

Sermon #38  
May 3, 2020  
Matthew 11:25-30

### **“Come to Me”**

Weariness! Are you sensing or feeling a much higher level of weariness as these COVID – 19 days drag on? There are many words that we can use to describe this weariness and how it affects us all – sometimes in different ways, but we are all weary today. Not just here in Elida and Lima, but in our country and all around the world today, people are weary.

Along with that weariness comes fatigue, loneliness, anxiety, fear, anger and a sense of helplessness. We can't do much about it. The inhabitants of planet earth are all feeling a heavy, weary, burden. Questions arise to the surface throughout every day, such as, “How are my loved ones doing? Who became sick today? How many more have contracted the virus today? How many have died? What about my job? Will it still be there when this is all over? What about the economy? When will a vaccination be available? These worrisome questions and much more continue to arise all the time.

Depression is on the rise. Loneliness attacks when we least expect it. Cabin-fever is no longer a joke. Suicides are increasing. People wait in long food lines, some not receiving the food they desperately need. The stock market falls. Alcoholism rises. AA groups cannot meet together, which is a critical part of their recovery process, so they at least meet on-line. The homeless are more worried than ever. A homeless man for twenty years in Ann Arbor, Michigan says, “You can't use the restroom nowhere. You're not allowed in no facilities – especially if you're homeless. We're considered a nuisance, but we're not trying to be. We're just trying to live.”

Around the world, heavy laws are enforced to maintain social distancing. Many are only allowed outside for only one hour-a-day and only one grocery visit a week or two weeks. The last two digits of their license plate number indicate when they can leave their apartment. Yes, the whole world is in a state of pandemic weariness, wondering when will this all end? And what will life be like on the other side?

Jesus gives the inhabitants of planet earth an invitation to rest – to lay down our heavy, weary burdens and trust completely in him. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus invited all troubled people to come to him. “Come to me,” he called, “all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

During this Easter season, we are in a series of sermons of Jesus' invitations to come and follow him. Two weeks ago, on the first Sunday after Easter, in John 21, the risen Jesus called weary, discouraged fishermen to “Come to Breakfast,” to a breakfast of renewal. Last week, Jesus invited his tired disciples to “Come and Rest” with him in Mark 6:30-34. Physical and emotional rest is so needed.

Today, in Matthew 11:28, his invitation is simply, “Come to Me.” This call is a little deeper, involving much more than physical rest, as important as that is. But what does it involve? Is it just a little something to help us through a heart-wrenching pandemic? Yes, it certainly helps now. But does it go further and deeper? There are two parts to this warm invitation with two promises as well, along with two affirming descriptions of who Jesus is. And it’s for everyone who accepts his invitation.

#### I. Invitation: Come to Jesus

Just as last week, the invitation begins with the imperative, “come.” This is an invitation. This calls for an active response of the will. In Isaiah’s passage that Rachel read earlier, the invitation to “come” is given four times; it’s given to needy people as well. And it’s given to those who truly want to live and know the Lord.

Now, back in Matthew 11, let’s begin with the context. Why did Jesus give this type of invitation at this point? What’s going on in the story line?

In Matthew 11, Jesus and his disciples are in a small town in Galilee, where Jesus is teaching and preaching (v. 1). We could say that his message is all about wisdom. He refers to John the Baptist’s actions being different from his own, but each had a purpose, but people did not recognize those purposes (v. 18, 19). Their actions seemed opposing, and yet wisdom proved their actions of ministry right in both cases.

Then Jesus continues preaching by pronouncing woe and destruction to the cities who refused to repent – nearby cities such as Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum (v. 20-24). They did not follow the way of wisdom and thus, judgement day would be more unbearable for them than for Sodom on the day of judgment.

All of that would have shocked his audience, but before they become angry, Jesus tells them the real recipients of wisdom. The contrast is between the wise and the learned, who actually do not have a clue about what Jesus is doing or the way of wisdom, but little children do – that is the innocent, and all who follow Jesus wholeheartedly with meek and humble hearts, not just the children. These innocent children and humble people are the ones who truly know Jesus and his way of wisdom. And no one can come to the Father, but only through Jesus and his humility.

And thus, the call comes – to all. “Come to me, all [emphasize] who are weary and burdened.” That is those who are weighed down by the burdens of this world, weighted down by the cities of human power, and the wise and the learned who make life unbearable for others. Jesus is turning the tables upside down here. His invitation comes to the weary and the downtrodden. And his promise is this:

Ib. Promise: “And I will give you rest.”

Here is that same compound Greek word that we saw last week. *Anapauso*, the

prefix “*ana*” meaning “each one” or “each group” and root, “*pauso*” meaning “to pause,” “to cease,” to “stop.” And the rest here is more than just the physical, as we saw last week, but it is spiritual, on-going in this life and even more for the life to come. This is the “rest” as in drinking living water, that which quenches the soul. Jesus would offer that to the woman at the well in John chapter four. And here he is offering the same thing – the living water of rest, spiritual nourishment.

