

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, July 9, 2023

Scripture: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30, *The Message*

16-19 “How can I account for this generation? The people have been like spoiled children whining to their parents, ‘We wanted to skip rope, and you were always too tired; we wanted to talk, but you were always too busy.’ John came fasting and they called him crazy. I came feasting and they called me a boozier, a friend of the misfits. Opinion polls don’t count for much, do they? The proof of the pudding is in the eating.”

25-26 Abruptly Jesus broke into prayer: “Thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth. You’ve concealed your ways from sophisticates and know-it-alls, but spelled them out clearly to ordinary people. Yes, Father, that’s the way you like to work.”

27 Jesus resumed talking to the people, but now tenderly. “The Father has given me all these things to do and say. This is a unique Father-Son operation, coming out of Father and Son intimacies and knowledge. No one knows the Son the way the Father does, nor the Father the way the Son does. But I’m not keeping it to myself; I’m ready to go over it line by line with anyone willing to listen.

28-30 “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

The title of my message today is: “*Just Plain Tired*” Pastor Mary Jo

Pray with me: Holy God, we come before you hauling around all sorts of burdens...you are well-aware how each one weighs on us. Oh God, we admit that we do not always ask for help when we most need it. Nudge us to realize that when we can’t lean on ourselves any longer, you have been here all along. Thanks!

When you take a vacation, how many suitcases do you take along? Are they so heavy that you can hardly lift them into the car?

When my children were growing up, we went on a family vacation to Washington DC. We borrowed my mother’s large, Samsonite, molded, pristine, *never-used* suitcase. At one point on the trip, when we were packing up to leave the hotel in the morning, one of my sons sat on the suitcase, so that it would close better. I snapped the latches shut, and he jumped off. Much to our surprise, the top re-opened and all of the rivets popped apart. It looked like something you might see in a cartoon. We laughed so hard we were crying! Not only had we “trashed” my mother’s suitcase, we still had another week or so of travel ahead of us. The burden of carrying that suitcase was now heavier and more awkward than before.

Just how much baggage do we carry? I’m not talking about jam-packed suitcases now, but other kinds of burdens. Sickness. Pain. Worries. Fears. Uncertainty. Let’s talk about this quote: God won’t give us more than we can handle. We won’t find those *exact words* in any version of the Bible, but the stories that fit into that category are many. This case is full, isn’t it?

(c2020 Dayspring, (in)courage) In a (Dayspring) devotional, Kristen Welch writes this:

“I sat across from a woman with dark eyes that told her dark story. As her hands wrapped around her cup of coffee, her eyes became pools of pain and I had to look away. She didn’t speak a word of English, but the translator didn’t need to tell me that she had suffered in this life and now carried the weight of the world. I could feel the heaviness.

A missionary arranged our unlikely meeting—me, a mom and writer—she, a middle eastern woman who had escaped oppression. We were joined together by the desire to [help women](#) in her country. As I listened to the violence she had endured, I couldn’t help but think of the saying I grew up believing,

“God won’t give you more than you can handle.”

*I’ve heard the words my entire life. I may have even spoken them a time or two. **And I’ve believed a lie.***

These words sound ridiculous to a mom who has buried her child; and to a teenaged girl who has traded sex for food; and to the woman who sat before me who could be killed because she follows Jesus.

That's more than anyone can handle. Yes, sometimes we are given more than we can handle. But all the time, we **have** One who can handle anything.

In today's Gospel lesson, Matthew 11:28-30 the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition, these are the more familiar words of Jesus:

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.
²⁹ 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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Who's handling the grief, the sickness, the pain and suffering, the poverty, injustice, financial insecurity; who's handling the parenting struggles, the hopelessness, the job-search? These words might make us want to run out the door screaming...knowing that our own personal *suitcases* are over loaded!

The words of scripture put another layer of stress on us. "How can I rest," we ask, "when the gut-wrenching hard times in life keep piling up?" The yoke that Jesus talks about must be defective...because it sure seems unbalanced.

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he wrote to people in the early Church who were being persecuted for their faith. He writes, (2 Cor 1:8-9:) "For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. **But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God... who raises the dead.**"

That' IT, isn't it? When we are weak and heavy-burdened, when we feel as though can't do it any longer; when we are fed up; when **it** has become too much; when we are running on empty; when it is beyond our capability to deal with...our grief, our loneliness, our anger, our loss, whatever it is that is weighing you down...

in that moment, **the strength of the God of resurrection** will be realized. "It has been with us all along!"

How do we know? Well, until we get to that point, we rely on **ourselves**, thinking "we've got this." Sure do! But, what we've got is: anxiety and sleepless nights. What we've got is: a focus on ourselves and our own misfortune. We are just plain tired of it all. We get argumentative. The dog starts barking at us! The cat runs and hides. We decide to pack up that old suitcase, and get away from it all.

