

## Sermon for July 5 based on Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30, Shivon Miller

Some of you may have seen the image by Genna Correll circulating Facebook this week with the drawings of 3 birds. The first bird is portrayed with one wide open eye, stepping forward with a “chirp”. Underneath it is labeled “early bird”. The second bird stands alert, wings at the ready, large round eyes focused ahead. It is labeled “night owl”. The third image showed a partially defeathered, belly up bird, lying on its back, feet in the air, head lulled to one side, tweeting out an “ugh”. The label reads “permanently exhausted pigeon”. The person sharing the image had added the caption “which one are you?” I do believe the population of permanently exhausted pigeons is on the rise.

There is a tangible, communal sense of weariness right now. Even if people are not feeling physically tired, head lulled to one side, they are expressing their emotional weariness – “I am so tired of \_\_\_\_.” Fill in the blank: pandemic, politics, racism, homeschooling, parenting, career, facemasks, violence, etc. We are a people tweeting out exhausted “ughs”.

It is into this world of permanently exhausted pigeons that God speaks the gospel today. “Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

This week I read this text in my own state of exhaustion. Already on an antibiotic for a sinus and ear infection, still trying to write an awesome Ethics paper, while learning how to join in creating an amazing church website, packing exciting Sunday School boxes and designing an engaging online VBS, simultaneously needing to entertain and provide for my own children, maintain our house and engage in actively considering what this pandemic means for our participation in sports, activities, school, church, etc. Ugh...I am so tired, there is so much to do, so much to carry.

At first hearing these words we can hear something like an invitation to a vacation with Jesus. They can be read like an advertising brochure. Are you weary? “Yes.” Are you carrying heavy burdens? “Well yes I am.” Then Come to Jesus! There you will find rest. They can create images in our heads of leaving everything and everybody behind and escaping to an undisturbed “spa”-like venue in which we can simply sleep, rest and renew on our individual island with Jesus. What do you picture when you think of the word rest?

For me the term “rest” does not conjure up the image Jesus provides next. Our scripture continues “Take my yoke upon you”. A yoke is that heavy wooden bar that lays over the necks of a pair of farm animals, allowing them to pull heavy working equipment. It is a harness that attaches two working animals together. “I will give you rest”. Here we are picturing a getaway from all our burdens and Jesus is talking about giving us a yoke, harnessing us for work? Our image of rest is rarely about “taking on” anything. When we long for rest we long to be freed from all that we have to take on.

Jesus goes on “learn from me”. Having recently become a student again I can tell you that “I will give you rest” and “learn from me” are two phrases I would NOT naturally put together. I think we would say we want rest to be a “learn free zone”, allowing our brains to “veg” out.

But Jesus says take on my yoke and learn from me and you will find rest “FOR YOUR SOULS”. For your souls.

Jesus is talking about rest that is deeper than temporarily setting aside our many to-do’s, temporarily turning off our brains and escaping to a location for naps and books on the beach and time in the pool.

That rest is not lasting. We come back and the burdens are still there and the weary rapidly returns. We are being invited NOT to “Come” to a location to hang out with Jesus but rather to “Come unto me”, to come into the very life, death and resurrection of Jesus – to die with him, to rise with him through our baptismal identities – for there we find rest FOR OUR SOULS.

A quick reminder I am in seminary right now so expect this may get a little heady... but recently in class we have been talking about Luther’s theological framework of Two Kingdoms. Luther believed that God was at work in the world through two strategies. In the right-hand strategy God works through the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus. In this strategy God frees us from sin, death and the devil through the life, death and resurrection of Christ. There is nothing we do to deserve or earn God’s love and mercy. Rather, the only use for the law is to show us our dependence on Jesus. We are freed from our need to prove our worth, for our worth is found in God alone. Think of the vertical axis of the cross – God comes to us, securing our identity in Christ alone and promising that nothing can take us from the love of Christ. We are saved – there is nothing we need to do, no exhaustive work necessary for our salvation is done.

This freedom through the Gospel then frees us to join God at work in the left-hand strategy. In the left-hand strategy God is at work ordering society for the good of all, the end of evil and the in-breaking of God’s kingdom here on earth. Because we no longer need to be concerned about our own identity, worth and salvation as that has already been secured, we are then freed to live for the sake of our neighbor. We are free to be the body of Christ – feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, healing the sick, comforting the lonely, advocating for the vulnerable. We are free to help bring the realm of God here on earth. Think of the horizontal axis of the cross – freed in Christ’s coming to us, we are then free to reach out for the good of the world God loves.

Now picture the cross, not standing tall, but laid out on the ground – can you imagine it looking like a “yoke”?

“Come to me all who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you...”

Is this what Jesus is calling us to come to? We are being called to take on Jesus’ yoke, to take on the cross and all that it means. In doing so, do we find rest FOR OUR SOULS? In the cross we are reminded that we are freed from having to earn our worth. We are worthy in Christ alone. Our worth is NOT found in our completion of tasks, in our job, our income, our abilities, our relationships with others, our success at living well, our ability to secure a legacy. Our worth is found in God’s unconditional love for us. We have nothing to prove. God loves us as children of God. We are not working for our salvation; it is secure in Christ. How much of what is making us weary is because we have forgotten this truth? We are often weary because we are trying to prove our worth to ourselves or someone else. We are often burdened by the projects that we feel will justify our life. Hear Jesus’ words – “Come to me - take my yoke”, remember your identity is in and through Jesus alone. Find rest FOR YOUR SOULS. Unlike the rest that ends when the vacation ends – we can always rest in this promise.

Resting in this promise, we are then freed to return to the work of the world for the good of our neighbor and for all of creation. We are freed, rooted in this rest in our souls, to love others in abundance, to serve without hesitation, to live knowing there is no way God’s love and mercy can be exhausted.

Most certainly this work in the world will make us tired. We are still finite beings with an infinite amount of opportunities to join God in caring for God's creation. Jesus has not invited us on a vacation. But is our *weariness* lifted when we once again come unto Jesus and remember our worth, our identity, our salvation is already worked out in Christ alone. Does that bring your soul rest? Ask yourself – all these things that are making me weary, why am I doing them? If your answers contain any element of proving your worth or finding your identity or securing your salvation – come to Jesus, take his yoke, learn from him. If your answers are for the good of my neighbor and the creation God loves, the soul that rests within you secure in the promises of God will give you strength.

I have had to actively consider this week, why am I exhausted? Am I still struggling to justify my own worth through a well written ethics paper, by creating an exciting VBS experience, by raising successful children? Or do I know my worth is through Christ alone? Do I do this work because I am freed to join God at work in the world? Can we be truthful about ourselves and what exhausts us and know Jesus meets us there with the invite to “Come”?

Come to me all you permanently exhausted pigeons...

Right before the invite to “Come” in our gospel reading today, Jesus says this:

“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 only to infants; yes Father for such was your gracious will. All 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...”

There is so much that is hidden from us, so much we do not know. We exhaust ourselves trying to figure things out that are not ours to understand. We find ourselves feeling de-feathered, flat on our back, feet in the air, head lulled to one side, lifting up our prayers - “ugh”.

So we come. We come to hear once again that we are freed – freed from our own weary attempts to work out our own salvation. Freed to take on Christ's yoke and trust in the steadfast promises of God. God is FOR YOUR SOUL - Come.