Now, let’s come back to our situation today. Even in or especially in a time of a pandemic that cause much weariness and unease, we need to remember the condition of our souls. Perhaps, that is when we reflect on it even more. When we are sick and closer to death’s doorstep, we tend to see our spiritual need more. Maybe that’s the main reason why we are so weary. So, I ask you today, “How is it with your soul?” And I ask myself the same question. “How is it with my soul?” John Wesley asked that of his preachers and congregants in the early days of Methodism. We need to keep asking that of ourselves today. “How is it with my soul?”

The standard, the goal is set for us in the description of Jesus.

Ic. description: “...for I am gentle and humble in heart.”

Jesus shows the way. He is the way – the way of wisdom and life, which is gentleness and humility. Take hold of him today. Respond affirmatively to his invitation and you will find his gentle, humble spirit. In that way, you and I both cease to be weary and tired. Yes, rest is much more than physical. It is a spiritual reality in Jesus. Let Jesus comfort your weary soul!

There is a second part to this all-inclusive, warm invitation, a second imperative.

II. Invitation: Take his yoke upon you.

Jesus goes on to invite his audience again, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” What does he mean by the yoke? A yoke was a device that held two animals together, such as two oxen, enabling them to produce the work together in tandem and do better than just one animal alone. It became a metaphor used throughout the OT, mostly in a negative connotation to indicate a harsh rule over another group of people. But here Jesus uses it in a positive sense. An unlearned animal was usually teamed with an experienced one. Thus, the neophyte, the newer one could learn from the well-trained, experienced animal.

We, the untrained neophytes, once we say “yes” to follow Jesus, we are teamed with his yoke, the best yoke possible. We are trained by the master himself in his yoke. And what’s the promise for following the yoke of Jesus?

IIb. Promise: “You will find rest for your souls.”

There is that word rest again. Once again, this rest is more than physical rest as we saw last week. This is “rest for your souls.” So, all are invited to rest, to take an *anapauso*. Each one pause or stop your weariness and follow the yoke of Jesus. And what is the description of this yoke? Jesus lovingly asserts:

Ilc. Description: “For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Are you tired of the weariness of this world? ...the burdens of every-day life? ... whether in a pandemic or not? Put your head in the yoke with Jesus and lighten your burden today. There is no other way to truly do that. No amount of physical rest will ever substitute, as important as that is. This is spiritual rest. This is wisdom. Only the humble and the meek can truly find this way. The wisdom of this world cannot find it. O Chorazin, o Bethsaida, o Lima, o Elida, repent and follow the way of the master, Jesus. Put your head in his yoke and truly live.

“But wait a minute,” you say, “I still have a question.” Jesus says that his way is easy, and his burden is light. What did he really mean by that? Does he mean that if we follow him that all life will be wonderful and full of happiness and prosperity all the time? Will everything be as we want it? Just put my head in Jesus’ yoke and he’ll lead me to all the wealth and all the pleasures every day. Is that what he means?

Don’t forget that Matthew also records another sermon from Jesus in chapter 5, where the same Jesus says to his disciples, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.” “Oh no, persecution,” you say. “I didn’t sign up for that part. Please take this yoke off me now.”

So, apparently Jesus has something else in mind than a life of much prosperity and pleasure. His yoke that is easy, but it is not always pleasurable. Maybe his rest does not depend on circumstances. Maybe his rest is with us even when we are persecuted – even when we are enduring a world-wide, scary pandemic. Perhaps resting in his yoke is much more than how we feel at any moment and more about wisdom. Maybe it is more about following him, doing his will, repenting of our sins and living in his freedom from sin. And certainly, it is more about doing his will and completing the purpose, the task that he has set for us to do in this world.

A tourist once observed Mother Teresa ministering to lepers in Calcutta, India. “Sister,” she said boldly, “I would not do what you are doing for a million dollars.” “Neither would I,” replied Mother Teresa. “Neither would I for a million, but I gladly do it for Jesus.” “I gladly do it for Jesus.” The work may not be easy or even desirable, but his yoke is easy, and his burden is light. Doing it for Jesus makes all the difference.

John Meares felt a call to inner-city ministry. It was not an easy task. There was much to do and many a sleepless night. It was difficult and sometimes frightening, but he stayed, because he said, “God gave me a vision for the inner city. God called me there. I dedicated my life to fulfilling that dream. That’s why I stayed.” “That’s why I

stayed.”

Taking up Jesus’ yoke does not mean an easy life, but it does mean a life free from weary burdens that we were never meant to carry. And it does mean a life of true rest here and more so in the life to come. Jesus’ promises you an eternal rest.

Concluding:

Now more than ever, with pandemic or without, there is an urgent call, an invitation to know Jesus, to follow him, to learn from him, and to receive his true peaceful rest. Will you lay down your weary burdens and follow him?