

The Weary Now Find Rest

Grace and peace are yours from Jesus your Lord and Savior, Amen.

Where is it that you go to find rest? Where is that place of serenity, peace, tranquility? Could it be that ultra-comfy power recliner that engulfs you in all its warmth and posh comfort, as you pull over the blanket and drift off for a nap? Maybe you're one of those that seeks rest in solitude? For you, rest means getting away from the rat-race noise of day-to-day life... no texts, no emails... just the quiet of birds chirping in the trees as the breeze rustles the leaves. Or, maybe your version of rest isn't limited to a particular location, because all you need is a hot cup of French Vanilla dark roast and a good book.

I guess before we go any further, it may serve us well to ask ourselves, "*Why...* why am I looking for this place of rest?" "*What* is causing me to be rest-less, weary, weighed down and burdened so badly?" Before you respond with, "Duhhhh, Captain Obvious, let me count the ways..." let's pause a moment. On the one hand – we're quick to list off our reasons... on the other hand, we also know our Savior's invitation, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." Where's the disconnect? If we know the problem AND the solution... why do we still get so weary and burdened?

This is the second of our Welcome Home Sundays, Sundays that we've been planning and working towards since January. We mailed out flyers to all our members, we've made nearly 300 phone calls, texts, emails to contact folks who may have been away for quite some time, welcoming them home, welcoming everyone to come and find rest. As with last week's Gospel, we are rejoicing with the angels in heaven over every soul who is found. Today we celebrate the blessings of having a home, a spiritual home, a place of true rest for our souls.

Listen again to these rest-giving words of Jesus: "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*"

In preparing for this sermon, I saw one commentary make a theme suggestion for this text. He called named it, "The Yoke's on You!" Of course that certainly offers a good direction and play on Jesus' word, "yoke." Unfortunately, it's a word that has perhaps lost some of its visual picture, since hardly any of us often hitch up the plow to a team of oxen any more. I'm wondering if a better word might be "hitch" – like a trailer hitch? Think in your life; what are some of the things that are hitched to you that are weighing you down? [picture] Here's one that I particularly like – classic mid '80's underpowered 4- cylinder station wagon, completely overloaded beyond reason!

Have you ever felt like this? There's the normal things are hitched to you that cause you to work extra, and then more get's piled on, and then work asks you to stay longer this week, and then your child gets sick, and then the third reminder for that medical bill comes in the mail... with all this rain – there's flooding issues and now that it's warm again the grass is growing and inch every day, along with the weeds. You feel a deep connection with the failed rear suspension in that car right now. The YOKE upon your shoulders is extremely heavy; how will you ever make it to tomorrow? Maybe if you just say a little prayer...

In the opening verse of our text, Jesus offers a little prayer that is pretty telling about the YOKE that was upon some of those listening to him. It was a yoke that they didn't even realize was there. ²⁵ *At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.*

Jesus gives his Father thanks that he has hidden "these things" from wise and learned – and revealed them to little children. What are *these things*? In short, it's how to deal with the yoke that rests upon every single person, young and old alike. This yoke has nothing to do with the amount of responsibility at work or the stress of earthly deadlines,... This yoke, that is upon every single person, is God's holy law – and His demand that we obey it perfectly.

On the one hand there is a group – Jesus calls them, "the wise and learned" – who feels that they are doing a great job at keeping their religious noses clean. They're doing the right things; they're outwardly keeping the commandments (at least in front of others). For them – there's something very critical that has become hidden – their own absolute dire need for a Savior, for Jesus who is standing right in front of them – praying about them! "Who, me? I'm doing just fine. My

life isn't all that bad. I don't need a Savior." To those who hold to this opinion of themselves, the yoke's on them! And it will be far worse than getting egg on themselves; it will be the Lord's eternal wrath.

Then there's the other group, Jesus calls them the little children group, not because of their age or stature, but because God has blessed them with a deep understanding of their need for a Savior. Having heard God's Word, knowing God's law, they realized what a burden God's holy Law places upon them. They realize how miserably they have failed to keep God's Law and for that, they knew they deserved hell itself. The Yoke was upon them, and it was too much to bear.

So, which of these two groups do you find yourself in?... the wise and learned, or the little children?

If I'm to answer for myself, which is really all I can do, just as you can only answer for yourselves, I'm guessing the answer is "a bit of both." There are times when my heart is clinging to Jesus, and in spite of the burdens of the day, I know Jesus will take care of it, just as he promises to take care of me. Then, there are those times when my hearts goes on auto-pilot... I have this following Jesus thing figured, I'm good to go.... Not surprisingly it's then when I let the hours of the day and week become consumed with the things of this world that I don't guard and keep my time with Jesus, in personal Bible reading, in prayer, in devotions. It's a slippery slope, because then quickly comes the burdens of guilt and shame and embarrassment that I haven't been keeping up – and the yoke weighs us down, only to be coupled with all the burdens of this world.

What a dangerous slippery slope! Life comes at us from every direction, and then the burden and guilt from our sin pile upon that... no wonder people are always looking for that place of rest, a place to escape, a place of quite – but never finding it. I need a break, I need a vacation – and then a vacation from my vacation just to catch up... yet there is no cabin up north, no condo on the beach in FL, no tree stand or bike path or cozy couch that offer to us what our soul's so desperately need – home.

These welcome home Sundays are far more than just a cute way to encourage people to be in church. It's about home – being home with Jesus. Yes, at the end of the day, we look forward to going home, to putting our feet up for a bit, to having some food, to resting... but the dishes don't do themselves and the laundry didn't get switched from 2 days ago... That's home – in a physical sense, the kind of home that each of us will have until we die. This home is different. Listen again to Jesus' invitation to come home and find his kind of rest. ²⁸ *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

No-thing and no one but Jesus can make such an invitation, **and** deliver what is promised. "Come to *me*... let your heart its home in me! Jesus knows. He knows what life is like, he knows stress and pressure, he knows hurt, pain, suffering, he knows temptation just as he knows ridicule. He could have taken the easy road, unhitching himself from the demands of God's Law, taking off that wooden yoke of the cross, retreating to some quite peaceful galaxy away from it all – but that would have meant hell for all mankind, an eternity without rest, without peace. However, his love for you would not let him do that!

That is why he can so freely make us such an offer... come to me... and I will give you rest. This is his promise and he will not and cannot every break it. Come to me, trust me to be the resting place of your soul. That doesn't mean life's problems will suddenly disappear, what it means is that we know how to deal with life's problems – taking Jesus up on his open and standing invitation. Not only does he freely unburdened us from our sin, but his yoke – which is nothing other than trusting him with a simple child-like trust and faith – is easy, is light; it is the very peace and rest that our souls so desperately crave.

To be sure the rest in heaven will be perfect and complete. Until that day – let us re-commit ourselves to Christ's invitation and Christ's yoke. Let us take up the struggle against our sinful nature that looks everywhere else but to Christ for rest. Let us strive with hearts clinging to Jesus' promises, to his word, to his sacrament, to blessings of being surrounded by the family of believers – that we may continually be refreshed, renewed, re-energized by the rest we find in Jesus alone.

In the 400's one of the Church Fathers, Augustine, captured this daily struggle of the Christian well. He wrote in his Confessions, "**You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.**" Lord Jesus, may our hearts always find rest in you, Amen.