

**“You Are Invited”**  
Matthew 11:25-30

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Day by day they appear at our doors. They arrive by mail and e-mail, by telephone and television, by newspapers and even in person. We call them invitations. A friend is getting married. A school is raising funds. A store is having a sale. A special event is about to happen. YOU ARE INVITED.

There is a deeply personal and eternally significant invitation that I extend to you today. It comes not from me but from our Lord. Here is what it says:

*“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.”*

Jesus of Nazareth requests the honor  
of your presence,  
The Lord of sea and sky has heard  
his people cry.  
The Lord of snow and rain has felt  
his people’s pain.  
His hand can save us!

So as simply and profoundly as I know how to say it today, “Come to Jesus.” The invitation that I extend to you is not to a building, not to a church, not to a system of beliefs, not even to a company of people. The invitation I extend to you is to an authentic, dynamic, relevant, redemptive, relationship with Jesus Christ.

You who are **weary**, come. Long before the haunting, horrible, defining day of September 11<sup>th</sup>, Scott Peck opened his popular book, *The Road Less Traveled*, with these words: “Life is difficult.” Indeed it is. Whether you are married or single, young or old, rich or poor, proud or humble, independent or dependent, you are going to need a little help now. Come to Jesus.

Late night TV talk show host, Conan O’Brien, his first night on the air after the tragedy, began by saying these words, “I don’t know exactly how we are going to do this. But we are going to try. Today I did something I haven’t done in years. I went across the street to St. Patrick’s Cathedral where I sat in silence and prayed. I needed someone; I needed something to help me.” You, who are weary, come.

You who are **worried**, come. On lighter days, I might have said, “Throw your fears to the wind.” After all, about 60% of the things you worry about are

unfounded, about 20% of your fears are already behind you, about 10% of the things we fear are so petty that they really don't matter anyway. Of the remaining 10%, half of it you can't do anything about. So on a lighter day I might have said to you, along with Bobby McFerrin, "Don't worry, be happy." But I would be talking to the wind to say that today. We are worried, and no amount of positive thinking is going to chase the fears away. We are worried about our safety and security. We are worried about our sons and daughters going to war. We are worried about our assets evaporating like the morning dew. We are worried about our ways of life being altered forever. Casey Stengel once said, "There are two kinds of baseball managers. There are managers who have been fired and managers who will be fired." We wonder about our jobs too.

I say as humbly as I know how to say it as your friend today, bring your fears to the Lord. Look full in His wonderful face. Somehow in the depth of your soul, at the center of your being, catch a glimpse of His wonder and grace. Embrace those things, which are eternal and everlasting, that are not transient even in these shifting sands of times.

Actor Jimmy Stewart enlisted in the Army Air Corp in 1941 and prepared to go overseas. Like so many fathers of that era, Jimmy's dad really couldn't say what he wanted to say. So as his son walked out the door to go to war, he handed Jimmy a letter. When he opened it, this is part of what it said:

"My Dear Jim Boy, You are on your way to the worst sort of danger that I could imagine. I am really banking on the enclosed words of the 91<sup>st</sup> Psalm to see you through. I love you more than I could ever say and I will pray for you every day. Love Dad."

Jimmy Stewart said, "I found an anchor in those first two verses of the 91<sup>st</sup> Psalm." Do you remember what they say? "You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty will say to the Lord. My Refuge and my Fortress, my God in whom I trust." You who are worried, come.

You who are **wayward and wandering**, come. In a class I teach on Wednesday nights, someone asked me if I think this is a religious wave or a religious awakening that we are experiencing in our country right now. I have thought about that a lot. I think that you and I will decide that answer. Which will it be for us?

John Rogers is an Episcopal priest in Virginia. Late one night, he got a telephone call from the bus station in downtown Washington. A young man was on the phone who had grown up in John's parish. He had gotten into drugs, lost touch with his family, now he was out of work, out of money, and needed help. John said to him, "Stay right where you are and I'll come to get you." He got in his car, went down and picked up the kid and brought him home. John let him talk into the wee hours of the morning. When he finally ran down a bit, John

Rogers said to him, "Have you ever asked Jesus Christ to help you?" "No," said the boy, "but you know when I get myself together, I'm going to come back to church, and then I'm going to ask Jesus to help me." Rogers replied, "It's never going to happen that way. You're going to have to come just as you are and then He will give you the strength to become what you were created to be. If you wait until you're better you'll never come at all." You, who are wandering, come today.

