



Deering Community Church

Pastor: Barbara Lockett Currie

Come To Me and I Will Give You Rest

Sermon for July 3, 2011

Scripture: Song of Sol 2:8-13; Mathew 11:28-30

Today's scriptures each offer invitations. In the seldom read Song of Solomon, one of the great love stories of all time, the beloved speaks to his love and asks her to come away with him; the winter is past, plus the rain is over and gone—we here in NH can definitely relate to the time of year that is being described. 'The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom...' How beautiful it is there and here in our special part of the country. What better time than now to go away with the one you love and enjoy the surroundings! When we have an especially hard winter and or spring, we welcome the blooms and fragrance of summer even more.

In our gospel lesson, Matthew is not writing about the weather, not even about the difficulty and tiredness of physical labor, Jesus is referring to the spiritual weariness that came from those exhausted from following all the religious rules, keeping up all the religious appearances, and obeying all the religious conventions of their day.¹ Jesus understands all the pressure of the Jewish faith to follow the Law. Jesus is inviting those who lived in his day as well as us to take it easy, rest awhile and even more important to team up with him.

It doesn't matter whether our burdens are spiritual, physical, emotional, or financial, Jesus' invitation still works. Is there anyone out there this morning that is feeling weary and heavy burdened? I think Jesus understands that we are all carrying one burden or another. For some it may be poor health, for others an addiction to alcohol, drugs, food, video games, the internet, and so forth, or still others may be emotionally weighed down with depression, anxiety and the like; some are financially

¹ Barbara Brown Taylor, The Seeds of Heaven, "An Open Yoke".



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burdened, especially in this long lasting economic downturn, facing unemployment, which often leads to not being able to pay the rent or the mortgage. Many families are having conflicts at home even to the point of relationships breaking up; others are burdened with spiritual pain, wondering is this all there is?²

I believe our scripture is saying that Jesus wants to lift the burdens off us that drain us, that suck the life out of us. We can all understand this desire; however, many of us have no idea of what a yoke is. There's a legend that says Jesus the carpenter was one of the master yoke-makers in the Nazareth area. People came from miles around for a yoke, hand carved and crafted by Jesus, son of Joseph. When customers arrived with their team of oxen, Jesus would spend considerable time measuring the team, their height, the width, the space between them, and the size of their shoulders. Within a week, the team would be brought back and he would carefully place the newly made yoke over the shoulders, watching for rough places, smoothing out the edges and fitting them perfectly to this particular team of oxen. The yoke Jesus invites us to take, the yoke that brings rest to weary souls, is one that is made exactly to our lives and hearts. This yoke Jesus calls us to take is always designed for two and our yoke-partner is none other than Christ himself.³

Jesus promises to give us rest. Is there anyone out there this morning that feels they could use some rest? Rest is more than sleep. Rest is more than just taking a break. Even on vacation many of us do not rest but increase our activity even more. But inactivity is not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about that deep, deep hunger you may have in your soul to resolve some of your doubts, to have some relief from the heaviness of unanswered spiritual questions. When I think about rest, my mind

² Ibid.

³ www.esermons.com for July 3, 2011.



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goes to that great quote from one of our early Christian fathers, Saint Anthony: “You made us, Lord, for Yourself, and our hearts will be restless until we rest in You.”

“Come to me, and I will give you rest.” When we come to Jesus, when we trust in being dependent on God rather than our money, our health, our leaders, our intellect to name a few, when we give our burdens, our questions to Jesus, he can offer us the good news of the kingdom of God, the overflowing grace where sins are forgiven, where we are loved unconditionally and also learn how to love others in that same way. The lost are found; the outcasts are embraced; his Father and our God will welcome us with open arms; and we will learn how to truly rest, to rest not just our bodies, but also our souls and our hearts in the Divine.

For Christians, Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God. On this Sunday before Independence Day we are talking about being dependent on God, a God that gives us freedom. The 4th of July is a day to celebrate freedom. For me the words written on the Statue of Liberty represents the specialness of our nation. The words are part of a poem, New Colossus by Emma Lazarus, listen: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore”. As you may know France gave the United States the Statue of Liberty for their friendship during the American Revolution. Immigrants and refugees alike have excitedly looked on this statue as they came to America, a country offering them so many opportunities, as well as an escape from religious tyranny, racial bigotry, poverty, prison, and especially political abuse. I grew up loving these words and feeling proud that I was part of such a compassionate nation. I do believe that our ancestors had a wonderful dream and as the country has aged the dreams have become more inclusive; we have the dreams of women that enabled me to vote; we had the dreams of Martin Luther King, Jr, that enabled my biracial children to get an excellent



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education, to be free to live where they want to live and marry whomever they wish to marry and, of course, have the blessing of not just knowing but having seen someone of their racial makeup become the President of the USA. My dream and my hope is that our nation will lead the way for peace and justice in the world. I dream that we as Christians can be strong in our religious heritage and at the same time not demand that others worship as we worship, but give them respect and freedom to follow God—or not, in their own way.

In summing up, Jesus does not promise us a burden free life. Rather his promise is that he will refresh our soul as we come to him, and when we go forth into the world again, he will replace the burdens that destroy and exhaust us with his presence. He will be our yoke partner, affirming us and giving us strength to love and do. He will minister to us and through us; he will give us strength and hope and peace and joy, and ever abiding love. Indeed he will give us new life both now and in the world to come. I'm thankful for God's grace through which we can all receive so much more than we could ever earn. And thank you, Jesus for your invitation to come to you and your promises of rest for our souls. Amen and Amen.