Jesus and *doing* more. It’s not just ‘take this yoke as another burden on your shoulders, another thing to carry, another expectation to meet.’

Take my yoke and learn from me. Take this teaching and walk with me. It’s the invitation to “follow me” which is repeated throughout the gospel of Matthew.

This invitation is stated beautifully in The Message: “Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace...Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.

A yoke is something that involves two animals in tandem, side by side. Together they pull the load. Together they do the work.



Sometimes a farmer would yoke an experienced ox with a younger ox, so the younger ox would learn how to work in the yoke.

Consider being in a work team with Jesus as your partner. Jesus is saying, “Let me be your yoke mate, and learn how to pull the load by working beside me and watching how I do it.”

What do we learn when we take the yoke of Jesus? We learn the truth of Romans 12:1: “Therefore, in view of God’s mercy, offer yourselves as living sacrifices.”

We learn that the yoke of Jesus is defined by mercy. That makes it easy and light. The yoke of Jesus is knowing that he has done the work to make us right with God. He has fulfilled the law of God perfectly. He makes it possible for us to be adopted children of God, loved by God as his own daughters and sons.

In view of God's mercy, it's not up to our efforts or perfect obedience or hard work. In view of God's mercy, we surrender ourselves, we let go and learn to carry the load along with Jesus and not by ourselves.

For many of us, this is not a new message. You have heard it before.

And yet some people here wonder if you're good enough to come to the Lord's table and take the elements of communion. "Take my yoke...in view of God's mercy." It's not about how good you are. It's about offering yourself to Jesus and trusting him. He has paid for all your sins. "Come to me and find rest for your souls."

This rest that Jesus offers gives us a perspective for the burdens and worries and anxieties that we face and that we carry. Jesus is not saying that he will take all our problems away and fix everything and make the world and your life a perfect and easy place. He says, "Let's carry it together. Trust me, and know that I'm there with you. You are not responsible to fix or carry the problems of the world. Take my yoke and we'll walk this together."

"In view of God's mercy, offer yourself to God."

As we experience and realize the rest we find in walking with Jesus, as we take his yoke and surrender to God's mercy, we also must realize that this is not just something for our own benefit. Living this spirit of peace and rest and confidence in God's mercy will have a ripple effect on our relationships at home and in our community. We live our lives from a contentment that is not overwhelmed by the fears and difficulties of life or in the headlines.

It brought to mind the teaching of the late Edwin Friedman, who talks about being a non-anxious leader or bringing a non-anxious presence into tense or stress-filled situations.

Edwin Friedman describes a non-anxious leader as "someone who has clarity about their own life goals, and, therefore, someone who is less likely to become lost in the anxious emotional processes swirling about. I mean someone who can be separate while still remaining connected, and therefore can maintain a modifying, non-anxious, and sometimes challenging presence. I mean someone who can manage his or her own reactivity to the automatic reactivity of others, and therefore be able to take stands at the risk of displeasing.

To have that presence is to have a confidence in oneself, which can be helped from knowing that “I am not my own, but belong to Jesus.” We could say that being yoked with Jesus helps us to focus on our own identity and confidence in him and not be defined by the anxiety or reactions of others.

Imagine the impact of being a calm, restful presence at a tense discussion at the coffee shop or with family about rail blockades and indigenous frustration with colonialism or some other political topic. Imagine the impact of being a calm, restful presence while someone shares their anxiety over a cancer diagnosis or frustration with pain. Imagine the impact of being a calm, restful presence with someone expressing their fears for the future.

Those are ripples of grace. It’s not needing to fix the problems of the world. It’s knowing that we can face life being yoked with Jesus, experiencing rest for our souls. The rest we experience ripples out into the lives of those around us.

“Learn the unforced rhythms of grace...Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

“In view of God’s mercy, offer yourselves as living sacrifices.”

“Take your everyday, ordinary life and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.”

“Come to me...take my yoke and learn from me...and you will find rest...For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

As you experience this rest, let it ripple out to bring rest and peace into a troubled, anxious world.

Amen.