

## Burdens Easy & Light

**Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**  
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**First Presbyterian Church**  
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A rabbi once gave a teaching where he said something like, “We often think Sabbath means not working, but really it is resting from creating,” which is what God did. And yet, many who look at Sunday or even the weekend as Sabbath use it as a time to catch up on things that didn’t get done during the week – things like projects, chores and errands.

The result of this is you finish Sunday feeling like you didn’t get everything done. And all you had planned gets put on next weekend’s to-do list.

Imagine instead, setting aside one day a week where you have absolutely nothing that is expected of you, nothing expected of you. Can’t you feel those burdens lifting, that spiritual rest settling in, even now, just imagining it? Nothing expected of you, right now. It feels wonderful, doesn’t it?

So much of what God wants for us – the blessings he has for us – are right there for us to receive, and somehow we don’t pick up on them. Our eyes are so clouded by worldly expectations we fail to see what God is offering. Our hearts are so jaded and skeptical that we don’t believe God’s promises, not in a world like ours.

We have so many responsibilities there’s just no time to explore what Jesus teaches us, how to live a blessed life as a child of God, how to truly receive the protection, comfort and care of the Lord, and rest in that.

Today’s New Testament lesson is an opportunity to consider what it would be like to take Jesus up on his offer when he says, “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.”

Jesus’ burden is light? Jesus bore the greatest burden imaginable! He withstood all manner of temptation, dealt faithfully and justly with every type of person imaginable, and stayed the course even when doubt and fear set in, all the way to the cross.

How in the world is Jesus’ burden light and easy?

Because of his faith in God and his faithfulness to God. When Jesus’ earthly ministry weighed him down, he retreated to the mountain or another secluded place and turned everything over to God. And that’s what we are invited to do – turn everything over to the Lord.

Seeing us struggle in this, Jesus says, “To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’”

Here Jesus is calling us out for having unrealistic expectations. He’s saying we’re like children who expect the world to revolve around our every want and need – like children pretending to be at a wedding where everyone is expected to dance to the same music, the flute; or at a funeral where everyone is expected to act a certain way, crying and mourning the loss.

Jesus is calling for adult behavior, and he sees us struggling with that, saying, “John (the Baptizer) came neither eating nor drinking, and (you) say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and (you) say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!’ So inconsistent, so judgmental, so small-minded.

Adult behavior – spiritually mature behavior – means being gracious with others, consistent in our judgments, and wise in our decision making.

Why is that so hard to do – a little grace, good judgment, wise decisions? Such mature and wise behavior is hard for us, particularly when we don’t have good role models to follow.

Take for instance the Nebraska judge who was under investigation for allegedly tossing firecrackers into a colleague’s chambers, signing court documents with the name “Adolf Hitler,” and setting a defendant’s bail at “a zillion dollars.”

According to the Chicago Sun-Times, the charges were filed by a second judge who was disgusted by such juvenile behavior. However, the second judge has since admitted to making pig noises at the first.<sup>1</sup> These are the types of people running our society.

We need someone to be the adult in this world. We need people to quit acting like children, even as we ourselves try to be more mature and wise and thoughtful with others. How can we put ourselves on the path to such spiritual maturity?

Ironically, we do that by looking toward God as a child looks toward a loving and supportive parent.

In teaching about the need for spiritual maturity and thoughtful and consistent behavior, Jesus says, “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 to infants.”

At the time of Jesus, those who were considered wise and intelligent were the scribes and the Pharisees – people with a lot of book knowledge but little-if-any spiritual maturity. Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> From The Los Angeles Times, as picked up by the Minneapolis Star Tribune, where Training magazine found it (June 1998), 18.

knew he would never reach them with his message of love and compassion, devotion and faithfulness.

But the disciples – the ordinary men and women trying to do their best – those are the ones he called to be his followers, because like infants, they were open to new knowledge, they were in need of a trusted and loving presence, someone who they could count on in all circumstances, someone like Jesus, someone like God.

If we think we have to be in charge of fixing everything, if we think that we're the only ones who know what's right, there's not much room for God. If we think we can handle it all on our own – whatever it is you're struggling with – there's no way for God to lend a hand. And when we let ourselves get so overwhelmed with all that we have to do – all the burdens we bear – it's hard to imagine ever letting up, ever taking a step back, ever finding a better way forward.

And yet, that's what Jesus is telling us to do. He says that when we are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, that's when we need stop struggling so much. "Take my yoke upon you," says Jesus – let's trade burdens. Mine is easy and light; I've already carried it, all the way. And yours – your burden – well, says Jesus, I've got that.

For those willing to set aside being right all the time, set aside your preconceived notions and expectations; for those truly open to what Jesus teaches, the wisdom he embodies; for those who know they need God's guidance, protection, blessing and care, all that heaviness the world lays upon you, all the worries you have, they're safe in Jesus' hands. Place them there right now. Jesus loves you, and Jesus can and will carry your burdens. So rest in that. Rest from all that burdens you. Jesus has this. Jesus has you. Amen.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

### **Let us pray:**

Gracious and merciful God, we come to you in prayer, and lay before you our anxieties and failures and pains. Forgive us when we worry – when we worry about the weather, when we worry about how we look, when we worry about our finances, our families, what the future will bring, when we worry about our jobs, our health, our weight. And sometimes we just worry about our worrying, ours or someone else's.

Remind us, O God, that you know our needs, and you care about us and love us. In your amazing grace, we find help and hope and assurance. In your grace, we are empowered to look to a future filled with your presence, your guidance, your protection and care.

We pray your healing touch upon those dealing with illness and disease. We pray your comfort and care for those dealing with the effects of aging and the fear and struggles they bring.

We pray all this in your name, O Lord, and as you taught us, joining in the Lord's Prayer, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**