

Pastor Kris Litman-Koon

Date: 5 July 2020

Lesson: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

[Jesus spoke to the crowd saying:] ¹⁶“To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

¹⁷“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.”

¹⁸For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; ¹⁹the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

²⁵At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

How have you been doing? No, really: how have you been doing? This question is often how we begin small talk, but it can also be the door to a much deeper conversation. How have you been doing? How are you and I supposed to answer that now that we are half-way through 2020? My assessment of where we are in the year is that the glass is not half-full, nor is it half-empty. It kind of just feels like the glass shattered upon impact.

Not long ago I sent a message to an old friend and I began to type, “I hope this message finds you well.” Pfft. I suddenly thought how communities like ours are seemingly left to figure out our own course of action through a pandemic. I also thought of the senseless and unjust killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. So I rewrote the sentence: “I hope this message finds you righteously angry.” He appreciated the honest sentiment.

I do hope that you are well, though. I hope you are healthy and will remain that way, that in the midst of isolation you still feel connection, that this time permits you to find joy in simple pleasures of life: reading some poetry, challenging yourself to learn something new, dusting off and

riding a bicycle, writing a letter to an old friend. Those things make our hearts full, yet the backdrop of all this are events that can stir up a righteous anger within us: a world in a pandemic and people selfishly risking the lives of others, a nation grappling with its racism, a society recognizing its proclivity to see violence as the primary tool for resolving problems, households fearful of eviction, and a political environment that is almost certain to become more turbulent between now and November. All of this makes me realize that we are living in a time when it is possible for our hearts to be both as full and as heavy as they'll ever be in our lives.

So, how have you been doing? Verbalizing an answer isn't necessary. God knows I can't articulate what I'm feeling nowadays. We might experience the full gamut of emotions on any given day. That is okay. We are human, and God knows this. So we are invited... encouraged... to bring our whole selves to God, including the feelings we have difficulty naming. Jesus says today, *"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, 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."* It is a heavy time that we are now in, and these words of Jesus are an invitation and a promise that we all need to hear.

Jesus spoke these words to people who were following him because they desired to be a part of this expanding reign of God. A reign of God that welcomes the outcasts instead of shunning them. A reign of God that values the sick and the ill instead of viewing them as expendable. A reign of God whose occupants extend beyond any tribal or national territory. These people witnessed the power of God at work in Jesus, and they were drawn to this new kingdom... where they quickly learned a few things. They learned, just as we know, that the work of feeding the hungry can weigh on us. They learned, just as we know, that truly welcoming others and hearing their voices will challenge us. They learned, just as we know, that the pursuit of God's justice in an unjust world can wear us down. Humans aren't able to continually keep doing that work. So we are tempted to dilute our calling. We may downplay what our role is in God's work because we are uncomfortable with its challenges. "That's not my job." But what Jesus offers today is a healthy alternative to diluting the call we've been given. He knows firsthand how difficult and daunting this ministry can be, so he offers us a reprieve. When we need a reprieve from the work that God calls us to do, we can turn to

the one who needed an occasional recharge during his earthly ministry. We hear him say, *“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, 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.”*

So in Jesus we can lay down our heavy loads. This isn't skirting the work of our calling; it is the healthy act of taking a break -- recharging our batteries -- so we can once again be vessels animated by the Holy Spirit to care for the poor, to offer welcome to the outcast, and to stand with the oppressed. Yet that burden is not ours alone. The worries and the weight of this calling is not a mantle for us to carry by ourselves. So Jesus offers to carry that yoke with us, to carry the yoke for us; giving us a reprieve while he takes on the weight of the work for a time. Even when we have difficulty naming all the feelings that we are experiencing, we can find in Jesus the quiet and the prayer that we need.

When we step back and think about it, this time that 2020 is unfolding to be will perhaps be the most unique time of our lives. It's a privilege for us to be called into the work of God's reign during this time. It's a privilege to be able to point to God's care and justice while the world is going through this. It is a privilege, but the times are still difficult. So when you grow weary from the weight of this calling, remember this invitation and promise: *“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”*

Thanks be to God. Amen.