

“Come...all” Matt. 11:28-30 9/13/20

When I was a Bible college student in Philadelphia, before I got kicked out of that school- but that’s another story! Let’s just say it wasn’t a good fit! Anyway, most Sunday mornings I would walk about a mile to 10th Presbyterian Church at the corner of 17th and Spruce for worship. I went mostly to hear Dr. James Boyce, who was one of the best preachers I have ever heard. Dr. Boyce would begin each worship service with these words of Jesus: ²⁸*“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”* (Matt. 11:28-30)

Those words of Jesus from Matt. 11 gave comfort to my young soul, and I still use these words of invitation when we gather together to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. I think there is a lot packed into these few verses, and I’d like to take a couple sermons to unpack them. I think you’ll find it to be rewarding!

We’ll begin with the first phrase this morning, *“Come to me all who are weary...”* We live in a world that often portrays Christians as narrow-minded, bigoted, and exclusivist because we believe that salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone. People think that we see ourselves as better than others, as holier-than-thou. And, sadly, sometimes we act that way!

But when we act like that, we are not reflecting Jesus, the founder of our faith. Although he did claim to be the unique son of God, through whom God was saving the world, here in Matthew and elsewhere, he invites anyone to come to him and receive God's grace! "*Come to me, all who are weary...*"

And he lived those words! Think of the wide variety of people with whom Jesus interacted and invited to follow him. He invited Levi, a tax collector for the Romans, to be one of his disciples. Tax collectors were hated by most Israelites, because they collaborated with their Roman occupiers, and cheated their own countrymen out of the little money they had. But Jesus invited a tax collector to be one of his disciples. And, then he invited Simon the Zealot to be a disciple! Zealots were as politically different from tax collectors as you could be! They strenuously opposed Roman rule over Israel, and participated in guerilla-like acts of violence against them. I imagine there must have been some interesting conversations between Levi the tax collector and Simon the Zealot! But Jesus invited them both to follow him! And they did! "*Come to me, all who are weary...*"

And, Jesus frequently hung out with notorious sinners, like thieves and prostitutes. And he was criticized for doing so by the ultra-religious Pharisees. But he also conversed with those same Pharisees and invited

them to follow him! Remember the story of the Pharisee, Nicodemus, who came to see Jesus at night and had a long conversation with him about what God was up to in the world. Of course, Jesus invited Jewish people to follow him- he was a Jew himself and was surrounded by Jews. But surprisingly, he also invited Gentiles and Samaritans into conversation, breaking all manner of traditions and Jewish laws which were designed to keep Jews and Gentiles separate. In time, his followers expanded their outreach to Gentiles and they became a majority in the Christian church.

And, Jesus invited both men and women to follow him. And he played with children and extolled their open spirits. He even reached out to lepers, who were so rejected by society, that they had to live outside the city walls. Jesus lived out his words in Matt. 11, inviting all who were weary and carrying heavy burdens to follow him and find rest. The early followers of Jesus also lived that out.

For example, in ancient Rome, children had no rights. In fact, a father had the legal right to dispose of an infant if it was imperfect- having a disability, or just being the wrong gender! These children were then “exposed,” left outside of town in the elements to die. Christians found this practice to be abhorrent, and together, they did something about it. They took in these unwanted children and found homes for them or adopted

them. They were living out Jesus' invitation to welcome all people, even those rejected by others.

Today, the followers of Jesus are called to embody this same spirit of hospitality and welcome. We should be welcoming all kinds of people, too! Rich and poor. Republican and Democrat. During this time of racial tension, Christian churches should welcome people of all colors, and be open to hearing the struggles of people of color in order to make our nation into a more open and just society. We should welcome those who are religious and those who are not. American citizens and everyone else. Men and women, children and youth. Sinners and saints. Just like Jesus who invites all people to come.

Did you know that people often wander into the church office off the street in search of some kind of help? Usually something like a food voucher, gas for their car, or lodging. Sometimes they are on the verge of eviction, and need help with a rent payment, or be in danger of having their electricity shut off. Your giving to GPC makes it possible for us to help many of these people, which is what followers of Jesus should do.

I usually invite the recipients of our help to come worship with us. I sometimes show them the sanctuary and give them written information on service times, tell them about our children's programs, etc. But almost none of them actually come. Why do you suppose that is? I can't be

certain, but I believe somewhere along the line, word has spread that GPC is not for them. Instead, it is a church for rich people who have it all together. Some people I've met have even called us the "country club" church. I didn't take that as a compliment, because that idea creates a barrier for some people who aren't financially secure. They think they wouldn't fit in here. And that keeps us from assisting them with their spiritual journey, and it keeps us from benefiting from their gifts and ideas. I frankly don't know what to do about it, except to continue inviting, but I'd like to see us do something so that we can welcome all people here like Jesus does!

Jesus said, ²⁸*"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."* (Matt. 11:28) To whom could you extend Jesus' invitation to come to him? Family members? Friends? Fellow students? Neighbors? Service providers? You could offer to pray with someone who is having a hard time. You could stand up for someone who is being treated unfairly. You could invite someone to come with you to church or to watch on the livestream. To whom could you extend Jesus' invitation to come to him?

As I close this sermon, I also wonder if you have responded to Jesus' invitation to come to him with your heavy burdens, whatever they are. We'll

talk more specifically about what that means next week, but have you come to Jesus to find rest? Why not come now?