

## What Faith Asks of Us *Practice the Pause*

Matthew 11:28-30

October 22, 2023

What does weariness sound like?

A young man asked me to lunch not long ago. An impressive guy, he has achieved a great deal for someone still in his early thirties. He's successful in business. He's a leader in his church, respected in the broader community, on the fast track for promotion and advancement. Others in his group of young professionals would call him successful, perhaps even describe his life as "perfect." At lunch, I learned otherwise. Almost as soon as we sat down together, he began to share with me the restlessness in his heart, that grating, gnawing, fraying sense that something is missing in his life. He described with some degree of frustration how he has done everything he is supposed to do, checked every box, and none of it had brought deep fulfillment. Quite the opposite—he described the emptiness of his professional life, the loneliness of constant competition, the constant anxiety, the sense that perhaps it's all meaningless in the end. Before we paid the tab, he asked for a place in scripture where he might turn for hope.

*Come to me, all who are **weary**.*

It is an invitation. The invitation of Jesus is not issued to the satisfied or the successful and certainly not to the self-sufficient. No resumés or reference checks are needed. Jesus knows better. He knows that we are the weary ones. Now, I understand that it is natural for us to compare ourselves to those whose struggles are more obvious, those whose lives are more tenuous, those whose futures are less certain. But this morning, perhaps only for this one hour, I wonder if you might be able to imagine *yourself* as

one to whom Jesus, gentle and humble in heart, offers his invitation:

*Come to me, all **you** wearied ones.*

So, what wears on you? What wearies you?

Is it the physical exhaustion of not enough hours in the day and too much to do? Is it the mental fatigue of consequential decisions and high stress situations? Is it the spiritual depletion of trying to hold it all together on your own?

Weariness takes many forms. It is deeply personal, but it is always communal. It affects our emotional health. It erodes our relationships with those closest to us. It causes us to lash out in anger or hunker down in fear. It steals our joy and frays our trust. When we are weary, we tend to lose sight of what nourishes our souls and recharges our spiritual batteries. And so, we keep running and running. We keep pushing and shoving. We keep trying, and it is never enough.

*Come to me...*

A group of pastors gather around a pot of coffee to share encouragement. That morning we were discussing a recent study ranking nine leadership positions that impose the greatest burdens on those who pursue them. Interestingly, at least to me, pastors landed at number five, situated just between coaches and mayors. To relieve the suspense and save you the Google search, number one: stay-at-home parent. (Can I get an Amen to that one?) That morning, our conversation turned to the poor example we pastors set if we ourselves are constantly stressed out, overly anxious, plagued by fatigue, wearing at the edges.

We described our efforts to be all things to all people and the resulting disappointment when this proves impossible. We commiserated about unmanageable paces of life, resulting in an epidemic of exhaustion. And one member of the group observed wryly that our most routinely and unapologetically broken commandment is the fourth one—*remember the Sabbath and keep it holy*.

My name is Chris, and I am a Sabbath breaker.

I imagine many of you can relate. It is one of the most common struggles I hear voiced by people of all ages—this frenetic busyness that leaves little time for reflection or rest. Or perhaps a list of too many obligations and options compete for our time, and so we struggle to prioritize or find a little room to exhale. From children whose schedules are already packed with activity, to teenagers whose stress level is through the roof, to parents whose daily grind begins well before sunrise and extends late into the evening, to older adults whose lives center on caring for a loved one around the clock, we hear a cacophony of discordant cries claiming so much of our time and energy that we are left feeling drained, lifeless. Indeed, the roars are so loud, our weariness so severe, that we might miss the simple voice of the savior...

*Come to me, all who are weary...and carrying heavy burdens.*

The words of Jesus are an invitation, not an altar call but a call to an alternative form of life, rooted in God's grace. He offers it not to the content or the comfortable, but to those shouldering, carrying heavy burdens. This morning, as you entered the sanctuary, every single one of you was dragging something, dragging behind you the weariness, the heaviness that threatens to overwhelm. I don't know which burdens you carried with you, but I can make some educated guesses.

