

July 5, 2026—The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. James Wyatt

Come to Me

The voice of my beloved! My soul's beloved speaks and says to me, "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away."

"Come to me," says my soul's beloved, "all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens." Is he talking to you, do you think? Anyone here feel weary? Run-down? Are you carrying too many things, heavy with sadness and grief, weighed down with worry and responsibility? Or maybe you just have too much to do? I gotta say, after this last couple of weeks of moving and a printout review at the office and a possible COVID exposure and everything else going on, I feel his words deep in my bones. Especially the "heavy burdens" part.

"Come to me," says the beloved of my soul and of yours, "and I will give you rest." All right, then. Rest sounds pretty good to me. I'm looking forward to some time off in August that maybe doesn't involve any kind of work at all, and might include some sunshine and water and perhaps a fruity beverage of some kind and nothing at all to think about. Yeah, rest sounds *really* good to me. Thank you, Jesus, I will gladly accept the rest you offer.

"Come to me," our beloved says, "take my yoke upon you and learn from me." Wait a minute. My vision of ideal rest does not include a yoke. The only reason you put a yoke on an animal is if you're putting the animal to work. Work is really sort of the opposite of rest. That's the point, isn't it?

Let me ask you something: do you ever come here on a Sunday morning and start to feel like Jesus is asking too much, like trying to live as he wants us to is just one more thing on your to-do list, one more burden on top of everything else you have to carry around? Maybe, like Paul describes in the passage from Romans we heard this morning, you find yourself struggling to do the things you think you're supposed to do: "I do not do what I want," he says, "but I do the very thing I hate." And I mean, our Gospel lessons for the last three weeks have been full of instructions: Proclaim the good news, cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons, take up the cross and follow him, and don't forget, when we're on the other end of things, to welcome those who come in Jesus's name. It does kind of seem like he's asking a lot.

And then Jesus, in the same breath as his promise of rest, asks us to put on a yoke and learn from him . . . "and you will find rest for your souls," he says. "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Hm.

So, here's the thing. In the Jewish context of Jesus's earthly life, "take my yoke upon you, and learn from me," actually meant something pretty specific. If you wanted to go and study with a certain rabbi, a teacher, and learn that teacher's particular way of interpreting the law of Moses, you'd metaphorically yoke yourself to that teacher, like an apprentice to a master artisan, as you learned to carry the obligations of the law. So Jesus is offering the same opportunity, here: yoke yourself to me, become my apprentice, my disciple, and learn my particular way of interpreting and carrying the law of Moses. And "my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Hey, great, easy A, right? We'll pass this class in no time and get right to that resting part.

But this is the same Jesus who, throughout the Gospel of Matthew, tells us that following the letter of the law isn't enough—it's not enough to love your neighbor, you have to love your enemy. It's not enough to avoid adultery, you have to avoid lust. It's not enough to take an eye for an eye, you have to turn the other cheek. How is that an easy yoke? How is that a *light* burden? And that whole "take up your cross" thing? that's not really easy or light at all.

Well, there's a rabbinical tradition that the law of Moses includes 613 commandments, including things you should do as well as things you should *not* do. There's plenty of debate

about the actual number, and some rabbis make a distinction between the long list of commandments and a much shorter list of “root principles.” And I think that's what Jesus is getting at when he says that his is an easy yoke, a light burden—his root principles, through which he interprets the law of Moses, are easy to learn. He said that all the law and the prophets hang on two similar commandments: love your God with all your being, and love your neighbor as yourself. See? Easy to learn. Maybe a bit harder to do. Which, I guess, is why the prayer of confession we say together every single week acknowledges right up front that we've failed to do them: “We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.”

But those root principles—love God and love your neighbor—they are the lens that Jesus uses to interpret the law and bring it to its fulfillment. According to the law of Deuteronomy, the parents of a wayward son who was a glutton and a drunkard could bring a complaint against him and see him stoned to death. But under the law of love, Jesus brings God's love to outcasts, to sinners and tax collectors. He eats and drinks with them, even though it makes him look like a glutton and a drunkard. In the next chapter of Matthew, Jesus points to this law of love to justify his act of healing on the Sabbath. He manifests the love in which we find true Sabbath rest for our souls.

“Come to me,” our beloved says, “and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me”—learn to love God with all your heart, with all your soul and mind and strength, and learn to love your neighbors as yourselves—“and you will find rest for your souls.” Because when we learn to love God, and to love the world like God does, we find our rest in God. I feel like maybe that's not such a burdensome yoke. To walk side by side with the gentle and humble Jesus, our beloved, learning to love like he does, like God does—well, maybe that's not such a heavy load. Will I mess up? Of course. Will I fall short of what is really a very high standard? Yep. Will I do the very thing I don't want instead of the good I want to do? Just like Paul, I will and I do.

But every time I stumble and fall, I can get back up, put that yoke back on me, and keep going, keep learning, keep loving. “Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.” “Come to me,” our beloved says, “and I will give you rest.”