

I've come to believe that one of the subtle effects we suffer because of the fall back in Eden is...most of us can always seem to find something to complain about.

Around this time of year, typically, we tend to complain about how busy we are...which was true...until last year.

Last year...for most of the year...due, of course to Covid, so many of the activities and events we love and look forward to were cancelled...we were **very, very ready** to do more at Christmastime.

But then even many of the Christmas activities were cancelled. So instead of complaining about being too busy, we complained about not being busy enough.

This year, for the most part, things are back on...and though we're glad of that, maybe in our efforts to "make up for lost time," some are back to complaining about how busy they are.

Some of us may very well be missing a little of the quiet and rest that last year provided.

Whether we wanted it or not at the time, maybe we **needed** last year...and even at Christmas, because, even though we sing admiringly of a silent, holy night where all is calm...we don't often practice what we sing in this season.

Why is that?

The truth is, Christmas is just a microcosm of a larger issue that, really, most of the civilized world is going through because of Covid. Covid has given us a break in our "normal" that many are using to re-evaluate what's important and what isn't in life.

How busy do we want to be...do we need to be...is it healthy to be?

How connected should we be? And connected to what and to whom?

To what should we give our time?

To what should we be committed?

This is the reason our nation is setting job resignation records. It's the reason people are changing even whole careers. It's why some are moving, some are simplifying, some are choosing different options for school, leisure, sports, fitness...church.

And all of it, in some way or another, comes back to our search for a happy median for life. We want a healthy normal.

People don't respond well...we don't respond healthily...to wild ups and downs...the roller-coasterish patterns that life sometimes brings. Those bring stress and we don't respond well to stress.

That's not to say we should resist all change...not at all.

Some change is good and even necessary.

But we work best when there's a certain amount of predictability to life. We work best when we can find a good, healthy rhythm of action and rest, which is always the case. But these last months have reminded us how hard that even keel can be to find and keep.

Now, our need for rhythm and rest is, of course, no surprise to God. He's the one who set that rhythm in the seven days of creation, after all.

And the less we listen to Him on this...the less seriously we take God's pattern...and we are, as a culture, listening to it less and less – the less we listen to God's prescription for this sort of rhythm, the more unsettled and roller-coaster-like our lives become.

So our quest for rest has to start by listening to God in the basic weekly cadence of life.

But beyond that, Jesus Himself addresses the human need for rest. We talked about it a little this morning, but I want to return to it for just a few minutes tonight.

In Matthew 11, Jesus makes the invitation, ***"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."***

Who is Jesus talking to here?

Well, some say He's talking to those who were looking for God...who were very much trying to please God, trying to be good and righteous and holy...which was a very taxing thing to do under the Pharisees' interpretation of the Law.

To fulfill all the little details of keeping the law, as it had come to be understood in Jesus' day, was exhausting and even, to some degree, demoralizing, because it was impossible. It had the potential to drive all but the strongest to utter despair.

So I do think Jesus was talking, here, to those people who were truly searching...wanting to be closer to God.

But I think Jesus is also talking to ***all*** people here...people ***today***...people who are ***burdened***...who are ***adrift*** on the wild waves of this life and cannot seem to find a place of calm.

Jesus is calling to those who react to, and are blown about by, every little puff of wind that passes by.

Jesus knew very well...life in this world is violently changeable. If we allow every passing breeze – be they pleasant or painful – to change our course and upend our security, we will be, as James writes, unstable in all we do.

And that's a miserable way to live.

But it is, increasingly, the way of our culture: to react, too often irrationally and overemotionally, to everything that passes by our door.

More and more, life's happenings...events...what people say...what they think, what they post...throw us into personal instability and uncertainty, which we then throw up all over other people in one way or another...which only then feeds the violence of our cultural ups and downs.

And living in this wild ocean of uncertainty...trying to surf this on it's own terms, chips away at our stability, our relationships, our schedules and our peace.

That's precisely why, speaking into our wild and woolly, up and down, over-informed, opinion-saturated and relationally stressed culture...which His contemporaries could have never imagined, Jesus makes this invitation...as suitable now as it was the day it was first made: "Find rest in me."