Some of you are carrying the burden of worry—worry for tomorrow, worry for the future, for your children,

your grandchildren, your parents, yourselves. Worried for our nation or the world.

Others among you brought along the burden of stress—the deadlines that are looming, the bills that are due, the exams just around the corner, more to be done than time to do it.

Still others shouldered a heavy load of pain—physical pain perhaps, the pain of broken relationships, regretful pain over harsh words spoken in anger, a heart heavy with grief and loneliness.

The burdens we bear are legion, each unique to the circumstances of our lives and yet collectively common to the human condition. The weight of the burdens we bear adds to the weariness we feel. And the more we are plagued by weariness, the more anxious we become. And anxiety becomes a burden we bear. We seek release from anxiety by working a little harder, sleeping a little less, cutting off relationships, bearing down or lashing out. And that vicious cycle of weariness and burden-bearing tragically draws us farther and farther from the rest we desperately seek but don't feel we deserve to receive.

A couple comes home at the end of a long day. It's been weeks since they had a conversation about anything other than managing the schedule and sharing the responsibilities. The distance between them has grown into a chasm, and the energy necessary to rebuild that bridge is fading fast. Silently, they brush their teeth and prepare for bed. So many words left unspoken, so much pain left unexpressed. Just too tired to talk tonight. Exhausted by the demands of the day. Maybe we'll find time tomorrow. Weariness.

A high school student pours over math homework well after midnight, remembering the carefree days of elementary school, when life seemed so simple. But now the stress of class, the demands of extracurriculars, the struggle to keep up with it all, the fear of disappointing parents and teachers, has taken all the joy and left only a sense of apathy. Weariness.

Can you relate? Have you in your own life felt the backbreaking weight of weariness?

*Come to me, all who are weary, all who carry heavy burdens....and I will give you **rest**.*

This invitation Jesus offers is an invitation to himself. *Come to me*. Imagine this. The rest you so desperately seek will be found not by ceaseless grasping, but when you finally let go. Listen to this. You will never earn Sabbath rest. You will never achieve Sabbath rest. You can only receive it as a gift. Finding rest for your soul involves trusting deep in your bones that the world does not depend on your effort to keep spinning. Perhaps deep down you, like me, prefer to think otherwise. Perhaps you prefer to think of yourself as indispensable. Maybe you have one of these devices that tells you over and over again how indispensable you are and how much this world spins around you, how desperately everyone is waiting for your communication, your perspective, your input. But the truth is that God's providence is not dependent on your efforts. *Come to me. You will find rest.*

In her book, *An Altar in the World*, Barbara Brown Taylor describes Sabbath-keeping as "the practice of saying no." She encourages us to honor the Sabbath this way:

"At least one day in every seven, pull off the road and park the car in the garage. Close the door to the tool shed. Turn off the computer. Stay home not because you are sick but because you are well. Talk someone you love into being well with you. Take a nap, a walk, a whole hour for lunch. Test the premise that you are worth more than you can produce—that even if you spend one whole day being good for nothing you will still be precious in God's sight."

Whenever we are weary, when we carry heavy burdens, our inclination might be to try harder, to drag that weight around, or some of us even wear it as a badge of honor. After all, the whole world is weary. We

might as well relentlessly drive ourselves to do more, to push and plow our way beyond weariness.

Here's a helpful tip from one who has tried: it will never work. Try this instead:

*Come to me, all you who are weary...and I will give you rest.*

These words of Jesus are preceded by a prayer. In that prayer, Jesus thanks God that the truth has been hidden from the wise and the intelligent and has been revealed to infants. Infants. Those who do not rely on their own efforts, the very ones whose lives are characterized by an innate trust. Anyone who has ever held a baby knows something of the vulnerability that Jesus describes here.

*This* is the invitation. Come to Jesus and believe—trust to the very core of your being—that you will be held. You will be embraced. You will be loved. *Not* for what you can do, but simply for who you are. Amen.