

Holy God, send Your Word, send Your Spirit, send Your love. Amen.

Do you ever lose track of time when you’re with someone?

There are people with whom I enjoy conversation – or silence – so much that hours could pass, and I wouldn’t really notice.

In fact, for me, my best days, the days that I say, “This is a really good day,” usually involve that kind of connection with another person.

We often feel that way with a new friend, or when we’re in love, or new parents.

When we love someone, we want to give them that gift of our most precious commodity, our time.

This is our invitation, my friends – to love Jesus so much, that we want to worship him with our most precious gift, our time.

We are talking about sabbath-keeping this season, Six days plus One each week, one that is different, that is holy, that is consecrated to God in a way that the other six ordinary days are not.

There are few things more wasteful in our culture than a day of non-productivity. You can hear the voices – inside, and out – clucking at what use you might have made of the time you spend in rest, or recreation, or creativity, or worship. “That day could have been used to make money, or reduce your piles of paper.”

There are few things more wasteful, in our culture, than a day of non-productivity. And few things more life-giving, if we can give ourselves over to the gift.

That is God’s command and God’s invitation. God loves it when we just hang out in God’s presence and love – which, at its best, is what worship is.

That God has given us the gift of time, years and months and weeks and days.

And has invited us to take one day out of seven to rest and recharge.

Can we take that gift? Often we feel we have to work for everything we receive.

Or, at least, I do. And when things are harder, I feel we have to work harder.

What if Jesus is telling us something radically different here?

What if Jesus is telling us, “Hey, *Come here, come to me all who work too hard and worry too much and are heavy laden and I will refresh you...*” –

Aren’t these about the sweetest words Jesus ever spoke?

Jesus has just been overheard in a moment of praise to the Father, in which he gives thanks that the secrets of heaven and earth have been revealed not to the professionally wise, but to “children,” by which he means his not-quite-getting-it disciples and the crowds of uneducated people following him. And Jesus has seen these crowds, how hungry they are for connection, for healing, for assurance that yes, they are okay; for a sense of “alrightness,” and so he issues this invitation beyond the disciples to everyone:
“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.”

I don’t think I’ve fully accepted that Good News yet. Have you?
I still live too much like I’ve got everything to prove,
like I have to offer it to God already perfected.
I think my tombstone should read, “She got it done!”
I like being useful. And often, I think my usefulness determines my worth.

But God says, “No. You’re worth everything because I say so.”
Jesus invites us to hand off the things that are too heavy for us –
how to make people we love be happy or be well or be employed;
how to make this church thrive; how to achieve peace in the world...
We get to hand all that off to Jesus and take on his burden, which is life and light.
And what do we get back?
A burden that Jesus says is light; a yoke of ministry that is meant to be easy.
Free of anxiety, free of fear, free of judgment.
We only have to say yes, to accept it. And then God can really use our gifts.

I once heard a retreat leader named Jonathan Linman talking about ministry. He said the deep abiding life of faith is the raw material in effective ministry. He quoted St. Seraphim of Serova, who said,
“Acquire inner peace, and a thousand around you will find salvation.”
He said “One of the greatest gifts of counter-cultural witness we can give to our society is to do less. Be more.”
That’s what Sabbath allows us to cultivate, the gift of being, when we resist the claim of the urgent in order to attend to the truly important;
when we resist the claim of the urgent, to attend to the truly important.

The more I reflect on Sabbath, the more I come to it as an icon of the Gospel.
Sabbath contains within itself the very heart of the Good News
which Jesus lived and died and rose again to make known to us.
Sabbath encompasses the love of God, the peace of God, the generous grace of God,
the mercy and thoughtfulness of God to provide rest for God's creatures and
creation; it reminds us that we are saved by Christ's work, not our own works.
Sabbath speaks of justice for all – because a day of rest gives those at the
lower ends of our economic spectrum that grace as well as the privileged.
Sabbath echoes of healing and restoration of the earth,
of reconciliation of persons with God, indeed of the whole cosmos with God.
Sabbath is the field Jesus talked about, in which a person sees a treasure,
buries it, and then goes and spends all he has to buy the field.
All of this is in the seventh day that God has given us,
that we give to God, if we want to draw near to God.

Beloved, we worship a God who wants us to know Her, to know Him.
That's the radical thing Jesus came to say, to show, to live:
no longer are God's people to stay far away, in fear of God's holiness;
God's people are to draw near in love. Jesus has given us access.

Beloved, Jesus invites us to come too, to offer ourselves extravagantly.
Not our leftovers, our "Okay, I can give you an hour, but..." Our everything.
That's what it means to take Jesus' yoke on us – it means we acknowledge that
he's in charge. A yoke is what oxen wear, to get driven around.
That's what this stole symbolizes – what oxen wear!
But, Jesus said, His yoke is easy. His burden is light.
Just imagine if we took off the yoke of proving it all, of pleasing everybody...
Can you imagine how freeing it would be to take that load off?
You can bet Jesus' yoke is light by comparison.

That is what we're promised when we enter this life of freedom Christ offers us:
we are invited to put all our weight on Him – all our cares, all our ambitions,
all our hurts, all our fears...

What burdens are you carrying – maybe for decades?
Can you put them on Jesus, let him carry them for you, with you?
I pray to get better at putting my weight on God,
not trying to take the weight of the world onto myself.
And it's not going to happen through my trying harder, but my yielding more.

God may also use us as agents of God's mission – but all that good stuff

God does through us does not earn us God's love and acceptance.

The love comes first.

The love has always been there, waiting for us.

The love is always behind us and ahead of us –

We can never get ahead of God's love.

We can only return to it again and again, like a batter sliding into Home –
and the umpire's call is a resounding, "Safe!"

Amen.

THE GOSPEL

Matthew 11:28-30; 12:1-8

[Jesus said] '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.'

At that time Jesus went through the cornfields on the sabbath; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. When the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, 'Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the sabbath.' He said to them, 'Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests. Or have you not read in the law that on the sabbath the priests in the temple break the sabbath and yet are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice", you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath.'