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Sandwich, Massachusetts 02563

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The Third Sunday after Pentecost

Today's sermon is taken from Matthew, chapter 11, verses 16-19 and 25-30.

O God, we come together because we need you, we need one another, and we need to hear your word; and if we hear it here, let us become so possessed by it that we become servants of it out in your world. Amen

I'd like to welcome you on my birthday (whoa! excuse me) -- well, welcome on this 4th of July weekend. Tomorrow we will be celebrating one of the most remarkable documents ever created -- The Declaration of Independence. We give God thanks for our freedom. We pray in our own small way we will contribute to the coming of the day when all the world's people will be free.

There's a delightful story about an elderly lady who had always wanted to travel abroad, and she had never ever been out of the country. So she started the process by getting her passport. She went to the passport office and asked how long it would take to have a passport issued. The clerk told her that she would have to take the loyalty oath first. "Raise your right hand please," he said. The lady did as she was told. "Do you swear to defend the Constitution of the United States against all its enemies, domestic or foreign?" was the first question. Her face paled and her voice trembled as she asked in a very small voice, "Ah, all by myself?"

Well, that would be a big responsibility for any one person to bear. The gospel reading for today is from Matthew: "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, 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."

What an interesting lesson for this particular weekend. I say it is interesting because there is a statue that stands in New York Harbor welcoming immigrants from almost every land on earth. We know her as the Statue of Liberty. Within the pedestal on which the great statue stands is poem by Emma Lazarus engraved on a tablet with these immortal words that described the highest ideals of this nation of immigrants: (One, I might say, that I was required to memorize when I was in school. I know we don't do those kinds of things anymore -- memorization -- but I'll never forget this)

"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,

The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Today we as a nation may not be quite as willing to extend that invitation as we once were, but thankfully Jesus still extends his invitation to all who would heed it. "Come to me all who are weary and burdened. I will give you rest."

Is there anyone in this room who knows what it is to be tired? Do you know what it is to be really tired? Yesterday Marion and I moved approximately two cords of wood. I have to tell you, I was so tired and Marion was so tired we could barely walk back to the house. We were tired!

I heard of a mom who was playing cops and robbers in the back yard on a summer evening, and one of her boys pointed a toy gun and shouted, "Bang, you're dead." She slumped to the ground, and when she didn't get up, a neighbor ran over to see what was wrong. The neighbor bent over, and mom opened one eye and whispered, "Shh! Don't blow my cover! It's the only chance I get to rest." (laughter)

Marion and I and busy moms are not the only ones who are tired, of course. Fatigue can take a toll on the best of us. I won't ask you if any of you have fallen asleep driving; fortunately, you lived to tell about it, but it happens more than any of us would like to think. Fatigue produces slow reflexes and poor decision making. There is evidence that some of the best known tragedies of the past several decades -- the Exxon Valdeze spill, the Challenger rocket explosion, the Chernobyl nuclear reactor meltdown, and the Three Mile Island near disaster were all caused in part by decisions made by people in critical positions who were suffering from fatigue, often caused by sleep deprivation.

Here again, I'm tempted to have you raise your hands if you have trouble sleeping at night. According to the Sleep Foundation more than sixty percent of Americans get less than eight hours of sleep. This is rest the average adult requires -- requires.

Forty-three percent of Americans report that several days of each month they are too sleepy to perform efficiently at work or at home. On a less dramatic scale, how many of us are grouchy and short-tempered with our loved ones simply and solely because we are tired.

It's almost as if Jesus had us in mind when he spoke those beautiful words: "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, 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."

You realize, of course, that a tired body is preceded by a tired mind; not always, of course.

Some people are tired because they do hard, physical labor. Others are tired because of strenuous recreational exercise, though not as many as you might think. Many people who are into running or swimming or basketball or some other strenuous sport will tell you that over time exercise actually produces more energy than it depletes. Sitting around doing nothing is the fastest way to grow tired and out of sorts. A tired body is preceded by a tired mind.

And, of course, I realize that exercise isn't for everybody. One man said his doctor told him that jogging would add years to his life. The man said, "I think he was right. I feel ten years older already." Most of us are not tired from straining our muscles. Most of our fatigue is mental. It takes energy to deal with people all day long. It is draining to sit in front of a computer screen. Many of us have jobs that are repetitive or that require precision, and so we drive ourselves into our homes barely able to put one foot in front of the other. We're tired; we're beat. We sometimes use the term "we're stressed." Then sometimes something quite interesting happens. The phone rings and a friend asks us to go shopping, or out for a drink, or dancing, or bowling, or golfing, or something else we enjoy. Suddenly we have a burst of energy that belies our explanation of fatigue. Have you noticed? Where does that new energy come from? It comes from our mind.

It is amazing how much energy people have who are driven by a sense of purpose. Ralph Waldo Emerson once said that the power of the Gulf Stream will flow through an ordinary drinking straw if the straw is placed parallel to the flow of the stream. The same is true of our lives. Align them with some great purpose, and it is amazing how much power, how much energy they can produce. These words of Jesus speak of the source of that energy: "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, 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."

The yoke suggests we are getting prepared to work in concert with Jesus. The rest that Jesus gives is not the bed rest of lying around doing nothing. The rest that Jesus gives is the rest of a renewed mind and a refreshed spirit. It is the rest of a new purpose for your life. Maybe you and I need to close a bargain with God. Do you have that sense of peace found in an encounter with God?

So many of us are tired because of mental and emotional conflicts that are draining us of our energy. We need to turn our worries, our concerns, our anger, our doubts and fears over to God, and we need to be yoked to Jesus. The elderly lady who went to the passport office didn't want to feel the weight of protecting the Constitution of the United States on her shoulders alone. That is a common mistake. Many of us are trying to shoulder burdens alone, burdens that Jesus would like to shoulder with us. Jesus said, "my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." A yoke is most commonly associated with oxen and other animals that are harnessed together so they help farmers plow. To be yoked with Jesus is to allow him to share the burden of our daily lives; to allow him to take off our shoulders the weight of trying to

solve our problems alone. I believe being yoked with Jesus is one of the secrets of a productive life.

I read about a trainer of Clydesdale horses. According to this trainer, the average Clydesdale was able to pull about seven thousand pounds. Put two Clydesdales together, however, their combined pull should equal eighteen thousand pounds. However, working as a team with proper training, the same two Clydesdales are capable of pulling twenty-five thousand pounds, more than three times as much as one Clydesdale.

In business that is called synergy. Get two people complimenting one another to work in tandem, and much more can be produced than either one working alone. Imagine then how effective our lives would be if we worked in tandem with the one who is the source of all ideas, the source of all energy, the source of all that has ever been created.

My grandfather owned a large dairy farm, and for a period of time when I was really young, he had oxen to move heavy loads on the farm. Whenever one of these oxen was being yoked in, the other, which might be on the far side of the farm yard, would come trotting up and stand beside the other one until it was yoked in also.

I believe Jesus stands today with the yoke upon his shoulders. He calls each one and says, "Come and share my yoke and let us plow together the long furrow of your life. I will be a true yoke fellow to you. The burden shall be on me."

How about you? Are you tired? Are you tired of being sick and tired? Are you ready to trust God with your worries and emotional conflicts? "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me," says Jesus, "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."

Amen

Transcribed by Phyllis K. Briggs