

**Sunday, October 13, 2024**

The Twenty-First Sunday After Pentecost

**Festal Evensong**

4:00 pm

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Preston Gonzalez-Grissom

on

Matthew 11:20–30

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## **Jesus' Radical Invitation to Rest**

This evening's gospel reading offers easily one of the most comforting lines in all of the Bible. "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." <sup>[1]</sup>

This evening, I invite you to walk on a short journey with me, exploring the experiences of two different people as they encounter this message of Jesus for the first time. I wonder which one you most identify with.

Imagine there are two sisters.

The first sister is the youngest. She has always been creative, energetic, and a generally positive person. She did okay in school but much preferred hanging out with friends, attending concerts, and seeking the next big adventure. We might graciously call her Type B.

She grew up in a church much like this one and she enjoyed it for all the reasons you would expect: She loved the music, the grandeur of the building, the dramatic liturgy. She even had a powerful personal prayer life. When things went wrong, she prayed to God for miracles, whether it's for relational problems or for a better-than-expected diagnosis. What's more she got to see things happen in her life she could only describe as miraculous. She is the kind of person for whom miracles happen. Do you know anyone like this?

When Jesus says to her, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest," she thinks, "All good so far." But then he adds, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." This is where the problem arises. Her Sunday School teachers didn't know she was listening but she was, she remembered what the word yoke meant—it's that hard, painful metal clamp around an oxen that makes it go where you want, much like the reins on a horse in the park, pulled tightly. It's also used to describe the yoke of slavery. So she feels skeptical; she wants the easy and light but not the yoke or burden. Jesus continues, "Learn from me, for I am humble and meek." She appreciates the humble and meek part but thinks, "I'll take some and leave others."

Eventually, the miracles slow down for her. She no longer sees God moving in ways she once did, and the responsibilities of the Christian life start to seem questionable. Inevitably, the liturgy becomes

stale, now she begins to wonder if the building is just a waste of money. When she hears that the Christian life requires responsibility that resembles being influenced—much less controlled—she leaves to try and find what she had with God somewhere else.

Jesus told the towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida, “If I did miracles in other towns like I did in yours, they would have repented, while you reject me.” <sup>[2]</sup> They want the easy and light but not the yoke and burden. Who could blame them? Isn't everyone like this? Not quite.

Now let us meet the older sister. She is Type A. She has gotten ahead in school and life by working hard and taking responsibility. She likes to be called things like good, intelligent, and under control. She questions her younger sister's experiences and miracles. If something cannot be explained in ways that are socially acceptable and seem intelligent, she is skeptical. As she grows older, she begins to feel behind, behind the image she has for herself—she must always do more, be more.

When Jesus says to her, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,” she feels this is no problem. She has spent most of her life learning from others, collecting well-worded sentences she can reuse to seem smarter. But then Jesus adds, “My yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

She likes the yoke; she has always appreciated that about herself—her ability to handle hard work and burdens, those she is used to carrying. But it's the *easy* and *light* that turns her away. The easy life is for the simple and naive; others may be satisfied with easy and light, but not her. She is skeptical of this Jesus, yet her desire to be considered good keeps her listening.

When he says, “Learn from me, for I am humble and meek,” she thinks, “Learning from him? No problem.” But when it comes to being humble and meek, she balks—it is too vulnerable. But before she can turn away, she hears Jesus praying to the Father: “I thank you, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, that your ways are hidden from the wise and intelligent, and you have revealed them to infants.” <sup>[3]</sup>

This presents a problem for her. The last thing thing type of person wants is to be a child, even a child of God. <sup>[4]</sup>

Both sisters will spend their whole lives looking for something that continually eludes them. Do you know what it is? Rest. The younger sister will hop from one energizing experience, relationship, or job to the next, yet rest will always seem impossible. She may crash, sure, but she won't find rest. The older sister will transition from responsibility to responsibility, with rest feeling like a lock for which other people have been given a key, but not her.

A common refrain when discussing rest is, “I do not know how.” But really, what we spend our lives looking for is not *how* but *who*—who will be the person or people that, when we are with them, our hearts can finally sit down inside.

The radically comforting part of Jesus' words lies not merely in his declaration that “My yoke is easy and my burden is light.” The radical point of this text is that Jesus says, “Come to *me*.” All things have been given to him. We are let in on a conversation between Jesus and the Father, and we are given the key.

Jesus thanks the Father for revealing these things to those who approach God like infants. The term “infant” refers to a little one who cannot yet speak. Jesus' secret is that he invites you to sit with him

when you have nothing interesting or impressive to say. The invitation this evening comes from Jesus himself. He asks, “Are you tired, exhausted, weak, empty, overwhelmed?

Come to me.” Come to him.

## References

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- 1 Matthew 11:28–30, KJV.
  - 2 Paraphrase of Matthew 11:21–22.
  - 3 Matthew 11:25.
  - 4 Erasmo Leiva-Merkikis, *Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word*, Vol. 1. Ignatius Press, 694..
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