

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

July 6, 2008, 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Psalm 1:1-3, Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

RESTING, IN A WORLD PANDEMIC

Matthew 11:28-30

And Jesus says: "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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

We long for rest, don't we?

Maybe now more than ever before in our lifetimes, we long for rest.

In our July Newsletter Parish Nurse Laura helped us understand this season with the words "Quarantine Fatigue." We have been separated from people we love, and from our church family for 16 weeks now.

We long for rest, don't we?

Then we add in the necessary conversations about racism, policing, and justice. Those conversations by necessity weigh on our hearts, and challenge us to listen in new ways.

We long for rest, don't we?

And have you heard about the Murder Hornets? And the possibility of a new Swine Flu?

We long for rest, don't we?

We long for peace that is soul deep.

We long for weariness to be eased.

We long to just stop, and let our weighty burdens fall from us.

We long for someone to really understand what it is like to live our life during these days.

And Jesus says to each one of us: "Come to me,"

"Come to me and you will finally be able to rest."

"Come to me, and the peace you have only glimpsed can surround you and hold you."

"Come to me, and you can lay down the weariness and let it go."

Jesus says: "Come to me, and let your burdens fall to the ground around you. It's OK to set them down, because I am watching over them. I understand.

These three verses in Matthew's Gospel are a gift.

Can you let yourself receive them?

Can you let yourself believe there is a place of complete rest that is for you, and you alone?

Can you let yourself trust that your weariness can come to an end?

Can you unclench your fists,

and the tight hold you have on all your problems,

and a maybe a lot of other people's problems,

and let them fall away from you?

Jesus says to us: "Come to me."

Can you do it? Can you trust in Jesus' love enough to know that these aren't just words,
but a real invitation that is addressed to you, and to all of us?

Can you do it?

Can you be strong enough to let go;
strong enough to admit that you just can't do it all alone?

Can you be strong enough to let Jesus have the entire list of your worries and your fears?:
--all those things that make the knots in your stomach tighten?
--those things that make your heart race?
--those things that make your breath catch in your throat?

Can you let go of your lists of what you haven't done yet,
your reasons you're not good enough,
the people you worry about at 2:00 a.m.,
the past hurts that still haunt you,
and the present realities that scare you even more?

Can you be strong enough to be weak and let go?

Can you be strong enough to know that without Jesus' compassionate strength,
you just can't make it, in any real or true sense?

Can you be strong enough to let go?

To stop?

To rest?

Jesus says, "Come to me and you will find rest for your souls."

Come to me:

Slow down.

Rediscover your resting heart rate.

Actually, physically stop, sit down in your favorite chair, dust off the hammock or the lawn chair out in
your yard, sit beside the river at your favorite spot,
just be still.

Stop! Stop doing, stop worrying, stop fearing, and just be still.

Be still and know that God is God

Be still and know that Jesus loves you.

Be still and know that you are God's beloved son or daughter,
no matter what,

there is nothing that can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans
8: 31-39)

So rest.

Rest in the Light of Christ that surrounds you.

Rest in the peace that cradles your weariness, your fears, your sorrows, and your burdens.

Rest, and Be Still, and let that be enough.

Let that be everything.

And then, when that rest has truly replenished you,

When the peace of Christ has put things into a new and heart-healthy perspective,

When the love of God is the first thing, and the only thing, you are holding onto...

Then, hear the rest of Jesus' invitation.

Jesus 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Let yourself imagine the yoke of early farming, yoking horses or oxen together to pull the heavy load. Let yourself see that wooden crossbeam with the two harnesses so that the horses or oxen were side by side, and could pull the cart together, sharing the load.

Now image that you are yoked to Jesus, side by side.
You are sharing the journey together, side by side.

Jesus promises his yoke is easy and the burdens will be lighter, when you are walking together.
Jesus doesn't put the yoke on us and lead us.
Jesus shares the yoke with us, beside us, and lightens the load.
Jesus shares the yoke with us, beside us, and we are never alone.
Jesus shares the yoke with us, beside us, and then we can continue to know true rest and deep peace.

The yoke is easy because Jesus has shaped it to fit us.

The burden is light because we are sharing it;
Jesus has shaped the very best ways for us to walk together with him,
beside him.

Re: sharing the yoke with Jesus: cf: Hare, Douglas R.A., *Matthew, Interpretation Commentary*, Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993, p. 128-130)

This morning Jesus says this to you, and to me: "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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Will you come?
Will you trust the peace, and the rest, that are soul-deep?
Will you come?
Will you share your burdens, and be yoked side by side with Jesus?
Will you come?
Will you be still, and know that God is God?
Will you come?
Will you rest because Jesus' love is strong enough?
Will you come?