

“Rest for the Weary”

September 27, 2020

Sabbath: Holy Rest series – Livestream

Raise your hand if you’ve heard or said anything like this before: *I am so tired! I can’t seem to get any rest! I feel like I’m controlled by my calendar - every minute scheduled! I am exhausted! I feel like I could just crumble, right here and now.* And Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

I doubt that anyone can help me. I got myself into this mess; I’ll just have to get myself out. And Jesus says, “Come to me; I will take your burden. You will find rest for your spirits.”

It’s so hard for me to let go of these things. I’ve carried these burdens for so long. Jesus says, “I will take those burdens. You can lay them down. Here you will find rest for your soul.”

Maybe more recently, you’ve heard or said something like this: *I feel so overwhelmed by all that’s happening in our country and our world. I’m tired of the 24-hour news cycle. I don’t know who to trust. I don’t what the truth is anymore.* Jesus says, “Come to me...”

Maybe you’ve found yourself talking with Jesus: *OK, Jesus, I’ll try to lay my burdens down. I know I need your help. I know I can’t carry this alone.* Perhaps we’ve felt like this before - **SHOW SLIDE** – *heavy load*. And you want to lay it all down in front of Jesus and leave it there, but you sometimes lay it down and pick it right back up and take it back!

We have worn ourselves out. Sometimes we’re physically tired, but we’re also soul-tired and weary. With all that’s happening in this moment, and with the reality of discontentment – that we want satisfaction - more, better, faster, something else - there’s no real rest. Our souls are weary and burdened, and we don’t even hear or heed Jesus’ words: “Come to me...” We’re looking around for rest rather than at the Source of true rest.

Over the past few weeks, we’ve focused on Sabbath – first looking at the Sabbath command as a pivotal one between loving God and loving neighbor, then remembering Martha and Mary and the relationship between doing and being, prayer and action – sitting at Jesus’ feet in quiet devotion so that we can listen to him and learn how to best follow him in active service.

These comforting words from Jesus in Matthew 11 only show up there and nowhere else in the Gospels. They may sound familiar to our ears because they’re

popular and shared often. These words have provided comfort over the ages, but they are more than simple words of comfort. Take a look back in chapter 11. These words come after Jesus has been asked if he is the Messiah. He goes on to answer with tough words for those who have not received him as Messiah, those who are not seeking the Kingdom of God or not responding to it.

Jesus has harsh words for those who are against John the Baptist, too. Both of them, John the Baptist and Jesus, aren't who people wanted or expected. John is too harsh and too demanding – remember “you brood of vipers” and “repent and believe.” Jesus is too weak and too welcoming for the taste of some who have power. So they've both rubbed people the wrong way; there's not a lot of love for them. They both threaten the status quo, and people don't like it.

So people are ignoring Jesus and dismissing him. And this is one time when Jesus seems to get angry. He's been accused of not being strict enough with the Law because of his encounters with those who were usually not included or at least not given a lot of attention by those in power. If any kind of poll was taken to measure Jesus' popularity, it wasn't high numbers.

And Jesus reacts because people are missing out on the abundant life that he offers. Jesus is speaking in the tradition of the prophets here – speaking a tough word – that he is the revelation of God who wants to be in relationship with people. But it's not sticking.

For those who have joined him, it wasn't gaining them a lot of friends either! Jesus offers an invitation and a promise - in him we can find true rest because he calls us to follow him fully and offer our best to him using God's gifts in us. We find purpose and hope in him as we seek God's Kingdom first. It's about living in this world and sharing Good News and claiming hope for eternal life.

So, this invitation is for those who are over-burdened and weary – the very same people who have responded to him and to the sign of the Kingdom of God in their midst. The miracles he does are the real deal. He is the real deal. He is Messiah. And he promises rest for our souls. God is doing something new in Jesus, but there are many who don't understand or accept his teaching, especially it relates to Sabbath. He has been called out for healing and more on the Sabbath.

Matthew is clear that Jesus comes to fulfill the Law (not to do away with it), but it looks different than what the religious authorities have in mind. Jesus seeks to make the Law an asset to living out God's call – not a burden. For many, it feels like a yoke around their necks – a heaviness that is unbearable, weighing them down. But Jesus seeks to offer life. The yoke he offers isn't “anything goes,” but it is life-giving. It is the very presence of God and the power of God in the midst.

