

JULY 9, 2017 BUCYRUS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

“COME TO ME” Pastor Becky Smithey

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Matthew 11:28-30, *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

“Come onto me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” We know these words. These words are grafted deep into our souls.

Matthew 11:28-30 is one of the greatest Bible verses in the New Testament. This teaching is like a diamond, a ruby an emerald, or whatever jewel that we treasure as enormously valuable.

It is one of those Bible verses that you and I need to memorize. That is, we need to put these words into our memory bank because they are so true, because we use them so often. This Bible verse is like John 3:16 or the 23rd Psalm or I Corinthians 13 or any other favorite Bible verse that you memorize. These words are great. These words are so true for our daily lives.

We need to memorize Matthew 11:28-30. Would you please say these words after me:

Come onto me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For I am gentle and humble. You will find rest for your souls. My yoke is easy and my burden is light.

What great words. What powerful words. What life shaping words.

“Come onto me all who are weary and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” That simple line is so powerful. One time in an adult Bible class years ago, I asked people what this verse meant to them.

The following are quotations from members of that class. Listen carefully. These words are sacred. These words are from the real world of real lives of real people:

--“When my husband was killed in an industrial accident, it was as heavy a burden as I ever carried, and in that process, God did give me rest. God carried my load and also gave me the strength to carry my load.”

--“When my husband died much too young, I could not pray because I was numb. I was incapable of praying but my friends lifted me up in prayer, upheld me in prayer, and I knew that I was being lifted up and supported.”

--“It seems that we work like crazy in carrying our loads in life, but Jesus is offering a tool to do the job more effectively. Jesus was creating a picture that people could understand. People could understand that he would fashion the well-fitting yoke that would make it easier to carry the loads of life.”

--“The story that God will give us rest reminds me of the contemporary parable about the footprints in the sand. Two pairs of footprints were in the sand, walking side by side. Suddenly, there was one pair of footprints. God said, “That is when I picked you up and carried you.” God lifts us up and carries us when the burdens of our lives are difficult.”

--“When our daughter was murdered, we could not have coped without the Lord and the love of friends and pastors.”

The list of comments continues: Listen carefully and you will hear the Word of the Lord, written by the Spirit active in the lives of real people.

--“This means, no matter what happens, God will be with me.”

--“This means never having to feel alone.”

--“This means having a sense of peace when carrying the small and large burdens of every day.”

--“This means that God is waiting to carry our burdens.”

--“This means that in times of trauma, friends lift us up. Friends are the hands of God.”

--“I have learned to pray *before* the burdens get so heavy and that helps me.”

--“Don’t wait for the big crisis to finally go to God.”

--“When the stress of everyday life becomes too much, coming to God in prayer is a great relief.”

--“When all things seem impossible, I think of this verse. When I do this, I find an inner peace, and the problems eventually get solved.”

--“After eleven years of battling drinking, I prayed to the God for help and eventually God lifted that burden from me.”

--“We have been praying that our brother, with his diabetic seizures, will take good care of himself.”

--“When the doctor told me that I had three years to live, the prayers that I prayed made me feel a huge burden was lifted off my back. That was eleven years ago.”

--“If you don’t have a belief in God, it is hard to get through the major problems of life.”

Yes, these words are sacred. These words were from the real world of real lives of real people:

Let’s us briefly look at this Bible passage for today. Matthew 11:28-30.

First, let’s briefly think about the situation. The context. The verses for today, Matthew 11:28-30 are an introduction to Matthew 12.

In Matthew 12, we hear about the Pharisees who were making religion very complicated and difficult. Their kind of religion was like a heavy yoke around people’s necks. Their religion consisted of don’t do this and don’t do that. Their religion was no, no, no, no, no. Don’t. Don’t. Don’t. Don’t. Don’t. Nix,

nix, nix, nix, nix. Theirs was a religion of 600 religious rules and regulations and rituals that people were not to do.

For example, in Matthew 12, Jesus and his disciples were walking through a field one Sabbath day and his disciples were picking grain in order to eat it. The Pharisees were upset that the disciples were picking grain because it was the Sabbath holy day. How ridiculous. No, no, no, no, no. Don't you pick grain on the Sabbath and eat it, even if you are hungry. No, no, no, no, no. How ridiculous. How absurd. How foolish.

In the next story, the Pharisees objected to Jesus healing a man with a withered hand because it was the Sabbath holy day and no one was to heal people on the Sabbath. How ludicrous. How ridiculous. How silly. No, no, no, no, no. Don't heal a man on the Sabbath, even if his hand is handicapped. No, no, no, no, no. How preposterous. How picky.

These Pharisees had turned religion into a series of rules, regulations and rituals which were like burdens on peoples' shoulders. Their religion consisted of six hundred no, no, no, no, nos. The religion of the Pharisees had become a burden, like a heavy yoke on the people's shoulders.

What a drag. What a burden. What a load.

Imagine, if you will, an oxen, with a heavy yoke on it. Imagine a big, old, strong oxen with a heavy yoke on its back, pulling a heavy plow. Under the Pharisees, that is what religion had become. A heavy yoke.

