The Easy Yoke: Finding Rest for the Weary Soul

Good evening. This evening, the homily is going to be a little shorter because it's evening prayer, but I'd like to take some time to consider the tender heart of our Lord.

The Context of Compassion

See, a few weeks ago, Jesse was speaking on Matthew 9:36. And in that passage, we read Jesus when he saw the crowd, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. You see, Jesus looked on the multitude and he had this divine, gut-wrenching compassion for them because he saw that they were helpless. They were scattered. They were without direction. And so, in response, this is what Jesus said to them. He said, "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For I am gentle and lowly of heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

The Modern Burden

So now I wonder how many of you when you hear these words you say that's me right there. I feel harassed. I'm weary. I'm heavy laden. The demands placed on me are not gentle and lowly and I could use some rest. Well, if that's you, you are not alone. So, recent surveys confirm that many feel this daily. More than half of US workers are experiencing burnout. Nearly three in four of them have moderate to high levels of stress at work. And that especially applies to Gen Z. And over half of adults regularly battle loneliness and relational disconnection.

See, Jesus's invitation then is as urgent today as it was then. See, in this age of social media, despite being more connected than ever, we feel lonely. We feel distant and split apart from those people who are not like us. And even our friends often don't give us the emotional support that we need. See, we were created for community and the type of isolation that we're feeling contributes to this soul weariness that many of us are feeling.

Addressing Soul Weariness

See, many of you I know carry heavy loads of loneliness, financial anxiety, caregiving along with the constant noise of our culture. So, we try to mix that weariness often with entertainment or with substances or shopping or with self-help books. But see, these wells will always run dry. They were never meant to satisfy our souls. They are at best short-term fixes that often leave us with more problems than we had when we started.

See, this is because the world does not have the answer for our weariness. The world does not offer real solutions. The world's yoke and its burden are the problem. And the only real rest comes in Jesus. And so this evening we will consider three truths from the promise in this passage. We're going to consider the weariness that we all carry, the welcome that we receive from Christ, and the rest we find in Christ.

A Prayer for the Evening

So before I do that let me pray quickly for us. Lord, thank you for this congregation. Thank you for the people who have come to hear your word, who've come to worship you, who know that the weariness of the soul can only find its solution in you. You are the real rest for our souls. Lord, help us to take that message tonight. Help us to leave here a little more lightened, maybe with your yoke and your burden instead of the world's in Jesus name. Amen.

Point 1: The Weariness We Carry

All right, let's begin by honestly facing the weariness that we all carry. So the weariness we carry, we need to recognize and acknowledge the burdens. See, we live in a fallen world where this weariness, it's universal. So I know many of you today do labor under heavy burdens. I've heard them. And like the multitude that Jesus saw we are often harassed and helpless, scattered like sheep without a shepherd or like oxen pulling a heavy wagon. See, in older translations, we are described as being in travail. Travail is that deep exhausting sorrow of the soul.

Understanding the Yoke

Now, for those of us not raised on a farm, a yoke is a wooden device and you fit it on the shoulders of beasts of burden like an oxen or a donkey and often on two animals at the one time. See the yoke attaches the animal to a burden. So you see in life it's not the yoke that's the issue. It's the burden that the yoke is attaching you to. And so it's the burden that we're thinking about. So this passage assumes a truth already that every human heart is already yoked to something. Often that's ambition or the opinions of others. Maybe it's self-righteousness or it could be worldly comfort.

See these burdens, they promise much but they don't deliver. What they deliver is more restlessness because the achievements fade. That inner voice that we all have of self-reproach, it returns and we are heavy laden and deep down we know it. See, we sometimes treat our bodies like batteries. We use them until they're empty. And then we think that just a little sleep is going to recharge us. But, you know, our bodies don't work that way.

A Personal Lesson from Iraq

So, I had an issue with this at one time, and I'd like to share it with you. Most of you know, I was in the army for a little while. And I was deployed to Iraq in 2005 and 2006, and I was the chief of strategy for Multinational Force Iraq. I was working 18 to 20 hours a day, seven days a week. And I was burdened with some heavy responsibility. See, I developed the national strategy for all the coalition forces in Iraq and at the same time helped build the Iraqi government from scratch. So, actual lives were hanging in the balance of my work and nothing I did seemed to be enough. There was always more work in a day than I could accomplish.

And I quickly learned that simply trying to sleep more didn't fix my weariness. You can't sleep off the psychological weight of a war. So, what finally brought relief was not where I rested my head, but who I rested in. So, my wife Debbie and I had committed before I left to reading through Oswald Chambers My Utmost for His Highest. We were going to read that together even though we were separated by a long way. Each night then I would take 30 minutes when I got back to my pod and I would read that day's devotion and then I would take some time to pray and then I would take some time to rest in the Lord.

