

Sermon on Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-end

5th July 2026, St James, Shirley

Verses 28-30 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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.”

To many, this is a famous and comforting passages from the Bible. It's an invitation to swap the heavy, exhausting burdens of life for a gentle, learning relationship with Jesus.

Jesus offers us *“rest for our weary souls.”* And don't we need that rest. Thirty years ago, Thomas Moore wrote a book, called 'Care of the Soul'. And in the first sentence of the book, he made the claim that *‘the greatest malady of our time, implicated in all of our troubles and affecting us individually and socially is loss of soul.’* *“When souls are neglected,”* he wrote, *“they don't just go away; the void can be filled with obsessions, addictions, violence, and loss of meaning.”*

The world has changed a lot in the last thirty years, but not in this respect. The world still frequently neglects its soul. And social media, and everything else that has come along in the last thirty years in the name of progress, has not always helped.

When we don't take care of our soul, it can affect every other aspect of our life - our relationships, our health, our sense of well-being and purpose.

So, what do we do? Simple, really. Jesus says, come to him, take his yoke, learn from him, and find rest for our souls. From Jesus. We can't buy it. There's no pill that provides it. Rest for our souls can be found through our faith and through our relationship with Jesus. Because we were created by

God to be in a loving relationship with him. And God actually created our souls to be restless until they find their rest in God, as St. Augustine once famously said. But it is only when we realize that our souls are restless that we finally accept this invitation.

It reminds me of a book by Brennan Manning called 'The Ragamuffin Gospel.' It's a book, he wrote in the forward, for the wobbly and anxious who know they don't have it altogether. It is for the aching and bruised who feel that their lives are a disappointment to God. The Ragamuffin Gospel, he concludes, is for anyone who has grown weary and discouraged along the Way.

And that is exactly who this invitation from Jesus is for today. For all of us who have grown weary. For all of us who are carrying heavy burdens. Come to me, Jesus says, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

But how does this happen? What happens when we come to Jesus? Well, he says, we take his yoke upon us. A yoke that is easy. A burden that is light. Paradoxically, we find rest for our souls by taking up his yoke. A yoke, by definition, is a wooden cross piece that is fastened over the necks of two animals and attached to the plough or cart that they are to pull. This wooden cross piece helps the two animals to pull together.

Take my yoke upon you, Jesus says. When we come to Jesus, and learn from him, we become yoked with him. He pulls with us. Jesus doesn't take away whatever we are pulling, but we no longer have to pull it alone. Jesus pulls our burden with us. And he goes on to say that his yoke is easy. Which, in this case, really means "well-fitting."

I like how the biblical scholar William Barclay explains what Jesus means by this:

“In Bible-times,” he writes, “ox-yokes were made of wood; the ox was brought to the carpenter, and the measurements were taken. The yoke was then drafted, and the ox was brought back to have the yoke tried on. The yoke was carefully adjusted, so that it would fit well, and not rub against the neck of the animal. The yoke that Jesus offers is tailor-made for us. Which means that it is not then a burden for us to live as Christ wants us to live. He wants to be yoked with us. What a gift.

Barclay goes on to tell of a folk legend about Jesus that may or may not be true:

‘There is a legend,” he writes, “that when Jesus was a carpenter, he made the best ox-yokes in all of Galilee, and that from all over the country people came to him to buy his yokes. And, as the legend goes, the carpenter Jesus had a sign over his shop that read, “My yoke fits well.”

His yoke fits well. His burden is light. And when we take up this yoke, tailor-made for us, we can begin to find rest for our souls.

But Jesus does not just invite us to take up his yoke. He invites us to learn from him. If we are going to find rest for our souls, it will be through learning from Jesus. Jesus, when you think about it, had as much reason to be restless as anyone. His life was incredibly difficult. And he knew it would end on a cross. But his soul was at rest. He was at peace. And he wants to teach us how to have that same peace.

He wants us to take his yoke and learn from him. And one of the ways to find rest for our souls is to continue learning from Jesus. Through Sunday School, worship services, through our daily Bible reading and prayer times, we

continue to learn from Jesus. And by imitating his example, we can continue to learn from him. Spending quiet time alone with God. Putting away our digital distractions, having a quiet place to retreat to, to listen for God's still small voice. That is what Jesus did. And we can learn from him to do this ourselves.

So, what if we actually do this? What if we actually come to Jesus every day, and take his yoke upon us, and learn from him? What if we woke up every morning and said to Jesus: I can't carry the burden of this day without you. I need you to teach me. I need you to lead me and to guide me. I need you to place your yoke upon me.

If you are like me, you need a daily reminder from Jesus to come to him, It's too easy to get caught up in life and forget to do this. It's too easy to neglect our soul. It's too easy to forget that we don't have to bear life's burdens ourselves. That Jesus wants us to take his yoke upon us so that he can help bear our burdens.

This daily *invitation* from Jesus can become something even more when It becomes our daily *mission*. What if we approached every day with this invitation in mind for others? What if we kept this invitation in mind whenever we met someone who was weary and carrying a heavy burden? What if we tried to live our lives in a way that showed others what it means to have rest for our souls?

We can see plenty of evidence all around of a world that is weary and heavy laden and doesn't know where to turn for rest. We see a world that regularly neglects its soul and desperately tries to distract itself from all of life's burdens, and will do anything, no matter how absurd, to avoid facing its soul. Our world needs this invitation from Jesus. Our world needs to know that

there is a place to turn when life becomes overwhelming. That there is one who wants to help bear the burden, if we will only come to him.

Just stop running everywhere else and come to him. Let's take his yoke upon us, for he is gentle and lowly at heart. The kind of rest we never thought possible is ours through Christ our Saviour.

Many in our world need to hear this invitation, or to be reminded of it. And there might very well be someone in your life who won't hear this invitation unless they hear it through you. But don't see this as a burden. See it as your well-fitting yoke. A yoke that is easy. A burden that is light. Because Jesus himself has made it just for you. And promises to help you bear it.