

Sermon by Gary A. Shockley

Scripture Reading: Matthew 11:28 -30

Jesus has been traveling through the countryside with the disciples doing amazing things, healing the sick, those who are paralyzed, those who are filled with disease, He taught unlike any kind of teacher that people had ever heard. And of course, He ran into the religious leaders, who stood in opposition to his message. They were threatened by him. He and his disciples must have been exhausted already in this journey, and He speaks these words to all those who would hear. Jesus said, "Come to me all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, let me teach you because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke fits perfectly and the burden I give you is light."

Join me in prayer: Lord, as we navigate a challenging time in our world and our country in our own lives, we open ourselves to the leading of your Holy Spirit. Speak to us. Bring us rest, bring us your presence, bring us strength to meet all the challenges that we face this day, and may we do so in a way that bears witness to the awesome God that you are, to those who know us, who walk with us, who watch our behavior. Bless this time we spend together. We pray through Christ. Amen.

I'm going start today with a little quiz. Don't worry, it's pass/fail. I know you didn't have time to study for it. All you have to do is fill in the blanks. OK, ready! I'm ready to throw in the _____ (towel). That's right. I'm at the end of my _____, no not Oreo cookies. I'm at the end of my rope. I'm just a bundle of _____ (nerves). My life is falling _____ (apart). I'm at my wit's _____ (end). I feel like resigning from the human _____ (race). Isn't interesting how we often think of life as a race. I mean the Bible does too. For example, in Hebrews Chapter 12 verse one, it says "Let us run with endurance, the race that is set before us". What kind of a race does God want us to run? What kind of a life

does God intend us to lead? As members of the human race, we run into all kinds of hurdles and twists and turns along the track of life, right? And it's not always easy, is it? For this reason, I wanted to talk this morning about one of my favorite passages of scripture as we run our race. And it comes from that scripture that I read a little while ago from Matthew Chapter 11. Jesus said, "Come to me all you who are weary and carry heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, let me teach you because I'm humble and gentle. You will find rest for your souls, for my yoke fits perfectly and the burden I give is light".

There are three specific invitations that Jesus gives us: Come to me, take from me, rest in me. Come to me Jesus said, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens. Does that describe your life right now? In times, it certainly describes mine. In the Bible people were always coming to Jesus. Just before that passage of scripture, they were bringing their diseased, their discouraged. Sometimes those who had even died to Jesus because they knew if they came to Jesus, that Jesus might be the person who could help them. Some believe that he had the answers to other questions. Some came for healing, some came for forgiveness, some came for comfort, some came for answers, but Jesus is saying...Hey are you feeling weary, are you feeling stressed out, are you at your wits end, are you facing emotional overload? Come to me. Come to me.

I find it interesting that back in the 1960's, sociologists believed that people living in the 1980's would have so much help from technology, that it would save them something like 22 hours of work each week, because of things like phones. Now, they couldn't envision an iPhone or iPad or anything like that. I find it interesting in the 1960's, but they thought all of these things were going to help us recapture time. How are you doing with all that time you've gotten from having a cell phone and an iPad, by the way? How many of us sit around and strategize how to fill up all those 22 hours that they thought we were going to have? Jesus says are you weary, are you overloaded are you stressed out, are you overworked? Come to me.

Honestly, I don't think he was thinking so much about a physical weariness, although that is a part of the human condition. I think Jesus may have had in mind an emotional weariness, a soul kind of weariness that we suffer deep down in our spirits, just plain worn out. I know what to do when I am physically exhausted; get more sleep, right? Eat better foods, get more exercise, go see the doctor, but where do I rest from my worries? Where do I go to experience release from the guilt that weighs me down or the fear that binds me up or the bitterness or anger that gets me all tied up in knots? Where do I go to find relief from the times when I experience even that distance from God? The Bible says in Isaiah chapter 40, verses 29-31, that God gives power to those who are tired, and worn out and he offers strength to those who are weak, and he promises those who wait on the Lord will find new strength. Come to me Jesus said, and I'll help you with this. Have you done that? Has there been a time in your life when Jesus became more than just a name to you? When he became the well of living water? When he became that eternal source of strength and renewal and rest? Come to me. Do you come to him every day? Do you spend time with Jesus in your in your life, in your race, in your journey? Do you come to him, if for no

other reason than, to remind yourself that he is there? He is there for you. Come. Come to me. That's the first invitation of Jesus.

His second invitation builds on that. Now, this is a strange one. Come to me he says. And then, the invitation is, take my yoke upon you. A yoke? That doesn't sound very good. Isn't that some heavy bulky thing that you strap on your shoulders...you know the shoulder of an animal? If we're looking for ways to lighten our load, wouldn't that make it worse? That doesn't sound very restful to me. Now, since I didn't grow up on a farm, I had to look up a little bit about yokes. What I learned is that a yoke is a wooden beam that is designed to connect two animals together so they can work as a team. Yokes are designed to distribute the load, so that it is equally shared, and that load is lightened. So, when Jesus invites us to take his yoke and wear it, he's offering really, to share our load. He's offering to get up underneath whatever it is that's wearing us out and help us through it. That's amazing! That's a great invitation, isn't it, to know that Jesus wants to be yoked with me, that Jesus wants to be yoked with you, that Jesus wants to bear and share our burdens? So, his invitation is really that...Come to me, stick beside me, go shoulder to shoulder with me and I'll share whatever load you're carrying around. I will be your partner in the journey of life.

