

“Rest for Our Souls”
Isaiah 40:28-31; Ephesians 4:14-24;
Matthew 11:25-30

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As I read the scripture this week, there was a word that stood out to me. I'm hoping it doesn't stand out to everybody. It was the word “weary.” It's not a word we use all the time, but it was a word that struck me as I thought about it. There are ways in which, in today's society, it feels like there is a certain weariness. As I was looking up that word, there was one particular definition I appreciated. It talked about weariness as an exhaustion of strength, endurance, vigor, and freshness. I guess I've always thought of “weary” as that tiredness that simply seeps into your bones. It's hard to want to get up and do anything.

I wondered why that word, weariness, might stand out to me and how it relates to our lives today. I began to think about the things that make me a little weary. One of the things is simply the amount of information that is present all the time. I don't know that it takes me all the way to weariness, but at least it tires me. All that information. And if it's not the information, it all the choices. Even choosing a breakfast cereal—there's something like 5,000 choices there. It's incredible.

So we have all this information, we have all these choices, and then it feels like there's a drive to be busy. Sometimes it's more than that. We have particular things we need to do, but it feels like there's always more that we need to do. There's always something else to make our lives more joyful. There's always something else that we're supposed to be doing because it's the right thing to do. There's always something more to do because we're supposed to be doing more. Sometimes it feels that way. For some people, in their work situations, there's always more to do because there are fewer people to do the same amount of work. There's more. It feels like there's just more and more and we're supposed to just embrace that more-ness. Sometimes it begins to feel like I am a hamster on his wheel—round and round it goes without really going anywhere.

It makes me feel weary. So I thought about Jesus saying, “Those of you who are weary...” Why do we allow those things to make us weary? What is it that motivates me to listen to all that stuff, to feel like I need to be reading all these different information sources all the time to know what's going on, and all the other things we do. There's a way in which I feel like I'm buying into something. I'm being led to do these things. There's a way in which I'm allowing my priorities to be set for me. It does, I think, get to be something about priorities. Life is about the things we do, and we're always supposed to be doing more.

Is it always about what we do? When we begin to think that way, if it's all about what we're doing, then we have to be doing something all the time. Is life never about rest? Or some of the other things that don't seem like doing? Is fellowship – enjoying time with others – doing? Do the tasks always take over?

It's talked about in this scripture as being like a yoke. We don't have to throw yokes on animals much anymore. We just go out and turn a key most of the time. But the idea behind it is, when you put a yoke on, you are then able to pull something that's attached to your yoke, your burden.

One of the things I began thinking about is, if I were going to have to wear a yoke, it would be a little like backpacking. If you have ever gone backpacking or carried something heavy that way, you want to try to get the backpack that fits you the best it can because it's going to wear anyway, so you want it to fit. I was thinking about that with a yoke. It has to fit well. I think that's part of what Jesus is saying when he says, "My yoke is easy." It fits well. It's one that is appropriate for us.

We are going to think a bit more about that idea of having a yoke and what we are yoked to. What do we allow to give us yokes? What burdens do we think we need to bear, and what kind of yoke does that burden come with? It would be interesting to go around the room and ask, "What are your burdens and what kinds of yokes do you have in your life right now? Does it feel like it fits you? Does it feel like it overburdens you?"

So, thinking about the kinds of burdens in our lives, what kinds of burdens do we have? It feels like the kinds of things our society tells us we're supposed to have, the burdens we're supposed to bear, are things like being the best, being the most knowledgeable, being the most successful, being the most of almost anything. We can't just have a particular care in our lives; we have to care about all kinds of things. We can't have a particular thing we like to do; we have to like to do all kinds of things. It's almost as if unless we achieve what everyone else has achieved—and those achievements are always painted in pictures that are superhuman—then we're not arriving, we're not "there." So we always have more to do. It feels to me like those things are the burdens we bear. I'm supposed to be the life of the party. I'm supposed to be the one who is most successful. I'm supposed to have the most wealth. The funniest. The best-known. Can we just keep going on with the kinds of things we're supposed to be? Do you ever feel those burdens?

When Christ says, "Come to me. My burden is easy," what is he saying? I think he is saying something similar to what Paul is saying. You don't have to be tossed around by every wind of doctrine or trickery. I have to admit when I think of people's trickery today, I think of advertising because that's where we see all that we're supposed to be. Yet, we don't need to be tossed around by all those different things that we're supposed to be.

Some of the force behind that for me is to feel like if I'm not those things, am I of any value? If I don't achieve all those things I'm supposed to, if I don't find joy in a new kind of food or a new kind of razor, am I somehow missing out on life? Is that where my value is? If I am not the best known person in town, am I not valuable? If I'm not the best, am I without value?

There's a way in which I think we get caught up in the things of life. Paul says we don't have to be tossed around like that. We might acknowledge that kind of trickery, but we don't have to be tricked by it. We know where our true value is. We know where we are loved. We know where we are given the kind of life that fits us, a yoke that is easy,

a burden that is right. The burden that Christ gives us is the more appropriate burden. It is a burden of care for one another. It's a burden of love, but in that we find love. Sometimes making the choices isn't always easy, but it is a burden. There is some work involved, but it fits.

I don't know about you, but there have been times in my life when I have had the opportunity to be with people who I felt I just loved being with. There was a joy. There are just some people who can say things in a certain way. We have a friend this makes me think of. When our kids were young, she would say, "May I take your children for an evening?" It was a way in which it was a joy to be with and to have a relationship with her and her husband, because it was loving. Over the course of years, as I have been in relationships and noticed folks who have lived out this burden of Christ, this love shared, they are the people I want to be with. They are not the flashiest people. They are people who oftentimes don't even get noticed, but when you sit down at the end of the day and ask yourself who you want to be with, they are the people.

We talked about how growing in Christ is sometimes imperceptible. I think in some ways these lives that I've seen—it is almost imperceptible to see how they have become the people they've become. But if you ask me who I want to be with, who I see living a life that seems to have a burden that fits, a joy that shows, a grace that's given, those are the folks that I want to be with. That's what Christ invites us to, for his yoke is easy and his burdens are light. They fit. Amen.

Gracious God, help us recognize the ways that we are buffeted, the trickery around us, the things that would overburden us. Help us come again to you, to grow with you, to sink our lives into the grace that you extend to us in a way that allows us to recognize the valuable burden, the right burden, the light burden. Lord, fit us to be your disciples and in that recognize the joy of living together the life you give us. Lord, let us come and hear your gentle and humble voice that would lead us, guide us, yoke us. Lord, let us be yours. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.