Come to Jesus. **Learn from Jesus.** "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me." "Join the team," Jesus might have said had He been speaking in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A young teenager came to me after the 8:30 service and said, "Dr. Olds, what is a yoke? For all the children and adults, who don't want to admit that they don't know, make a straight line across your paper and put two "u's" at the end, you have a picture of a yoke. You tie a rope in the middle of it and you have a harness by which two oxen can move a load. It was a common harness in Jesus' day. A yoke is team equipment. Oxen, and sometimes humans wore them in Jesus' day to pull heavy loads.

There are a few things about a yoke that you need to know. Yokes were always custom fitted. They were always tailor-made to the individual. Yokes don't remove the load; they only redistribute the load. Yoke-mates must pull together as a team; they must do it as a unit. Yoke-mates are no longer free to do as they please. They must obey each other so that the load can be moved in the long run. The choice of a yoke-mate is extremely important. It is also true in normal life.

Thomas Wheeler was Chairman of the Board of Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company. He and his wife were driving in the country one day close to where his wife was born. Noticing that he was low on fuel, Tom pulled into this seedy, dilapidated, one-pump gas station. A man came out and immediately struck up a lively, animated conversation with Tom's wife, while Tom pumped the gas himself. Back on the road, Tom said to his wife, "Did you know that guy?" "Did I know him?" repeated the wife, "We dated all through high school. I almost married him." "Boy are you lucky," said Tom, "Had I not come along, you could have been stuck in that dilapidated old service station for a lifetime." "My dear," said the wife, "if I had married him, he would be the Chairman of the Board for Mass Mutual Life Insurance Company and you would be pumping gas!"

Yoke-mates make a lot of difference. Your faith makes a lot of difference. The God you choose to yoke with now makes all the difference. The Lord you choose to serve now in the depths of your own souls will shape and form your destiny for years and for eternity. Choose your God well. **Choose your God well.**

"Team up with Me," says Jesus. "Learn of Me." There are some plays in this game that we have yet to master. What are the real symbols of success as a

Christian? How can we make suffering redemptive? How do we even start to love our enemies? What is the true meaning of community? I've been on this trip a long time and I've only begun to learn some of these things. But today and last week and in the days and weeks to come, I've got a feeling that we'll have to sink much deeper into our faith. The trivial, surface faith that has sustained us in previous times will not be adequate now. Now is the time to dig deep into your soul and find the ways of God.

This is a time for 'Gorilla Goodness.' It is time to take Christianity and put it in the trenches. It is time to take your faith and apply it to your daily life. It is time to exercise your beliefs in the routines of your day. Maybe it's happening. If the article in the *Tennessean* yesterday was right, Americans are kinder, more patient in wake of this tragedy. Even at the Metro Traffic Violations Bureau, people are more civil. To complain now, seems trivial. Crime is down in America. It's time for 'Gorilla Goodness'; to put our faith into practice in the marketplace. *Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me.*

One more thing, come to Me all you that are tired and weary of life's heavy loads. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me and I will give you rest. **Rest for your souls**; rest that comes from forgiveness at the heart.

Do you ever think of the church as a garbage dump? I know that's hard, isn't it? In all the beauty of this place, to think of this place as a garbage dump is almost more than I can bear. But that's what it is. Yes, I need to bring the Lord my gratitude. But there's something else I need to bring to the Lord. I need to bring my sins to the Lord; my shame to the Lord. I need to confess my sins so that God who is faithful and just can forgive my sins as God so deeply wants to do. I need to bring my hate and my revenge. I need to bring my anger and my bitterness. I need to bring the broken places of my life so that the great Healer can begin to touch them and put them together again. Bring your garbage to this place so you can find rest for your souls. Find peace here.

Deitrich Bonhoeffer, a leader of the Confessing Church of Germany, was arrested and thrown in a concentration camp. As Bonhoeffer lay in a darkened cell, he hears a fellow prisoner weeping from the cell next to him. So Bonhoeffer says to him through the wall, "I am a pastor. Would you like to pray?" "I don't believe in prayer," came the reply. But, undaunted, Bonhoeffer continues, "If you can hear me, put your hands on the wall as if you were touching mine." Then the great religious leader offered this prayer:

Lord, it is dark in me, but in You is day.

I am alone, but You will stay.

I am afraid—You never cease.

I am at war—in You is peace.

And the great martyr wrote that he heard the tapping of the hand on the other side of the prison cell. A soldier on his way to his death had heard and received that prayer.

*My dear friends, today I don't know what's ahead for us. But I do know that the peace of Christ can abide in your heart and life everyday. I know that. I believe that. So as your friend and your pastor today, I say this as simply as I know how --May the peace of Christ be with you!*