I found this quote: **Create a life that you don't need a vacation from.** I am not sure who said it...but it draws me to Jesus and his words of blessed assurance: Matthew 11:28-30

"Are you tired? Worn out? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

There is a wonderful legend concerning the *quiet* years of Jesus, the years prior to his public ministry. The legend claims that Jesus, the carpenter, was one of the Master "yoke-makers" in the Nazareth area. People came from miles around for a yoke, hand carved and crafted by Jesus, son of Joseph. When customers arrived with their team of oxen, legend has it that Jesus would spend considerable time measuring the team: their height, the width, the space between them, and the size of their shoulders. Within a week, the team would be brought back and he would carefully place the newly made yoke over their shoulders, watching for rough places, smoothing out the edges and fitting it perfectly to this particular team of oxen. Hmm.

In the last few weeks, we have been following the stories of Jesus as he commissioned his Apostles to proclaim the good news, cure the sick, raise the dead, heal the sick, and cast out demons. He warns them that as they go along, they will be persecuted: "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of

wolves; so, be wise as serpents and innocent as doves,” he says. Jesus encourages them with the words: “Do not fear.” He tells them to welcome one another, and to BE welcomed in his name.

He is still-speaking those words to US>

Have you ever noticed that Jesus never says: “NOW, GO...I WILL SIT BACK AND SUPERVISE.”

He fits us with a yoke that is made exactly to fit our lives and our hearts. The yoke he invites us to wear fits us well, does not rub us wrong, nor does it cause us to develop **sore spirits**. It is specially designed for TWO, and he is our yoke partner.

Jesus said that he would help carry our burdens... we can trust that to be true...

Jesus tells us to “go and do likewise”...to help carry one another’s burdens. We can trust him to be with us.

There are some among us who hold inside the grief of losing loved ones. Help someone carry that burden today...and then, keep checking in on them. There are those that are hurting and healing and feeling a desperate need for the caring words that you can offer. Help lift that pain today.

There are those who are hungry, need clothing and need help finding a job; they have no place to lay their heads tonight. We, as a church are engaged in ministries that help those with such needs. If you have been thinking of volunteering, contact someone who is active in our outreach ministries. Don’t know who that is?

Raise your hand if you are a part of one of the Mission and Service activities here at First Congregational as we reach out into the community and the world. Look around.

The scripture today is not just about **us** being physically *just plain tired*. It is not just about taking some sabbath time and getting in touch with God...or communing with nature in the woods up North. It is about us and for us to take seriously the cost and joy of discipleship as we continue to serve one another. Think of all that has been accomplished in our outreach ministries and all that is still possible because we have been *just plain tired* of injustices all around us; *just plain tired* of knowing that there are people among us who go to bed hungry at night and do not have decent living accommodations...*just plain tired* of hearing about other people having economic insecurity....**and we have been moved to do something about it!**

Looking ahead with hope, to the day when there will be a “just world for all,” it is clear today, July 9, 2023, that the yoke is still uneven. We might be at least *a little guilty* of letting Jesus carry his side, with us, on the other side, dragging our feet and waiting for someone else do the work.

I am here to remind you today that when you have wearied yourself with **your** burdens, and do not know which way to turn, remember that we are yoked with Jesus. **When we start thinking that we need a break from it all...might be the exact time that we will be empowered to do the hard things that feel impossible.**

Jesus stands beside us and reaches out his hand; and he is beside us as we, in turn, reach out to help lift the burdens of others. Think on these words: “*Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.*”

How much will we insist to pack and drag along on our own? When will we have the courage to hand it over to Jesus? Then, and only then...“Just plain tired” will no longer be an accurate description of you! Maybe we should start *packing* like we are going on a motorcycle tour...and our only ‘baggage’ can be fit into a gallon size freezer bag. Let’s leave the other baggage behind and wake up to God’s new day.

Let’s pause now and rest our souls as we dream of the many blessings yet to coming...and hear these words of thanks, written by Rachel Hackenberg:

The tree shall whisper thanks for the wind by which it dances though its roots cannot be moved.

The dove shall coo thanks for the small nourishing seed that has blown so far from flower.

The rock shall be still in thanks for the quiet stream pooling past it & softening its hardest points & edges.

*The violet shall radiate thanks for the taller grasses that shelter it from the harsh noonday sun.
The seagull shall clamor thanks for the tide that bears salty morsels and swells the breeze for flight.
The field shall murmur thanks for the summer rain that gently bends the hay and soaks the earth.
And I shall collapse in thanks (not weariness!) for all good gifts of creation & all sweet joys of love in life.*

Breathe in rest.

Breathe out thanks.

Benediction ~ Rev. Dr. Elyse Berry

O God of Rejuvenation, may we leave this place feeling alive, awake, and made for this day.

In you there is hope for satisfaction, while our hunger for justice remains everlasting.

May we find strength in gentleness and relief to heavy loads.

And may we carry your promise of refuge with us wherever we go. Amen. ~ Rev. Dr. Elyse Berry

Go now, this hour's worship has come to an end...let our service continue.

Preaching today, Pastor Mary Jo Laabs, Interim Associative Pastor for Congregational Life and Outreach
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