I do find that every time I get disconnected from Jesus, my stress level goes through the roof! And when I don't spend that time with Him a little bit each day, sometimes a lot, life becomes overwhelming. Whenever I get these little anxiety twinges right here in my chest or nervous or sleepless, I'm pretty sure that I've unwittingly, maybe unintentionally unyoked myself with Christ. But I'm learning that life goes a whole lot better when I'm yoked with Him.

A couple of observations about yokes since I did the research, I want to share it with you. Yokes are made for two, not one. We're not meant to go through life apart from God. We were created by God to be connected, to be partners. Secondly, yokes are custom fitted to the shape of the one who wears it. So that yoke that he wants you to take, fits you like a glove. What God expects of you and intends for your life is something that will fit the person that he created you to be. That he has uniquely shaped you to do his will and to be all that you can be. And I'm reasonably sure that God does not intend for us to wear the yoke of someone else, a yoke that was designed for another person's shoulders. I know that God will never call me to be a mathematician, that's a yoke that will not fit, but he has called me to other things. Yokes are meant for two to travel and work together. You can't be yoked to Jesus and go off on your own. When you're in a yoke, you're connected. This yoke is meant to connect us, and to help direct our lives. "Come to me.", Jesus said. Come to me. Take my yoke upon you, this form fitting yoke, that is meant to strengthen you by bearing and sharing the load so that you're not carrying it alone.

And then there is Jesus' third invitation, and that is to rest...to rest in me. The actual Greek word that Jesus used, *anapassas*, is not a rest from work, but a rest in work. That's interesting. We tend to think of rest as something that happens apart from our labor. I work and then I sit down and

don't work. Rest is a moment or an event to interrupt activity. When we're out raking leaves these days, we sit down on the steps every now and then to rest, but that's not *anapassas*. That's not the kind of rest that Jesus invites us to share. I want to suggest this morning that Jesus' rest is what we experience while we're working and living our lives. And that has everything to do with pace. In the midst of our business, I can rest as long as I'm thinking about my pace. When we're yoked to Jesus, He becomes the pace center of our lives. Farmers would purposely yoke an older experienced animal to younger inexperienced one to set a pace that would keep the younger one from working itself to death. Wow! Let me tell you something. When you are yoked to Christ and he is your pacesetter you're going to slow down a little bit. You're going to get off the hurry track and this frenetic pace that we're used to living. Jesus, from my reading of scripture, was never ever in a hurry. Did you ever notice that about Him? Nowhere in the Bible will you read Jesus ran from this place to the next. I get the impression that Jesus kind of sauntered, that Jesus was a meanderer, that Jesus took his time. And He was able to observe incredible things in God's world that he wrapped into his parables and stories that he shared with folks.

One time Jesus had a friend who was dying, and the Bible says it took Jesus three days, get this, to go three miles to get to his friend. Three days and three miles...It's a mile a day. He had a plan, and He was not in a hurry to carry it out. I wish I could be more like. Don't you? If we maintain our connection, if we come to Jesus and we allow Him to yoke himself to us, to carry and share and bear our burdens, if we maintain our connection with Him, He'll teach us how to rest by setting a new pace for life.

I found this in my travels the Japanese version of Psalm 23 let me share it with you:

The Lord is my pace setter I shall not rush

He makes me stop and rest for quiet intervals

He provides me with images of stillness, which restores my serenity

He leads me in the ways of efficiency through calmness of mind

And his kindness is peace even though I have a great many things to accomplish this day

I will not fret, for his presence is here

His timeless all importance will keep me in balance

He prepares a refreshment and renewal in the presence of my activities, by anointing my mind with his oil of tranquility

My Cup of joyous energy overflows

Surely harmony and effectiveness shall be the fruit of my hours for I shall walk in the pace of my Lord forever

My friends, is there anything weighing on your mind or your heart today, any burden that you're carrying that just feels way too heavy for you to shoulder, trouble with business, health concerns, wondering when we are ever going to get through this pandemic and what's on the other side of that for us, family struggles, personal issues? God brought you to this moment, I believe, and he

wants to meet with you, he wants to listen to you, he wants to speak words into your heart, and he wants to set a new pace for your life. "Come to me.", Jesus said. Come to me, the first invitation, take my yoke, let me bear and share your burden. And rest in me. In the midst of your busyness and your work, find rest, by allowing me to set the pace of your living.

I want to invite us into a time of prayer to accept this gracious invitation from God. God, there are times that I am tired of being tired. Weary from trying to keep all the balls in the air, from trying to control everything. I am worn out at times from a life lacking in margin and rest and peace. Today I turn to you again, as I have many times before, and I accept your invitation. I come to you now. I come to you now in this moment. I take your yoke upon me. Allowing you to bear and share my burdens. I look to you. I trust you. I beg you to help me find a new place in my living. Forgive me for all the times I've turned to other things, other people before I turned to you. Fill me now again with your power and your holy presence. Shine a bright beacon of your love in my heart. Lead me in your ways. Help me to rest. This we pray together in your holy name. Amen.

Come to me, take my yoke, rest in me.