Jesus wasn't the only one promising rest. And that hasn't ended. Even still, there are others promising rest. We see it in advertising. There's always the perfect solution for our busy, harried and hurried days and our sleepless nights and the rest in-between. Quick meals or the perfect pillow – anything to make life easier and more restful. Come to me...try this or do this or pay for this and you will find just what you need.

But none of that really works in the depths of our souls. We have a bigger, deeper spiritual issue to deal with. We have to admit our need for that deeper kind of rest – the real rest that God offers us in Christ. Forgiveness when we confess our sin. Comfort in knowing God cares. Joy beyond measure in knowing that death is not the end for us. This is about the gift of salvation. Jesus offers it.

Jesus proclaims that he is gentle and humble in heart. His gentleness is not weakness, but strength that can receive us as we are and transform us. We can learn from him. We can grow with him. We can become more like him as we follow him. Jesus speaks this invitation into our lives.

So, we seek to love and serve Jesus, the One who never showed weakness, but who showed meekness in being strong against those who persecuted him, tried him, and crucified him. So, we hear Jesus' invitation: "Come to me...take my yoke upon you...learn from me..." And we hear the promise he offers: "I will give you rest...I am gentle and humble in heart...you will find rest for your souls...my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

It's a beautiful and comforting word, right? I can accept his invitation and receive his promise, but I also have to follow him. This is for those who are tired and weary because of the world's lack of compassion and care. It's not an invitation to hide away from the world, but be prepared to face the world with Jesus' help.

This is for anyone who needs the comfort of Jesus – Savior of the world. And it's a challenge if we would ever think that we can save ourselves. We need a Savior to save us from sin that separates us from God and each other. We need a Savior to save us for righteousness and holiness – justice and mercy.

And it's a challenge to any of us who think we're "self-made" because Jesus calls us to be transformed into his likeness. We are his disciples, and he gives us direction and purpose. When we take his yoke on us, he's also sharing the load with us. He's walking with us. When people see us, they should see Christ. Our lives should reflect the One in whom we find rest.

To accept Jesus' invitation is to commit and re-commit ourselves to being followers of Jesus – the one who is gentle and humble in heart and who calls us to be gentle and humble in heart. He calls us to recognize our need to rise above what comes easily to us – quick reactions of anger, the desire to be rude and mean, and instead,

learn what it means to be meek – not weak – but strong by the grace of God. As Emilie Townes writes, this path of discipleship is “hard, necessary, and sometimes very lonely work.” It offers us rest because we’re not alone, but it also brings the possibility of conflict.

The Gospel of Jesus demands decision from us and comforts us. Jesus is waiting for us, but we come to him. I’ll confess to you that the state of the world forces me to ask the question more often: *What does God require of me? What are we to do about this and say about this?* I’m so tired of so much, but then I consider those whose experiences are so much more tiring and weary than mine, and I wonder if they hear this word more clearly. Because of my skin color alone, I have privilege and power that others don’t. I’ve been included when others haven’t. We know people are struggling to have enough food to eat, to find work, and so much more. So much tiredness and weariness.

Jesus can offer comfort, but what am I supposed to do as his disciple? What do we do – the Body of Christ – in response to the tiredness and weariness of the world around us? How will we show integrity – that what we say and do show our relationship to Jesus? Again, the challenge - our lives should reflect the One in whom we find rest.

Jesus tells us to learn from him. So, I keep going back to the words of Jesus and his mission when he reads from the prophet Isaiah: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to preach Good News to the poor...* (read more in Luke 4). Or the Sermon on the Mount... (Matthew 5). Or all of the stories of his life and ministry and healing and reaching out. What are we doing to offer rest in the name of Jesus? Who is it that’s tired and weary? How are we going beyond our own need for rest and recognizing what others need?

We’ve been talking about Holy Rest. St. Augustine said Christ is our true Sabbath – that our hearts are restless until we find rest in him. This rest from Jesus isn’t a vacation or being idle, but being joyfully and fully in Christ’s presence. This invitation and promise aren’t for a life of ease, but a life of faith and trust – and seeking truth and working for justice, truly resting in Jesus and walking with him.

If you’re tired, weary, defeated, discouraged, or uncertain, I hope Jesus’ invitation and promise cut to your heart. It’s for you and me, and it has the power to transform us and the world around us. We don’t carry our burdens alone; we don’t have to. Jesus doesn’t leave us to bear it all alone – and as the Body of Christ, we bear one another’s burdens. We find rest in Jesus – and hope in him.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE and the LORD’S PRAYER