See, in those moments, I found real perspective and I found the rest that allowed me to get up the next day and return to the war in the desert. So, it wasn't a place of rest that mattered. It was the person in whom I was resting that mattered. So this evening, I want to encourage you to recognize where you are weary and heavy laden. To name it, to honestly ask yourself, what are you yoked to? Then ask where you're going to seek the rest that you so desperately need. Are you going to look for it in the world? Are you going to look for it like I thought in more sleep? It just didn't work. Or are you going to go to Jesus? See, Jesus invites us into the best rest, the most effective rest, and the only rest that will really restore our souls.

Point 2: The Welcome of Christ

Which brings us to our second point. See, the glorious news of the gospel is that Jesus does not stay far off from us. He draws near to us. He wants to be near us. He longs to gather us under his wings. He's moved when he sees us with compassion, with a gut level compassion. He wants to help you rest. And he just says simply, "Come to me."

See, the great news is he doesn't say, "Hey, fix yourself up and then maybe I'll be available for you." He doesn't say, "Get off the substance, beat that addiction, and then you and I can have fellowship." No, he doesn't say any of those things. He says simply come to me. Really, come to me just as you are. See, he expects you. He knows that you're going to be labored. He knows that you're going to be heavily laden. He knows you're already yoked to something.
But in his words, notice how approachable he is. He declares himself to be gentle and lowly in heart. See, he's meek. He's good. And he's welcoming. He's especially welcoming to those who already feel like a failure from being overwhelmed by the burdens of this life. His invitation is a gift of grace for those who feel their exhaustion, coming like little children who cease to pretend that they can bear the world's weight all by themselves.

You see, we're not designed for long-term solitary loadbearing. On the cross, Jesus bore the ultimate burden and loneliness so that we might be welcomed into his rest. Because he carried what we could not, the way is now open. His compassion has removed every barrier to him.

The Barriers to Rest
So the question is tonight, what keeps you from coming to Jesus? For some people, it's pride. They say, "I should be able to do this on my own. I'm an adult." For others, it's the pull of the world's comforts. The short-term comfort that they feel seems to them safer. It's the reason that sits on my heart and burdens me the most is some don't come because previously they were

hurt in another church—what we call church hurt. Their experience was marked by rigid rules and condemnation and hurt and so they don't come.

But hear Jesus again, "I am gentle and lowly in heart." He is really the ultimate real safe space. So the reasons we stay away, they're all part of the heavy burden. They're the world yoked. That's what we're yoked to: our pride, our worldly comforts. Maybe we're yoked to our church hurt. But he doesn't invite us to just come. What he's offering is an exchange. It's a real exchange. His easy yoke for our crushing burdens and true rest for our weary souls.

Point 3: The Rest We Find in Christ

Which brings us to our last point. So this call for rest. Now look, it's not laziness. It's not idleness. It's just an exchange of yokes. "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me." So when you read that passage, emphasize the "my" not the "yoke" because Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you." His yoke is easy. His burden is light because he's the strong one. He walks beside us. He carries the greater weight. He bore on the cross the one thing could not carry even if we were inclined to, which we are not.

When we are yoked to Christ, we are no longer alone. We walk in step with a gentle and a lowly king. He forgives our stumbling, and he teaches us his better way. See, learning from him means rooting ourselves in the holy scriptures, persevering in prayer, which we're going to do tonight, receiving the sacraments, following his lead within the fellowship of the church.
See, in Christ, we discover rest for our souls. The deep abiding peace that the world cannot give and the world cannot take away. It's that accusing voice, the accusing voice inside us grows quiet when we rest in his finished work. We're loved. We're accepted. We're secure in him. St. Augustine wrote in his confessions, "Because you made us for yourself, our hearts find no peace until they rest in you."

Conclusion and Closing Prayer

So, CTK, let us be a people that respond to this Lord's invitation. I encourage you this week, take some quiet time to first honestly acknowledge the weariness you carry. Name the burden you are yoked to. Second, gladly receive the welcome from the gentle and lowly savior. And then third, daily enter into the rest we find by taking his yoke and learning from him. So if you're feeling scattered and burdened or restless this evening, hear the voice of the good shepherd: "Come to me."

So I want to pray in closing, but I want you to pray with me. So I have prepared a prayer for you that you can find in the book of common prayer to pray together:

"Heavenly Father, you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you. Look with compassion upon the heartfelt desires of your servants and purify our disordered affections that we may behold your eternal glory in the face of Christ Jesus who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen."