

Matthew 11: 28-30

I'm exhausted....I'm stressed to the limit...I feel drained....I'm running on empty... Have you ever heard yourself or someone else say those words? Even now in this time of lockdown there is still so much to do, so much to think about. At one time or another, most of us have been there. We live in a fast-paced world where we're often hurrying, rushing, working too hard until our energies are depleted and our well-being is in tatters. And then we come to church.

Welcome! Welcome to this church (and remember the church is the people so anywhere that God's people are), this place for tired, weary people. In our text for today, Jesus gives a clear invitation and a promise: "Come to me, you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Jesus understood this need. He knew the importance of rest, time for replenishing his soul. People were often crowding around him; they wanted what he offered--- healing, forgiveness, courage, hope, life. One of the amazing things about Jesus was his compassion, He never turned anyone away. But after days of teaching and healing, when he felt his energy waning, Jesus would steal away to a lonely place to pray—to "rest." In the text today Jesus is giving us an invitation from his own practice: Come to me... and I will give you rest."

What happens in the silence? If we can quiet our chattering "monkey mind" and be still, gifts are given that we cannot give ourselves. Jesus gives us some hints about the gifts. Listen again: "Come to me..and rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." A yoke is a harness, like the yoke over the shoulders of an ox. But Jesus' yoke is not restrictive; it provides a

useful structure. His yoke is easy. It's really a gift, a practice that harnesses for us a pathway to newness, aliveness. "Learn from this gift, this way that I offer you," Jesus says. "My burden is light." Did you get the double meaning? My burden is not heavy, but also..my burden is light--- energy.

With a little theological imagination, I want to suggest that there are at least four gifts wrapped in Jesus' invitation and promise. Gifts that come in the silence, when our heart is open.

1. The first is the gift of Sabbath time. Jesus is a Jew; he knows about Sabbath time. Sabbath provides the spacious context for Jesus' invitation. He's echoing one of the Ten Commandments: Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy. Sabbath is a gift, a day of rest. This rest is more than sleep; it's rejuvenation, restoration, re-connection to our life force, to full aliveness. In the Creation story God worked 6 days and then God rested on the seventh day. If it was good enough for God, it's good enough for us.

Being restful means living in the present moment, not regretting the past or feeling anxious about the future. Sabbath rest, if we practice it, infuses us with attention to the present moment. I don't know exactly what prayer is, but I know how to pay attention. Attend to the present moment; it's where God shows up--- God's energy, God's peace.

In his invitation, Jesus is offering Sabbath rest, and this rest is the pathway to renewed aliveness.

2. The second gift Jesus offers is release---the opportunity to let go of stresses and pressures, release the inner obstacles that block us.

Recently in my garden I could hear children playing and I could hear a child in the distance, chanting or singing, over and over, “Let it go, let it go.” I wondered what the children were playing; but I heard the child’s words as a direct message to me. “Let it go.” Then it dawned on me that the child was actually singing the chorus from the Disney movie “Frozen.” “Let it go, let it go.” A little child shall lead us!

Whatever dilemma, problem, or anxiety is clogging our insides, “let it go.” In the silence, this time of rest, I’ve sometimes imagined putting our anxieties on a little imaginary boat, and let them float off on the boat. Yes, the boat will come back, but keep putting the anxiety or worry on the boat. “Let it go.” For fullness of life to develop, emptiness is essential. Let it go.

3. The third gift in Jesus’ invitation is the gift of the inner wellspring: living water. When we can let it go, we’re removing the debris from the wellspring, this inner wellspring that wants to flow freely, to give us fullness of life. That wellspring flows with goodness; it’s the source of our aliveness. If we do our part in releasing the stresses, then calm energy, aliveness, can emerge—and it will even gush. . Jesus said to the woman at the well, “I will give you living water that gushes up to eternal life.” He doesn’t mean life in the hereafter; he means life—capital L—in the here and now. Gushing up in the Now. Jesus tells us, “I have come that you might have abundant life, fullness of life. (John 10:10) Not existence, not half-life, but aliveness, fullness of life. This life force comes to us from the inner wellspring—“that of God in every person,” as the Quakers say. But to get to our True Self, we have to let it go—let go of our stuff, and get back to the source, the well.

4. When we go to the wellspring, the inner wellspring, and take it in, we may receive a fourth gift - the gift of energy for our work in the world. If I don’t find my way back to the wellspring, I will not have the energy and inner resources to do my work in the world. Jesus is our role model; he was both a mystic and a social reformer; he was a contemplative and an activist. He was often going off to pray, to re-connect to the wellspring. Then he would head back to his ministry of compassion, justice, equality, non-violence. “My burden,” he said, “is Light.” Call it energy for goodness, for justice.

This pattern is the model for all of us. We all have our personal leadings, as we rebuild as we come out of lockdown there are many hurting people around us , as we are called for specific work that continues the mission of Jesus.

This is long-haul work, and we can’t do it without daily attention to our inner life, getting back to the wellspring. Jesus is still teaching us this wisdom, handing us the gifts—Sabbath, release, wellspring, energy for mission. All for the purpose of abundant life, for us and those we serve. Come to me, Jesus says—to my way, my practice. I will give you rest. This rest is better than sleep; it’s rest for the soul. He’s echoing Psalm 23: “The Lord is my shepherd.God leads me beside still waters. God restores my soul.” Restores my deepest self! When we get to the place of genuine rest, we re-connect with the inner wellspring, the source of life, abundant life. Let’s call it aliveness that gushes. Come to me, Jesus says, and find life-giving rest.

Amen. So may it be.