

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost - A Proper 9 (2026)

Genesis 24:34-48, 42-49, 58-67

Psalms 45:11-18

Romans 7:15-25a

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.....For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let's cut to the chase, shall we? Who here is weary? Who is wearied by the trials, uncertainties, vagaries, and outright absurdities of life that are or have left you in a state of either giving up or giving in to the issue(s) at hand? You obviously do not have to raise your hand, but I'm going to guess that each of you has already answered these two questions in your mind, haven't you? I know I have. I'm weary of partisan politics, religious self-righteousness, the vile meanness of much on social media, and the utter lack of humility among us human creatures. I can't imagine the state of my mental health if I were not a follower of Christ.

All of us at one time or another have experienced the soul-crushing reality of weariness, a spiritual condition that is more than the physical or emotional state of being 'tired or exhausted;' a reality in our soul and mind that yields to discouragement and places us on the proverbial hamster wheel of running around in a loop, looking very busy, but which nevertheless results in going nowhere and is nothing but non-productive effort. Weariness finds us acquiescing to a sense of inevitability that things just won't change. I know I have been there and sometimes didn't fully understand my condition until 'after-the-fact.'

In these concluding verses in today's gospel reading from Matthew, Jesus is inviting the people to an opportunity of 'true rest.' The context of the story is the desperation the people are experiencing as they try to live lives of religious integrity in accordance with the law, and the additional burden placed upon them by the Pharisees. What started as the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai subsequently included ordinances and statutes that the people were to obey as God's chosen people. These included rules about religious festivals, war, slavery, diet, and sacrifices. In addition to the rules noted in the Torah, the Pharisees added 'clarifying laws' to help the people understand the original rules. I can't fulfill the Ten Commandments; can you imagine trying to follow hundreds of rules every day of your life? Jesus called this religious, legalistic way of living a 'burdensome yoke.' Jesus knows they couldn't, and we can't live this way; thus his invitation to a new way of living that brings freedom, freshness, hope, and joy in the place of weariness and hopelessness.

While the burdens Jesus speaks about in today's reading concern religious legalism, he also speaks about other burdens we have all carried at some point in our lives. The list of these burdens is too many to number, but we know many of them from our own experiences. Some of us have been wearied by the burden of loneliness, addictions of various kinds, the need to be liked, issues with our health, chronic pain, severed or life-sucking relationships, or those involving our finances. Some of us have dealt with the burden of unsustainable expectations of others, thinking that we're not worthy of God's love, or that very 'Western' idea of rugged individualism; that I need to take care of myself and don't need or want help from anyone else. I can do it myself! This might be cute coming from an adolescent but is demonstrably destructive when displayed as a 'grown-up.'

I think Jesus is asking all of us: 'Why are you making your life so difficult? "Come to me, he says, and I will give you rest."' Jesus is talking about a rest that is good for the soul, that lifts the yoke of whatever is driving us away from him or oppressing us, so we can put our heads down at night and sleep without worry or anxiety. That's his promise, and Jesus does not break his promises. Jesus is offering

the rest we all crave. Jesus is not going to make us accept his invitation, so the choice of finding the rest that renews our soul is available, but we must accept it. A little humility, admitting that we cannot get better on our own, opens the path to accepting his gracious and life-giving gift.

Jesus used the metaphor of a yoke to emphasize how his offer of rest operates. As we know, a yoke is a piece of wood that has been shaped in such a way that it rests upon the shoulders of cattle to help pull the load that needs to be moved or fields that need to be worked. Jesus said that the 'burdensome yoke' of religious legalism was unbearable and would only lead to exhaustion and frustration. We hear our politicians use this metaphor to express oppressive rules used to keep people 'in line' or to describe conditions under which people are oppressed.

The obvious question begging to be asked is 'To what are you and I yoked?' The Israelites were yoked to life-choking religious rules. We are yoked by all the maladies and ways of thinking that weary our souls, as I mentioned previously. In all these situations, Jesus again offers his invitation: "Come to me, and I will give you rest." What are we waiting for?

Jesus' offer of rest means that he will remove our existing yoke from around our necks and place his yoke, a burden that is light, yes, but a burden nonetheless, on us. Jesus is not saying we won't have burdens to bear or challenges to face. We will still deal with the vagaries of life like an unexpected diagnosis of cancer or the sudden death of a loved one. He is saying, however, that he is in the circumstances of life 'with us.' While we may be willing to exchange the yoke of the world for the yoke of Jesus, because who wouldn't want peace and rest versus a life of anxiety and worry, the reality is that we must accept Jesus as the leader. It's our combined effort of his leading and our obedience that results in the rest of which he speaks.

Let us be very clear: While many around us battle daily with the burdens of life and use the world's remedies to cope, Jesus is the only answer to what truly ails us

and all who are sick and tired of being sick and tired. It's not that the tools of psychiatry and modern medicine, or our attempts at spiritual practices such as meditation, are not worthy in their own right when used appropriately; in terms of spiritual weariness, however, they still only offer partial remedies. Jesus is *the* remedy, and his invitation to wholeness awaits all who are weary and carrying heavy burdens.

Dear friends, each day God graces us with on this earth is filled with opportunities and choices. Jesus asks each of us to pick up our cross daily and follow him. This will be a difficult task if we are not yoked properly to him. Every choice we make each day, whether big or small, moves us either towards God or away from him. If we're properly yoked to Christ, the way will be clear, and the ability to carry our share of our lightened burden will renew our bodies, minds, and souls. This grace from God to share our ups and downs of life changes how we understand the world and the people around us. For those of you who are living such a life, give glory to God. For those who are mired down in a spiritual fog of uncertainty and worry, Jesus just wants you to trust his promise of rest and peace by saying 'yes' to his invitation. A life of true rest and renewal awaits, and as the great hymn penned by Horatio Spafford states in the refrain: "It is well, it is well, with my soul"... a state of being that speaks of a *current reality*, not a future hope. To Jesus' invitation, just say 'yes,' and by his grace, a life of contentment and peace awaits. Maybe, or maybe not today or tomorrow, but whose arrival is nonetheless promised.