

The Challenging Faith: The Yoke of Community

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Matthew 11:16-19; 25-30

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“Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” These words from Jesus are a comfort to many of us. How many of us feel weary right now? Our society often runs us ragged. The demands of work, family and even church can make one weary. You never have a moment to yourself. The “To Do List” never seems to get shorter. It can be hard to disconnect from life and find a moments rest, even if we try to get away. I don’t know about you, but I don’t really look forward to taking vacations mainly because I have to do double the work just to be gone for a week, let alone nearly three weeks. Our trip to Australia was wonderful, but between all of the pre-vacation work and then having to be back to work one day after landing made me want a second vacation as I suffered from jetlag for over a week.

Another source of weariness can come from watching the news. More shootings, more disasters, more societal unrest and even war. It seems like a never-ending battle to try and make the world a better place. The rise in corruption, greed and exploitation compounds the many societal struggles we see all around us. Is it no wonder that anti-depressant and anxiety medication usage is up in the country. Many of us even avoid watching the nightly news, trying to shield ourselves from the worst of it.

Add to all this the heavy burdens of responsibility piled upon us. What are some of the burdens you find yourself carrying? Burdens to provide for your

family? Burdens to do more and more so as to please others who depend on you? All of this can feel like a heavy weight around your neck.

Jesus says to us Come. Jesus sees the weary burdens we are trying to carry all by ourselves and says come and I will give you rest. This invitation to rest tells us that we don't need to do this all alone. Jesus is calling us into community. Into a new way of being in the world. Think about it, how often have you carried a secret burden that has worn you down until you finally seek out another person to confide in. Jesus is inviting us to come and admit we can't do it alone, to begin finding rest.

Philippians 4:6-7 says it this way, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." God reminds us that we cannot and should not carry these burdens alone, as the song says, "Let us lay our burdens down" at the feet of Jesus.

The second thing that Jesus calls us to do is to learn from Jesus. In Jesus time the yoke used for service became a symbol of exploitation and occupation by the invading countries like Rome. People were looking for a deliverer from the Roman occupation. But this occupation went deeper than that. It was an occupation, an exploitation of the soul that Jesus came to liberate us from. Jesus is inviting us to not only take off the yoke of oppression, but to put on the yoke of the kingdom of God by following Jesus' example of service.

If you are at all familiar with yokes and harnesses you know that you often yoke a team of service animals, horses, or oxen typically, in pairs to one

another. When Jesus invites us to learn from him, we are being invited to be yoked with Jesus to learn how to work as a team together. This is an invitation into the community to share our burdens and to learn to be in covenantal relationship with one another.

Our burdens have not gone away but are shared. When one is weary the others support them and vice versa. The Kingdom of God is a new way of being in the world. The call to discipleship begins with us being liberated from the exploitive ways of the world, where each person is out for themselves, and we take on the yoke of Christ.

Paul once again, says in Galatians 6:9-10 “So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all and especially for those of the family of faith.”

The call to discipleship is a commitment to a covenantal bond of service to one another that we have learned from Jesus. When we are yoked to Christ, we are fulfilling what God called us to do, and that is love and care for one another. Sharing of our burdens and our strengths to a cause greater than ourselves. So come, let us take off the yoke of exploitation and take on Christ’s yoke of love and service to one another. For Christ’s yoke is easy and the burden is light when we truly love one another.