



Advent Series: *Come Unto Me – Replacing Anxiety With Peace In Christ*
The Gift of Unburdening Our Weariness on Jesus
Matthew 11:28-30

Rev. John Sowers
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In the Advent and Christmas Season, where we celebrate the birth of Christ, many of us find an even greater measure of burden, an even greater sense of stress. If everybody is saying that this is “the most wonderful time of the year” but it is not a wonderful time at all for you, doesn’t that simply make the burden bigger?

Scripture

Matthew 11:28-30

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Sermon

When Kate was a toddler, evening would come and she would grow tired and we knew that she needed to sleep. But like other children, she would fight going to bed and wiggle and wriggle to be let down. Often times we would just put her down after which she would get up on her legs and walk around in a near sleep trance until, exhausted, she would run into something (something like “air”), or bang her head against the coffee table, or trip over something (something like “air”). She would fall to the ground in tears and sobs, whereupon we would pick her up and she would nearly instantaneously fall asleep in our arms.

Kate was exhausted and more than anything she needed rest, even though she fought that idea. As we end the Thanksgiving weekend, and as we begin the Advent Season and the Christmas Season, there are many among us who inwardly look like Kate. We are fighting our exhaustion and metaphorically wobbling around the room. Once we trip over our own air, we will fall into the reality of our exhaustion. My prayer this morning is that when we fall, we fall not to the ground but into the arms of Jesus.

When I think about the people of this church, I think about one of my favorite verses on Christian community from Romans, chapter 12, verse 15: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.” For so many in this church our blessings are profound but for so many others in this church our sorrow or our struggle is just as profound. My observation of the Body of Christ is that when we are living collectively in the Spirit, then we find ourselves rejoicing and weeping all at the same time because of the depth of love we have for each other. Christian community becomes less about a sense of balance between the two and more about a sense of wholeness within the two.

Jesus models this wholeness for us. He challenges us to lives of purpose and mission but he also brings us the fullness of his unique comfort. Our passage this morning is one of the comforting statements of Jesus, with additional notes of challenge within.

Certainly there are those here today that need to hear words of comfort from Jesus. For some of you the need springs from cumulative stress in your life. Days are long and tense and sleep is sparse and you wake up with none of the stress gone and the cycle ready to repeat. The stress is driven by family situations, or by finances, or by a vague sense that life was meant to turn out differently than it seems to be.

For others gathered here this morning there is nothing vague at all about the source of your weariness and your stress. Bodies are breaking down, or relationships are irreparably broken. The burden, to which Jesus refers here, is your constant companion.

The irony is that in the Advent and Christmas Season, where we celebrate the birth of Christ, many of us find an even greater measure of burden, an even greater sense of stress. If everybody is saying that this is “the most wonderful time of the year” but it is not a wonderful time at all for you, doesn’t that simply make the burden bigger? And, consciously we know that we cannot buy our way out of stress but we are constantly bombarded with that temptation.

We don’t need the stress of Christmas; we need the rest of Christ, the peace of Christ. Jesus brings that to us. We need to notice two things about this promise that Jesus makes to those of us who are weary and burdened. The first thing that we need to notice is the self-revealed character of the one who makes this promise. Jesus describes himself in this passage as “gentle” and “humble of heart.” There is something so reassuring about the character of Jesus. We are to be thankful that the one who seeks to alleviate our burden does so gently, not dictatorially, humbly, and not haughtily. This is a Savior that saves from a kind heart, which is what is needed by those who are beaten down and need to be lifted up.

The second thing that we need to observe about this promise of Jesus is that because it comes from Jesus it is a promise that will be kept. Though gentle and humble of heart, Jesus is also the Son of God and very God in his own right. This is no “pie crust promise” – easily made and easily broken. This is the promise of the savior, who always keeps his promises. Because of the work of the cross, Christ can promise us rest.

There is one other thing that we ought to hear from Jesus this morning in this word of comfort that he gives and that is the comfort comes with work. Jesus doesn’t promise us that if we come to him our lives will be taken up by “bon-bons and Oprah”, or, “chicken wings and Sports Center.” Rather, Jesus says that when we come to him and rest in him, he will give us an easy yoke, and a light burden. A yoke is an instrument of work, and is certainly true of a burden. Jesus doesn’t remove work and purpose from our lives, he just radically reorients it toward his purposes. And because it is *his* purposes, he pulls the yoke and he has done the heavy lifting already. We can rest in him, and we can work alongside him – and in both we will find his promises and his purposes.