

July 9, 2023

'Labour and Leisure

Rev. Dr. Kimberly Heath
Wall Street United Church

Matthew 11:28-30, Isaiah 30:15, Micah 6:8 NRSV

28 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

This is the season of vacation. Do you remember the 1983 blockbuster movie *National Lampoon's Vacation*? What a classic! Clark, played by Chevy Chase, is on a mission to take his family on the perfect vacation. He wants to get away from the hustle and bustle of Chicago to take the family to Wally World in California. Ellen, his wife, wants to fly — but Clark is convinced that driving across the country will give them the best opportunity to bond and create memories. They end up driving the 'Wagon Queen Family Truckster.'



As you likely remember or can easily imagine, the road trip is far from smooth. When they finally do arrive at Wally World after a ridiculous number of hilarious mishaps, they discover that Wally World is closed for 2 weeks! So much for a dream vacation.

Don't you love vacation? As Canadians we are very aware of how fleeting this season of sunshine and heat is. (Okay, for some of you the season of heat is way too long, but just remember we are closer to this Christmas than to last Christmas. That reminds me of the movie 'Christmas Vacation' — remember when Clark is determined to have the best Christmas lights in the neighborhood?)

Vacation is partly about needing a break. We want a break from work, we want a break from routines and schedules and meetings. Partly it is about wanting some rest.

What do you need a rest from? I think the whole world could use a rest.

The service a couple of weeks ago on forgiveness touched many hearts. I dropped in on the knitting circle and one woman told me how much she appreciated it and needed it. She said she had to '**forgive her way all through Costco**'. When we asked her more about it, she said that it was Seniors Day, and it was crowded with people who were very rude and impatient and not polite or gracious. It's not just Costco. It's

everywhere. People just don't have that — I don't want to call it armor — but that **layer of rest and resiliency** that allows small offenses or inconveniences to bounce off of us like water off a duck's back. You know how that is. When we're well rested and things are going smoothly we're able to see stupid things as stupid things and go on with the day. But when we are tired and weary, little things become big things.

That's why AA has that wise **HALT** saying "**Hungry, Angry (or Afraid), Lonely, Tired.**" That's a dangerous place to be if you are in recovery. It's dangerous for any of us, but the consequences of relapse can be deadly.

We're not just tired, we're **weary**. It's a good word. Weary suggests physically tired but also a fatigue that is soul deep. Any of you there?

Many of us are. Maybe even most of us. Three years of pandemic has made us all tired. We are out of the pandemic part of it, but the after-affects are still very much with us. And of course life goes on and other challenges are added: health challenges, grief, relationship and financial challenges.

Being tired and weary is not a new thing. Jesus is clearly speaking to a burnt-out audience because he says to them "Come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens." What were they weary of? They were weary of being occupied by the Romans and having to watch their backs and pay significant taxes. They were weary of their religion which had many rules and more taxes and not a whole lot of life. And they were weary of all the usual things that wear us down: health, grief, relationships, finances.

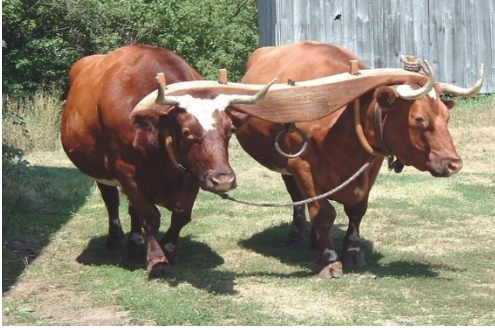
In the middle of this weariness Jesus offers a balm ... fragrant ointment used to heal and soothe.

"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." Yes! Amen Jesus!

That's what I want and need. Rest. A break. Time off. A beach and a book.

What kind of rest is Jesus offering? Listen to what comes next: **"Take my beach umbrella and sunscreen upon you, for my BBQ is sizzling and my beer is light."**

Drat! That's not quite what it says. What does it say? *"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."* **Yoke? Surely you must be yoking!** (It's too bad our guitar player Paul isn't here because a 'Paul joke' was required. A Paul joke is a dad joke only worse.



In case you don't know or have forgotten what a yoke is, it's a wooden harness that you put on oxen or horses so they can work and plow a field. Wait. What? One second Jesus is offering rest, the next we're being compared to beasts of burden and invited to put on a contraption that does not look like it's made of feathers so that we can pull something heavy. Where's my hat and book?

Jesus knew that time off and a break are really important. After all Jesus said that Sabbath was created *for us*, not us for the Sabbath. Sabbath is the day of rest, and it was part of the commandment to keep the sabbath. Jesus points out that the day is meant as a gift for us, not a burden. Sabbath and rest are important.

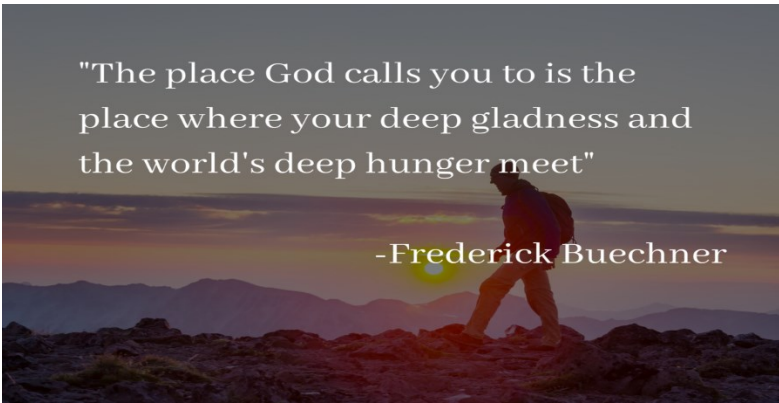
We live in a time when we often feel valued because of how much we accomplish — because of how busy we are. We have such an 'all or nothing' relationship with work and rest. We **idolize work and busyness** — we admire productivity and hard work and feel that we ought to do more and say 'yes' to this job and that job. Many people struggle with retirement because their identity is wrapped up in what they "do." Then as we fall into the trap of being a workaholic, we begin to feel burnt out and irritable and dreaming of another lock-down so we don't have to do so much. (We start to look like a not-so-cute version of my puppy who has two speeds: sleep and Tasmanian devil!)

There's another way. Jesus is not idolizing work and neither is he telling us to quit. Jesus suggests that rest comes from a deeper place than simply a vacation from work. The work we are being called to is *the work of the Kingdom of God. It's the work of bringing God's love and grace and justice and forgiveness to a weary and burdened world.* Does the world ever need more love, more grace, more people willing to stand up for marginalized people!

The needs of the world are great — climate change, refugees and displaced people. Last week Lynda talked about the need for fresh water around the world. You don't have to go to Kenya to see the need. There is great need in this community for more housing and more mental health and addiction supports. I have no doubt that the needs in your family and for yourself are quite demanding. It can feel overwhelming and exhausting pretty quickly.

The fuel needed to do that kind of work does not come just from vacation—though that can be good and should be taken. **Jesus offers us not vacation but vocation.** Rest comes from knowing your purpose. It comes from having a sense of *why* you were created. Jesus is inviting us to work for the kingdom of God, but it's a different kind of work. Jesus is inviting us to work with him.

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me... for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” The Greek word ‘easy’ in “my yoke is easy” can also be translated as “kind”. It’s not that the work is a piece of cake, but that the harness and the tools required for the job fit right. You can imagine that some yokes that are placed on oxen are made more carefully and kindly than others. A wooden one that was smooth and carefully crafted, perhaps even specially made to fit a particular animal, is going to be kinder, gentler. Jesus has work for us that fits us. We were made for this work.



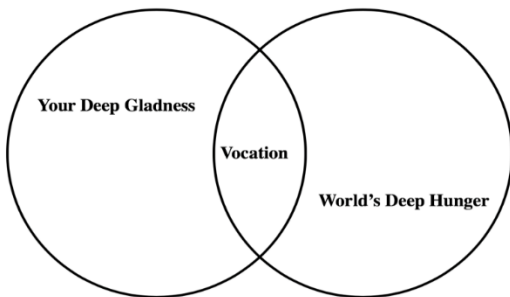
"The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet"

-Frederick Buechner

How do you know what that work is? That takes some discernment and prayer but Frederick Buechner said:

‘Your deep gladness’. That’s a wonderful phrase! What fills your tank? I can tell you when **CJ** is making eggs over easy on Friday mornings, they are in their element. When **Jason** leads people in a 12-

Step group and he can see people’s lives changing, it fills his cup. When **Chris Bremner** sends a card to congregation members wishing them a happy birthday or offering prayer, she feels good. We keep trying to give our volunteer musicians a break but it’s hard to do. Why? Because singing, playing keyboard or guitar gives them gladness. Now I’m not saying it’s all unicorns and rainbow farts 😊 — each of those things I mentioned takes some effort. It’s labour— but it makes you feel good. When you are in that sweet spot where you know you are doing something that you can do and that fills a need, there is nothing quite like it.



I hope you have experienced that for yourself. It’s not duty, it’s a purpose and a calling. That, my friends, brings strength and life in a way that no vacation ever could.

It’s hard to explain. Maybe the image Jesus gives us helps. When Jesus says, “**learn from me**”, it’s not that he wants you to sit

and listen to a boring lecture. The “learn from me” is more like “See, I’m already doing this work, do it with me.” You notice that the yoke that oxen put on is designed for two. “I’m putting on the yoke, you are being yoked to me.” The work is done together with Jesus and together in Christian community. That’s where the power of the Holy Spirit comes in. As we work together with Jesus and with the Church, we make a difference.

Thanks be to God