

Pentecost 8

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Comfort, rest, refreshment are all things that we need. This is the time of the year when many of us will take a break from our normal routines to seek a time of rest and refreshment. We journey to the shore, to the mountains, to a favorite family gathering place to refresh ourselves with those we love. If we cannot afford to take a trip this year, perhaps we'll schedule time to just rest at home. We are tired. We need a break. We want to just do something that is different and fun. We long for refreshment.

I have seen it happen at many a wedding. A mother will go out on the dance floor and invite her young child to join her in the dance. First it is a slow dance and the child squirms out of her mother's arms to retreat to the sidelines. With a wink and encouragement the mother begins to dance to a faster beat all the while encouraging the child to join her on the dance floor. But the child will not dance. Finally the mother turns her attention to an older child who is eager to join her in the frivolity. They laugh in delight and joy as the stubborn child stands by and watches.

"To what do I compare this generation?" Jesus said. "It is like a child whose mother calls from the dance floor. If I do a slow dance will you join me? How about sharing the antics of YMCA? When John came you wrote him off as a demon because he asked too much. And now here I am flapping my arms, twirling around in the dance while you sit on the sidelines and pout."

Most of us would love to join Jesus in the dance but we are convinced the world will stop turning if we rush out on to the dance floor. After all we really do not have time for dancing. We listen to the voices that tell us "we have no identity other than our work." "Self promotion is the name of the game if you want to be successful." "More is better." "Idle hands are the devil's workplace."

If you are listening to the voices in the church, you hear that successful pastors grow their churches. That you must have the latest and most up to date programs to attract young families and provide activities for children. You will be told that the leaders of a church must develop programs for every need. Increased giving is what will allow the church to grow and prosper. Please get yourself a phone that can download email. We dare not stop to breathe or take

off the yoke that drives us for even a minute lest we find that are losing the momentum to succeed.

When we hear the call of Jesus to come join him in the dance, we often hear the invitation as a burden to bear. But Jesus' invitation is an offer to take on a different kind of yoke. "Come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest," is the invitation of Jesus.

Your burdens may be no heavier than your cell phone and your labor no more than pushing buttons on a computer but you know what it is to long for rest. What Jesus is inviting us to is more than just sleep. It is more than a break in our normal routine of activity. It is the rest of St. Augustine when he wrote, "Our hearts are restless, O Lord, until they find rest in thee." Our days are often filled with frantic seeking. We remain restless even when we have taken time off. We long for true comfort, refreshment, rest but we don't seem to be able to find it.

Until this past year our nation has been blessed and cursed with an expanding economy. I believe that under the soaring market reports is a restlessness. Even in the current downturn in our economy there is a search that drives us and refuses to allow us time to rest, to be refreshed.

The economic growth and development I have seen in York over the past twelve years is amazing. Walking on George Street the other day I noticed a sign, "Luxury condos now renting." I wondered to myself who in the city can afford such luxury living, any city for that matter? I hear that tiny 1 and 2 room apartments in New York rent for thousands of dollars a month. Maybe this seems as far fetched to you as it does to me but extravagant excess affects all of us. To read about salaries in the millions paid to sports figures, radio personalities, or media personalities means that more and more of us who make six figure salaries think what we do and have is not enough. There is no end to the search for satisfaction, the more you earn the more you can imagine you could earn. The more you have the more you want. I suppose this is what drives the economy but it does not give rest to the soul.

We hear the invitation of Jesus to come, to step out of our old patterns and try something new. We know the gospel story and we believe it. But it is hard to trust a new yoke. It is hard to establish a new idea of what it means to be human. We are caught between work that gives life meaning and rest that nourishes the soul.

We struggle with the yoke of the world but we are unsure of the yoke of Christ. Though we might say "yes" to Jesus' invitation we still find ourselves reflecting the words of the apostle Paul, "I do not do what I want, but the very thing I hate. I can will what is right but I cannot do it."

Dorothy Bass in her book on practicing our faith introduces us to a forty year old mother who reflects on her life. "I never thought I'd be living this way," she says, "I somehow imagined life to be simpler." At age forty she thinks she should have her life together by now. But things have just not worked out that way. Too few evenings include meals with loved ones; too many are given over to demands of work, housework or homework. Her closest friends are scattered across several time zones. The neighbors she entrusted with the key to her house have moved away and she does not know the new neighbors. She finds But she is wary of getting too involved. She showed up for a PTA meeting and got stuck raising money. "This is not how I intended to live my life," she sighs.

We have to wonder, maybe the dance of Jesus is no different. Maybe it is the same push, push, push just toward a different goal. But there is more to Jesus' invitation than just taking time off. "Take my yoke upon you." That is an image that does not fit well with rest and refreshment. We seldom use the word "yoke" Our thoughts turn to animals joined together by heavy wooden yokes pulling a wagon or plow. How can you find rest by taking up a yoke?

Jesus borrows this image from wisdom literature. The yoke is not considered a burden but a source of joy. The yoke means the burden is shared and thus lighter. Being yoked means that one does not have to carry the entire weight on one's shoulders but can share the load making it easier. When things are going our way it is easy to forget that we depend on God for all things. It is easy to think our power resides in ourselves. There is no one among us who will not one day find herself carrying a load too heavy to bear alone. None of us is self sufficient, we are all in need of rest, comfort and refreshment.

Most of us find ourselves like the child at a wedding. We stand on the edge of the dance floor wanting to join the dance but feeling uneasy and unsure of ourselves. We want to know the joy of moving freely even if it seems silly but standing on the sideline is all we know how to do. Jesus comes with outstretched arms inviting us, cajoling us, willing to teach us how to dance. Blessed are those who know their need of refreshment, rest, comfort early for they are the ones who learn to put themselves in the arms of the Comforter.

