

Stepping Forward to a Better Life:  
Keeping Company with the Weary  
Matthew 11:25-30

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Invitations: They grab our attention every day. Somebody is getting married, a friend is having a party, a business is hosting a luncheon and we are invited. What would our lives be like without invitations?

The greatest invitation ever offered came from the heart of Jesus Christ addressed to pilgrims like you and me. It is printed in your bulletin. Will you read it with me because it is Jesus' invitation to you?

*"Come to me all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; and you will find rest for your souls."* How will you respond to that invitation today?

**COME TO JESUS.** Several months ago, I stood at the foot of the Statue of Liberty and read once more those inviting words to immigrants landing on our shores. You know them as well as I:

"Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she with silent lips.  
"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-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

As I walked through those old buildings on Ellis Island, as I looked at the artifacts left behind by those people arriving those days, I tried to imagine what people must have felt as they came to this land of the free and the home of the brave. Is it not the hunger of every human heart to breathe free? Is that not the desire of all of us? Did you hear the weird story about a young man who joined the military on the spur of the moment without the slightest notion of what he had gotten himself into. Then reality struck that he had enlisted for four years and could possibly be sent to combat; the young recruit started grabbing every piece of paper he could find. He'd take one look at each piece he seized and lament, "This isn't it!" His sergeant walked by and the new recruit grabbed the officer's papers, took one look and shouted, "This isn't it!"

Recognizing there was something wrong with this young man, the sergeant sent him to the post psychiatrist. Instead of sitting on the couch, the young man started rummaging through the papers on the doctor's desk. "What are you looking for?" inquired the psychiatrist. "I don't know," said the soldier, "but this isn't it." The psychiatrist sat down and wrote up a Section 8 Discharge and handed it to the soldier. The young man took one look at it and started shouting,

“This is it! This is it!” Is it not the hunger of every heart to be free, to be really free?

Life is like a merry-go-round. It takes you round and round, up and down, but never seems to get you anywhere. Life is like a roller coaster ride. It lifts you high, slams you down, and jerks you around and lets you off at the same spot you started. One young mother lamented, “I’m so tired, my idea of a vacation is a trip to the dentist. I just can’t wait to sit in that chair and relax.” Paul said, “*I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do. Who will rescue me from this body of death?*” Jesus answers,

“*Come to me all you who are weary and carry heavy burdens and I will give you rest.*” He wants to set us free. Or as the Bible says, “*If Christ sets you free, you will be free indeed*” (John 8:36).

**TEAM UP WITH JESUS.** “*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.*”

Last time I preached this text a kid came up to me and said, “Dr. Olds, I thought a yoke was a part of an egg.” Thank God for the honesty of little children and their alertness. Today I am trying to give you a picture so you parents can show the yoke to your children and all you city folk who do not understand harnesses can look at it, as well.

Look at the sermon notes. A yoke is a piece of equipment put on oxen and occasionally humans in Jesus’ day enabling them to carry heavy loads. Just as two heads are better than one, two oxen can move more weight when they pull together. Here are some things you need to know about yokes:

- Yokes were always custom fitted, one size does not fit all
- Yokes do not remove the load, they distribute the load
- Yoke-mates must pull together as a team
- Yoke-mates are no longer free to do as they please

Jesus finds something familiar to illustrate his point. People walking down the roads of His day would see this again and again and so He just picks it up right out of life and says, “*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.*” *Team up with me.*

If life is a game, we will be wise to learn the basics from the Master. Isn’t that the invitation that Jesus is giving? Remember that old story about Vince Lombardi who took the Green Bay Packers from fifteen losing seasons to successive world championships. One day after a brutal defeat Lombardi walked into the locker room, waited for things to get quiet, held a football high in his hand and said, “Gentlemen, this is a football.” After a long silence a big, 320-pound tackle said, “Coach, could you go over that one more time?” I don’t know about you, but I am constantly saying to Jesus, “Could you go over that one more time?”

Jesus gently replies:

*“Consider the lilies of the field, watch how they grow.*

*Watch the birds of the air, how freely they fly.*

*Count the stars in the sky, remember who put them there.”*

Try smarter not harder. Have you discovered that in life?

- Persons already in a hole seldom reach their destination by digging harder in the wrong direction.
- When we are in over our heads, it's time for observation, evaluation and often change.

Take My yoke upon you; learn from Me. In the Church we call that discipleship. That is what Christian living is all about.

- Not ease, but new equipment
- Not burden free, but burden bearing
- Not escape, but extra strength to do what you are challenged to do

Does not the Bible say, *“I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength”?*

**REST IN JESUS.** To these invitations Jesus offers a promise, *“You will find rest for your souls.”*

This is not an invitation to take a nap in church. I had a youth minister once who made a habit of sleeping through my sermons while sitting beside me in the chancel. Needless to say, he didn't work for me very long. Many will get away this weekend and come back more stressed and tired than when they left.

The invitation is not ‘Come, let Me tuck you in bed, hold your hand and sing you to sleep.’ That is not what Jesus is saying. There are too many sleeping Christians already. The invitation is ‘Come, let Me give you a reason for living, a zest for life, a lightness of being that will transform your days into joy and your work into celebration and your life into praise. Is that not the rest for which our souls truly long?’

Richard Foster says in one of his books, “In a country of noise, hurry, crowds, in a country of climb, push and shove, Jesus gives a different invitation. Jesus invites us to come into the living room of His heart, where we can put on old slippers and share freely, come into the kitchen of His friendship where we can chatter and batter and mix in good fun. Come into the dining room of His strength, where we can feast to our heart's delight. Come into the workshop of His creativity where we can become co-laborers with God. Come into the study of His wisdom where we can grow and stretch and ask all the questions we want. Come into the bedroom of His rest where we can know and be known.

Come to Jesus all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens. Take His yoke upon you and learn from Him, and He will give you rest for your souls.

Amen.



