

S.230709 Champaign First, Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 "Rest for the Weary"

Gospel Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

16 "But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

17 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.'

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; 19 the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

25 At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

28 "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, 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."

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest," says Jesus.

Perhaps you have heard these words on a Sunday morning before communion.

Or, perhaps you have heard these words in a moment of prayer when you were stressed and needed comfort.

They are comforting words, words of welcome, of relief...healing words. They are words for a tired world, a worried world, a world torn apart by competing voices and authorities. These words bring about the kind of feeling you get when you are child and you are wrapped in a hug from a trusted adult, perhaps a grandparent, after a skinned knee or a long school year. These are protective words that melt away the woes of the world and focus us on what matters. Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you...my yoke is easy and my burden is light." These are words of rest for the weary.

I was drawn to these comforting words on vacation. I had been yearning for a rest. You may have noticed my Facebook page. I have been posting images of rest - the ocean waves lapping... lapping against the shore; the green bounty of nature; the creative spirit of the gardener who plays with a rainbow of color that enhances and focuses our attention; a serene lake, a roar of a waterfall, a laugh, a bird, a single daisy, a dance...grace, all grace and joy.

But, these words in Matthew are more than mere images of tranquility and escape. They are an invitation into a restorative relationship with God whom Jesus knew intimately.

Our text in Matthew comes as the Jesus movement is getting off the ground. It wasn't an easy time. Jesus had been preaching for a while and healing the sick. Eugene Peterson ([The Message](#)) says as Jesus does this, "The wretched of the earth learn that God is on their side."

This was good, wasn't it? Jesus had called a band of disciples. They were enthusiastic about bringing in a new order, an order

that cared about the least of these, the disenfranchised. Between Jesus and John the Baptist his cousin, the status quo was being shaken up. The powers that be were challenged.

And then, and so, John the Baptist was arrested and thrown in jail. Doubt was creeping into the early vision of hope for the future that the disciples had. If John was arrested and Jesus would not save him, was Jesus really the one John was preaching about? When doubt enters a conversation, you begin to hear the whining and competing voices grow louder. It is hard to make sense of the truth and what is real with this kind of tug of war going on.

Here is what those competing voices were saying about John and Jesus,

John came fasting but the people said he was crazy, someone with a demon. He needed to be locked up.

Jesus came eating and drinking with the outcasts (just the opposite of what they said about John) but people said he was a drunkard, a sinner.

Could they not make up their mind? Would they not be satisfied?

John and Jesus were bringing about change. When change is happening ambiguities arise. You can find a voice for every idea. And, every competing idea can be twisted around. It is exhausting, isn't it? Who is right? What is right? Words you could once trust don't make sense anymore. What do you believe when doubt competes with hope? The disciples were wavering.

Jesus assures John's disciples that John was a prophet as great as the greatest of prophets. And, people are never satisfied, says Jesus. They are like children who whine about the games they are playing and cannot see the reality that is in front of them. On

the other hand, a wise person can see what is from God. Through his actions Jesus had been showing them goodness, healing, hearing, loving, grace. Wisdom uses a special eye. Wisdom uses a listening ear. Wisdom uses a loving heart. Seeing, hearing and loving focuses our actions in the right direction. I think of these as intentions you might make in a yoga practice. Notice carefully, Jesus doesn't really give a definite answer, he encourages his disciples to look with their wise mind. What do you see? he asks. He says, in the translation from the Message, "The blind see. The lame walk. Lepers are cleansed. The deaf hear. The dead are raised. The wretched of the earth learn that God is on their side. Is this what you were expecting? Then count yourselves blessed."

Jesus' words to the disciples speak to our own time, in the midst of our own ambiguities. We can find the wise mind in the competing voices that surround us as the church finds new direction and hopes for the future. When you can't communicate and connect the way you used to, you learn new words. We know that, we have an ESL/ELL program and Alan helped us learn sign and we try to provide French translation. We know how to learn new ways of communicating. We continue to help people connect with each other across barriers. That is having a wise mind and a listening ear and a loving heart.

There is another thing that Jesus does after cutting through the rhetoric of ambiguity with a wise mind. Jesus prays. Jesus's personal response to the whining and competing voices of doubt amidst the hope is prayer. It is gratitude. He thanks the Father. Prayer reminds him that the intimacy of his relationship with God is what empowers him to gather us to him and teach us the truth of God's love. Prayer returns our attention to grace, God's grace is neither forced, manipulated or controlled by putting our own wants and desires first. God's grace is known by the least of these, an infant's perspective. Prayer connects us to a power

greater than the competing “people powers” of the world. Prayer connects us to the love of a parent for a child and a child for a parent.

Jesus invites us into this kind of intimate and loving relationship. “Come to me all you who are heavily burdened and I will give you rest,” Jesus says. Gentle and humble of heart, Jesus invites us to walk with him in a way that doesn’t fight against the powers that be, it transcends them. There is no need to arrest the prophets and kill them to silence their words of truth. There is no need to crucify ordinary people with laws that give power to the powerful. If the sick are sick, they need healing. So heal them. If the hungry are hungry, they need to be fed. So what kind of food do you have to share? Jesus’s way will feed five thousand from five loaves and two fish. What are your resources? What kind of skills can you teach others? A gentle and humble heart has a domino affect. It grows. It is like our Raindrop Offering. Share one raindrop and soon you will have a lake. Share one skill and soon you are self-sufficient and teaching others.

What I learned in my rest as I focused my spirit on God’s transcendence around me during my vacation was that in a chaotic, natural world that is bug infested, hot, devouring and full of thorns and brambles, a gentle and humble heart brings into focus the Creator’s grace. The ordinary has color and beauty. The wise mind sees these things and all the other voices fall away. The political haranguing that the disciples experienced around them faded into the background when they could focus on what was wise and good and loving. A crucifixion became resurrection. Death became life. Doubt did not take away hope. Let that be our way.

Jesus invites us to come and his way will give us rest. In this relationship we can come together as a church to bring God's rest to a weary world bathing them in an eternal love.

St. Francis said this a long time ago:

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.”