

14th Sunday of Ordinary time

Zech. 9:9-10; Psalm 145; Romans 8:9, 11-13; Matthew 11:25-30

We are living in a unique and challenging time. While we celebrated the 4th of July and our countries independence yesterday, we are painfully aware that too many people do not live in freedom, but instead, are limited and victimized by racial injustice and poverty. Moreover, as cities begin to open up, the recent spike of COVID-19 cases has brought new fears and burdens to many. It seems evident that much of life is lived in a state of stress, anxiety and heavy burdens. The year 2020 has added exponentially to this reality. Life is hard. Carrying stress, anxieties, and other burdens is part and parcel of the human condition, especially in a time of world pandemic and racial inequality and unrest.

We all carry burdens: Family issues, financial stresses, relationship difficulties, work place harassment, health concerns, job losses or job reductions, marriage conflicts, global fears, racial tensions, religious doubts, grief, sorrow, and COVID-19 uncertainties – to name a few.

It is to these, our burdensome realities, that Jesus' concluding words in our Gospel reading speak. Friends, please hear Jesus' words. For those who know their need and the weight of their burdens there are no greater, kinder or more compassionate words. Jesus said:

**“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened,
and I will give you rest.**

**Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,
for I am meek and humble of heart;
and you will find rest for yourselves.**

For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”

I find in these words a threefold invitation from Jesus. An invitation to Come, to Take and to Learn.

Jesus says, “Come to me, all who labor and are burdened and I will give you rest.” Another translation states, “Come to me all who are tired of carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest.” Oh, how we need to come to Jesus. Jesus knows our every struggle. He knows our desperate need for rest, rest that refreshes, relieves and lightens our burdens. If you, like me, are tired of carrying heavy burdens, Jesus' invitation to “come to him” is a gift beyond measure.

Sometimes the very burdens we carry are lies we tell ourselves about how we are not wanted or not worthy to come to Jesus. Yet, Jesus' grand invitation has no conditions. All are free to come.

“Come to me, **all** who labor and are burdened”. All of us are invited to come to Jesus. All people from every tribe and nation, of every color, race and ethnicity. Anyone, anywhere can come to Jesus. He is with us always.

To come to Jesus is to pray, (with or without words) honestly sharing our burdens and struggles. To come to Jesus is to serve the poor and the outcast - to see Jesus in the poor. To come to Jesus is to worship him with open hearts. To come to Jesus is to read his word with gratitude. To come to Jesus is to be honest with ourselves and with him. To come to Jesus is to come as you are, where you are, and who you are. To come to Jesus is to trust in his mercy and love. To come to Jesus is to receive his forgiveness. To come to Jesus is to say, "Here I am."

May we not let our burdens turn us away from Jesus, but instead, lead us to Jesus the author and giver of peace and rest. Jesus calls each of us to come to him and that is what we truly and desperately need.

Jesus' invitation is also an invitation to "Take". "Take my yoke upon you."

My college professor, Dale Bruner, finds it interesting that while Jesus offers us rest and renewal, he does not invite us to take a nap or vacation, but to take his yoke. In his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew Bruner states, "A Yoke is not a sitting instrument it is a walking/ working instrument...Jesus realizes that the most restful gift he can give the tired is a new way to carry life, a new way of bearing responsibilities. For in the final analysis, realism sees that life simply is a succession of burdens; we cannot get away from them; thus instead of offering escape, Jesus offers equipment."

As a carpenter, Jesus most likely would have made yokes in his day for cattle and others to do their work. Here, Jesus offers his yoke to help ease our tired and over-burdened lives. The yoke Jesus invites us to take is a double yoke where we become according to Bruner, "Yoke mates" with Jesus. I like the image of a "Yoke Mate". Jesus is inviting us to stay connected to him in all we do. It is being yoked to Jesus that we will find rest.

Jesus knows every burden we carry and Jesus wants to lighten our load. To be yoked with Christ is to abide with him and to be with him in all that we do.

I have a twin brother and occasionally we refer to each other as "womb mates". I am honored to have a womb mate, but I want and need Jesus as my 'Yoke Mate". I want to abide so close to Jesus that my connection to him and my relationship with him affects every decision I make, every action I take and every thought I have.

My prayer and hope for all of us is that we can come to Jesus and abide with him in a personal relationship. I pray we can be yoked with Jesus in such ways that every decision we make, every relationship we have, every desire, every move we make is somehow connected to Jesus. When two cows or horses are yoked together if one makes a move it will affect the other. May we be so yoked to Jesus that our connection and relationship with him affects every facet of our lives.

Moreover, Jesus tells us that "His yoke is easy." It has been said that "Jesus' yoke is easy because it is lined with love." Jesus' yoke was forged and made through his obedience and self-donative sacrificial love. Jesus' yoke is easy because he defeated all power of sin and darkness

on the cross. Jesus, carrying the sins and burdens of the whole world, defeated Satan! All our burdens, struggles, anxieties and fears are easy and light in comparison.

The invitation to “take” is voluntary. Jesus does not force us to take his yoke and abide with him, but invites us to trust taking his yoke upon us will lead to rest and ease our burdens.

When we are yoked with Jesus he does the majority of the heavy lifting.

The poem/prayer “Footprints in the Sand” reveals how vital being yoked to Jesus is:

“One night I had a dream...

I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord, and
Across the sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene I noticed two sets of
footprints in the sand; One belonged to me, and the other to the Lord. When the
last scene of my life flashed before us, I looked back at the footprints in the sand. I
noticed that many times along the path of my life, There was only one set of
footprints.

I also noticed that it happened at the very lowest
and saddest times in my life

This really bothered me, and I questioned the Lord about it.

“Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you,

You would walk with me all the way;

But I have noticed that during the
most troublesome times in my life,

There is only one set of footprints.

I don’t understand why in times when I

needed you the most, you should leave me.

The Lord replied, “My precious, precious
child. I love you, and I would never,
never leave you during your times of
trial and suffering.

When you saw only one set of footprints,
It was then that I carried you.”

The third element to Jesus’ invitation is to “Learn from Him”. It makes sense that if we were going to learn any trade, we would want to learn from the best. With this in mind, to learn the art of living is to learn from Jesus and to glean knowledge and encouragement from saints who lived yoked to Jesus.

It is amazing how much learning is available to us. From books to Youtube, leaning is endless.

There is some great information and learning material on the internet. Nevertheless, Jesus

desires more than head knowledge. Jesus is inviting us to learn from his head and his heart, his

every move. While learning about Jesus is important, Jesus is calling us to learn from him. The more we come to Jesus, the more we take his yoke upon us, the more learning, growing and rest we will find for our souls. In fact, Jesus says the reason we should learn from him is that “he is gentle and lowly of heart and we will find rest for our souls.”

Yes, to learn from one who is gentle and humble of heart is what we need.

Jesus’ invitation to Come, Take and Lean is for all of us who are tired of carrying heavy burdens. Hear again this grand invitation:

**“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened,
and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,
for I am meek and humble of heart;
and you will find rest for yourselves.
For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”**

Years ago I memorized these grace-filled words. They have been a source of mercy and rest for my soul ever since. I want to encourage you to spend time with these words. Write them down and put them on your bathroom mirror. Read them over and over again. If possible, commit them to memory. As I mentioned above, there are no more timely, compassionate or grace-filled words to help us today!

In and through these comforting words, Jesus offers all of us a grand invitation to Come, Take and Learn. May our lives reflect a grateful RSVP.

I will pray for you and ask that you pray for me.

God bless you in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Deacon Steve