

"Come Unto Me "

Texts: Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67

Romans 7:15-25a (Series A, 5th Sunday after Pentecost) Ps. 45:10-17

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Let us pray:

"Come unto me all you who are weary and heavy 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."

These are well loved words - perhaps the best known of the promises of Christ. They serve as the call to worship at many a church and can be found on the lips of new and more experienced Christians alike. I want to look at them with you today - in two parts.

The first part is the words *"Come unto me all you who are weary and heavy burdened - and I will give you rest."* What don't we here today know about burdens! Who here hasn't had to carry some mighty heavy loads. "Come unto me", Jesus said, "and I will give you rest."

An interesting fact: In the early days of travel in desert countries, it was common for caravans to stop at water holes known as oasis (with Palm or date shades). These locations were for the convenience of people traveling who needed to stop and let their quench their thirst and that of their animals.

That is one of the functions of Worship for many of us - a time for rest and refreshment – a time to quench our thirsty souls. There is nothing quite like coming to the Lord and setting aside our burdens for a while - nothing quite like having our batteries recharged, our radiators cooled down and our spirits lifted.

All of us, from the youngest to the oldest, know about burdens. I pray you all know as well about the rest that is ours when we come to the Lord and focus anew on what it is that is important - the rest the comes when we take a break, when we take time, to connect with our Saviour.

When Jesus spoke of burdens and of our coming unto him, he was most certainly talking about the burdens of care and of anxiety and of labour that we are all familiar with. But, as the gospel indicates, Jesus was also speaking of the burdens of religion that some of us carry - the burdens that are tied to our backs by the Pharisees and scribes of our age – the burdens of endless rules and regulations concerning what we can and cannot do - at work, at play, at home - and at church.

Jesus broke radically with the religious pattern that had been established by the God fearing persons of his day. He ate and drank while others fasted. He plucked grain and fed his disciples on the Sabbath – while others looked on in disapproval. He rejoiced in God while others prayed solemnly with long faces. He called God 'Father' while others dared not even speak the name of the Lord.

Jesus came to us to lift the heavy burdens of life and of religion from our backs. He reminds us that the Sabbath is made for us - not we for the Sabbath - he urges us to know that faith is a thing that is meant to set us free - free to truly worship - and to truly serve our God - with joy and love in our hearts - on the Sabbath and on each and every day in between.

Jesus promises rest from the burdens that we carry - rest from the burdens of legalism and judgement and from the weight of anxiety and worry and from the yoke of unrewarding labour and endless labour for that which cannot satisfy.

About ten years ago during my rounds in one of our local hospital I came across a young woman who was carrying a personal heavy burden. She told me the story of her life and the burden of guilt after several visits. Some twenty plus years ago she became pregnant and was pressured by her boy friend to abort her baby, and after procedure he disappeared. This woman is either religious, or a church goer, and according to her, a born again, hard core feminist.

She is well educated, she made good living, and speaks three languages fluently. The roof begun to cave in, when she was diagnosed with cancer and found herself strangely depressed. She had accomplished what few people accomplish at her young age, she was free from the worry that so many people have, yet she found herself feeling empty and adrift.

She wonders if she could ever find peace with in. She sought help from professionals, but none could help her deal with her real guilt. Would God ever forgive me was her expedition, and my answer to her was Yes! I prayed with her each time I visited and introduced her to Christ's love. God is able to both forgive the past and give you peace which surpasses all understanding. It took several months for this truth to seek in. That God I is able to make something beautiful out of any mess create for ourselves.

Come unto me - all you who are tired - all you who are feeling drained - all you who are feeling empty - all you who are burdened by a sense of disappointment and let down - all you who are exhausted by the struggles of life and weighed down by your sense of duty and of what is right and wrong - and I will give you rest. I will cleanse you - I will fill you with new joy - and establish you in a relationship with God that will give you new life - here and in the world to come.

That is the first part of what Jesus had to say - of what Jesus promised. The second part is this - "take my yoke upon you and learn from me." This seems a contradiction - only Jesus could promise rest from our burdens in one breath and turn around and speak of taking up another burden and another yoke in the next.... What Jesus was driving at however is that there is no such thing as a burden free life - life always has burdens, but What Kind of Burden it is that we carry.

As Pastor I spend much of my time providing comfort to people who are cracking under the burdens of affluence - mortgages, debts on two cars - how to deal with keeping together a home full of appliances and conveniences which are meant to give them free time but enslave them instead to working harder and harder to pay for them all.

I deal with those who lives are overwhelmed with constant activity - and conflict - providing listening ear to those who are weighed down heavily by the burden of dealing with the hassles of others – the activities of others - hassles and activities with their children -their in-laws - their parents - their spouses - their bosses - and their own selves.

One thing I have learned in this is that life's greatest burden is not having too much to do, nor having too much to care about - some of the happiest folk I know are the busiest and care the most.

Rather the greatest burden we have is our constant engagement with the trivial and the unimportant - with the temporary and the passing - - with the ultimately uncontrollable and unpredictable. The issue in life is not if we shall be burdened - but with what shall we be burdened, it is not if we shall be yoked - but to what and with whom we shall be yoked.

Jesus has no interest in unburdening us so that we can be free or liberated or self-esteemed or all those other modern infatuations which are themselves incapacitating burdens.

Jesus is interested in lifting the burdens off our backs that drain us, that suck the life out of us. He is interested in removing the harness that we forge for ourselves, or the world forges for us with its constant demands and pressures, so that he can place around our necks his own yoke - his own harness – the yoke, the harness, the burden - that brings to us new life, new energy, new joy. To us - and to others through us..

The promise and the reality is that the Burden that Christ has for us, the Yoke he offers to us when we come to him and learn from him, is that it is an easy burden, and that in wearing his yoke and learning from him, we will find rest.

The yoke that Jesus puts upon us is an easy one - it is designed for us - individually and personally it does not drag us down, it does not chafe or bind or cause us to collapse in fatigue. It is well fitted for us.

Jesus' promise is not that we shall find a good vacation with him - that we will be able to get away from it all, but rather that he will refresh our souls when we come into his presence - and that when we venture forth - with him - into the world again, that he will replace the burdens that destroy and exhaust us with a burden, and a yoke, that will be life affirming and easier to carry.

His promise is that what we come unto him, when we learn from him, and offer ourselves to him, that he will minister to us and through us – that he will give strength and hope and joy and peace, and patience and love, that he will give us new life - here and now and in the world to come.

Best of all this young woman found a church of her choice where she is being nurtured in God's grace and love and we still communicate periodically she has come to believe in the power of God's forgives. For Christians during Holy Communion in a regular worship setting God always issues an invitation to all to come just as we are.

"Come unto me all you who are weary and 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." Amen.

We are not out of the woods yet my sisters and brothers in Christ, so let all take time to pray, to encourage and call one another in the household of faith and ALL nurses, doctors, truck drivers, all essential workers etc. They were the ones who listened to you; whereas others just talked. Then ask yourself, "When was the last time I encouraged someone?" It's not difficult, and the people you encourage are so blessed by it.

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- Jesus, Keep me Near the Cross # 335
- Just As I Am, without One Plea # 592
- Holy God, We Praise Your Name # 414