This was the situation that Jesus was addressing. Jesus said, ***“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”***

In this verse, Jesus is offering us an invitation, a grand invitation, an appealing invitation. His invitation is this: *“Come to me, all that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”*



--“Come to me.” Jesus is asking us to come to him because he wants to offer us rest. Jesus wants us to come to him, and asks us to come to him. This is Jesus' personal invitation for us to come to him and his presence.

--“All.” All people become weary and carry heavy burdens in life. He didn't say that particularly *good* people should come to him. *Nor* did he suggest that any *special group* should come like Jews, Christians, or whatever. It is the word, ALL. All people are to come to God. All people are invited to Jesus.

--“You” That means you and me. We are not talking about somebody else here but you and me.

--“That are weary and carrying heavy burdens.” In Jesus' day, those people who were weary and carrying heavy burdens were the poor, blind, lame, maimed, lepers. These were people who were sick. Jesus said, *“I didn't come to heal people who thought they were well, but people who knew they were sick.”* The Pharisees didn't know they were sick and in need of a physician.

How about *you*? What is it that wears *you* down? Wears *your loved ones* down? Wears *your neighbors around the globe* down?

Around the globe? Starvation, political oppressions, civil wars that go on for decades.

Or closer to home? Heart attacks, cancer, and similar diseases.

Or in your home? Divorces, unemployment, problems with the kids.

Jesus was making a personal invitation to all folks, including you and me, who were weary and heavily burdened in life to come to lay and put their burdens on him.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, thought that they had it good and had no need to come to Jesus with their burdens. They didn't know they had any.

What burden are *you* carrying? Let's pause for a moment. Let's be personal now. In your own mind, what are some of the major burdens in your life that wear you down? Please answer in the quietness of your mind.

Jesus invites you to come to him and leave your burdens at the foot of the cross.

Years ago, I remember being in Jerusalem at the Wailing Wall. Each person who approached the wall was to write on a small slip of paper about a burden and slip that white piece of paper into a crevasse in the wall. And leave that burden at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. This was good.

Sometimes on Ash Wednesday, I have had people write their sins and burdens on a piece of paper and drop it in a burning pot and the fire symbolically consumes their sins.

Sometimes at Good Friday services, people write a note to God on a sheet of paper and tape it to the cross in the front of the church.

In the Old Testament, there was the scapegoat who carried away the sins of the world.

In the New Testament, there is the teaching that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who carries away the sins of the world.

There is this liturgy in the church, this movement, this tradition of taking our burdens and dumping them on God who carries them away for us. .

This is a good invitation for you and me. Every day we are to bring our burdens to the Lord God and dump them on the back of Jesus so that he can carry them away for us.

This is the first invitation of Jesus, for all of us to bring our burdens to him and dump them on his back.

But there is a second invitation:

“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.”

The second invitation for you and me is to take up Jesus' yoke. Jesus said, *"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble."*

What is Jesus' yoke? The word, "yoke," symbolizes religion. The religion of the Pharisees was a thousand rules and regulations which essentially said, "No, no, no, no, no" to everything. Negative, negative, negative, negative, negative.

Whereas the religion of Jesus was simple and positive. To love God and love neighbor. To love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul and your neighbor as yourself. To be merciful, loving and kind. To have faith that moved mountains and carried momentous burdens. To worship God and love one's neighbor. Jesus' religion were simple *positives* like worshipping God and practicing mercy. The mood of his religion was that of a wedding feast.

We all *need* to wear the yoke of Jesus. We all *need* to wear the religion of Jesus. Love of God. Love of neighbor. Mercy, love, and kindness. A faith that moves mountains and carries momentous burdens.

We are all to learn from Jesus. Jesus is our teacher and we are his students or disciples. We are to learn gentleness and humility, love and forgiveness, faith and trust in the goodness of God. We are to have faith that moves mountains and carries momentous burdens.

This religion, Jesus' yoke, is easy compared to the Pharisees with all their harsh, negative rules.

--"Easy." Really means, "a perfect fitting yoke." Many Biblical scholars remind us that Jesus was a carpenter, and we often assume that Jesus was a *master* carpenter in his day. One of the primary jobs that Jesus would have done for others was to craft yoke for their oxen. Jesus would design and craft personally tailored yokes that would be a "perfect fit" for the shoulders of a particular oxen. The yoke wore easily, like a fine fitting pair of shoes or a fine fitting dress or suit. Because Jesus' yoke was well fitting, it was both easy and light. To pull a plow with ill-fitting yoke created unnecessary burdens for the oxen. And the Pharisees created unnecessary burdens for other people to carry.



Not only does it make a difference if it fits well, but when two are pulling together, the burden is shared. Why not walk with Jesus by your side, sharing your load?

In this Bible verse, Jesus offers us two grand invitations that are appealing to us all:

First. *"Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest."*

Second. *"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble. My yoke is easy and my burden light."*

Amen.