"When life gets nutty, when things are out of balance and stressful, come to me."

"Come to me to find rest."

"Don't go to the news to find rest.

Don't go to social media.

Don't go to your friends who all just think exactly like you.

Don't go shopping.

Don't turn to politics or the government.

Don't immerse yourself in drugs or alcohol or sex or video games or any of the other escape mechanisms that are popular in our culture."

***"Come to me...and...take my yoke upon you."***

What does it mean to "take Jesus' yoke" upon us?

To the first century Jew, to "take the yoke" meant "to enter into submission to."

If you took upon you the yoke of the Law, you were entering into submission to the Law.

Same for the yoke of the commandments, the yoke of God, the yoke of the Kingdom, the yoke of business partnership, the yoke of debt, the yoke of marriage.

To take the yoke is to agree to submit ourselves to this relationship.

Yet Jesus says, ***"You who are weary, burdened and heavy laden...you've tried all sorts of other yokes and have not found anything good...but take my yoke...because,"*** He says, ***"my yoke is easy."***

The Greek word for "easy" here means, "well-fitting."

In Jesus day, ox-yokes were made of wood. To create one, you'd measure the ox and then rough-cut the yoke. Then you'd try it on the specific ox for which it was being built. At that point, you'd carefully adjust it and then custom shape it and smooth it around all the different contours of that specific animal, so that it would conform perfectly to the ox...so it would not irritate the animal.

In other words, you would tailor make the yoke for the ox, so it would be as comfortable as possible.

Now, it was still an instrument of work...of strain, in fact, but it was a yoke that was workable and not destructively burdensome.

Barclay writes, "Jesus, being the son of a carpenter, might well have made a sign to hang in front of his shop that said, 'my yokes fit well.'"

In coming to Jesus and submitting ourselves to Him...in taking His yoke upon us, we will find that the work of life will be so much easier...because of the fit...because of how well Jesus knows us and how much He loves us."

That's why, in our submission to Him, we will find rest for our souls.

There are so many people today giving themselves...submitting themselves to so many poor-fitting yokes...yokes that were not made for us...yokes that don't know our measurements...yokes that are too big or too small or too rough or too heavy.

Which is why there is so much fatigue and frustration and anger in our culture.

That's very often why there is so much wild variation to our rhythms and days and moods...somewhere, somehow, we've not submitted ourselves to Jesus.

Somewhere, somehow...we're resisting or refusing His yoke for us.

Listen, do you have a place like that in your life?

Is there a place of instability and upheaval...a place of conflict...a place that's unpredictable...filled with maybe even violent ups and downs?

That's the place, right there...that we need to be sure is submitted to Jesus.

To find right rhythm...to find calm...to find stability and steadiness...and to ever really find rest, we have to submit ourselves to Jesus...we have to take His yoke upon us...the one He's made and fitted just for us.

No one can surf the waves of this life forever. Sooner or later, they will drown you...they will pull you under.

Don't let that happen.

Don't let life's pitches and tosses exhaust you and ruin you and those around you.

Jesus invites us, at the height of our busy-ness, in our search for truth and right...in the middle of life's ups and downs: ***"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."***

Do you need to come to Him and take His yoke...even tonight?

If you do, would you do that?

Jesus, there are so many things that destabilize us in these days:

The holiday season itself brings stresses related to family and friends.

The travel.

The weather.  
The meals and presents and other preparations.  
The expectations of others.

But even beyond the holidays, there's more that sends waves through our lives:

The moral degradation in our land.  
The faith of our nation, or lack thereof.  
The polarization.  
The politics.  
International relations.  
The whole situation with Covid.  
The economy...inflation.

And then...personally:  
Life decisions we have to make.  
Stresses in relationships.  
The impatience people have with one another in these days.  
Jesus, all these things are real to us and they are always threatening to shake our worlds and steal our peace.

But Jesus, we want to find real rest, and we know that only comes in You...in taking your yoke...in joining ourselves with you so tightly that your plans become ours and your ways become ours and your steadiness becomes our own.

So Jesus, even in the midst of rough waters...the violent swings of these days...give us the sense to come to you, so we might have peace...so we can know your rest.