

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend Anne H.K. Apple
Sunday, July 5, 2020

Matthew 11: 25-30

At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

"Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, 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."

If you've been a parent, and had to introduce your child to the spiritual discipline of a formal worship service, "Big Church" - do you remember those moments? Some congregations are flexible, and warmly welcome young children, others not so much. My mother tells the story of taking my big brother, Gregg, to worship for the first time. They arrived late and were seated in the second row, squeezed into the middle of a pew, behind an important church matriarch.

Gregg had his Buster Brown church shoes on and when he kicked the back of the first pew, they made a satisfying noise. Tap. Tap. Tap. With each tap, the matriarch's spine winched straighter. Then brother Gregg had significant moments of flatulence. My parents could not help but shake with laughter. If it could go wrong, this work of "doing 'Big' church" ... it had gone wrong that Sunday. Eventually the matriarch turned and glared with judgment and shame. Mom always tells this story with a sense of wonderment that our family ever returned to the house of the Lord.

At Idlewild, I remember our parenting playbook for coming to "big church." We considered ourselves wise and we had a series of "what not" statements to drive home our lessons.

Around the breakfast table and a bowl of Cheerios we said, "Sweetie, what's not going to happen is that *you will not* leave the sanctuary and go to C3 with Miss Katie and her swaddling hugs."

Clicking her into her carseat, we said, "Sweetie, what's not going to happen after Miss Elizabeth shares the gospel story is that *you will not* run down the long hallway and up the ramp to the Jones building."

And walking into church, we said, "Abigail, what's not going to happen is *you will not* eat goldfish, drink apple juice, and build block towers to crash with Gentry, Ellie and Georgia."

We were so wise with our management of expectations.

As the prelude began on that first Sunday of full worship for our youngest, I whispered, "Abigail, this is what is going to happen. Pastor Margaret will call us to worship." And in a judgmental, strict way, I said to her, "Put down your crayons and pay attention."

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She looked up at me and said,

“I know, Mom. The *teacher* leads us *then we do our part.*”

“I know, Mom. The teacher leads us then we do our part.”

I was not as wise and intelligent as she, this young child, who intuitively knew the truth of the Gospel. *The Teacher leads us, then we do our part.*

Well, ... yes.

Earlier in this chapter in Matthew, Jesus pronounces woes to communities who did not repent of their sins and turn back to God. Jesus did not come into this world to go lightly, but to be Light. And when the darkness of sin moves in, Jesus isn't afraid to name what he sees. Jesus names his frustration about communities who do not follow, but only pay lip service. “Woe you you Capernaum.”

After these words of judgment, Christ turns to pray and thanks God for God's revelation of truth through the eyes of children - not those who think they are wise and intelligent. And then Jesus offers an invitation.

“Come. Take. Learn. Find rest for your souls.” I particularly like how Eugene Peterson describes this passage.¹

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.”

Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.

I wonder if this is where we find ourselves as the church in the midst of civil unrest and pandemic uncertainty. We are living in a world where what is true seems uncertain, and appears to be debatable. How is it that we individually and together we learn the unforced rhythms of grace.

I believe it's in trusting what is true.

Here's the undebatable truth. Christ's love is true. It bends towards all of humanity and gives hope. The teacher leads us and then we have to do our part.

Jesus says, “Come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens.”

When we come to Jesus, we have to leave behind some of the ways we live in this world. We have to let go. Trust in something beyond ourselves. Where are the places in our lives where we feel overburdened or exhausted? Resentful or entitled? If the end goal is to rest in Christ, maybe the question we need to be asking ourselves, both individually and as a community, “What is it that is preventing us from resting - and finding a peace that passes all understanding?”

Is it that you don't think you have enough?

¹ The Message

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Or is it that you are frustrated because you know absolutely what is right, and judge that others do not?

Or is it simply that nagging feeling like you simply can't get anything right?

Christ invites us to come and to take his yoke. This taking on Christ's yoke doesn't mean that the work we have to do won't be hard, but that it will be shared. We will set down the worldly things that we carry, and walk in step with Christ, our yChrist who is gentle and humble hearted. Oke balanced with gentleness and humility.

Gentle and Humble.

Jesus says, "Learn from me." I'm gentle and humble hearted. These certainly are not the ways of the world. They are the ways of Christ.

We are learning to come take on Christ's yoke as the church in new ways. What will we leave behind? What in us is not gentle or humble hearted? We need not be the church of Capernaum, Bethsaida or Chorizan. We need discern and examen through Christ's teachings that Christ's joy might be known through us.

When I think back to the story of my brother in church, I see a full sanctuary in the sixties (why else would a young family have ended up in the second row?) Today we have 20 in our pews and a sense of longing for when we fill the pews.

My yoke is easy and my burden is light.

The teacher leads us, and then we do our part.