

St Andrew's Gananoque
July 5, 2020
Scripture: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30
Sermon: Come Unto Me

One of the things that I look forward to each day is getting the mail. It gets harder each year as most of what we tend to get in the mail are bills and junk mail. But every so often you find something that can make your day, whether it is a letter, a card, or an invitation to an event. Summer is the time when we would probably get an invitation to a bbq, a wedding, a birthday celebration, or an anniversary party. These are all events where we will look forward to attending and sharing in the joy filled celebration. But then again, this is no normal year and all of these events have been put on hold for a while. Regardless of that fact, we all enjoy receiving invitations. Sometimes we might actually miss an invitation if it is sent to us by email or by Facebook. They are different from something printed on paper and can cover a vast amount of subjects from being invited to 'like' a page or comment to being 'invited' to join a group.

In our passage from Matthew, Jesus speaks what are among the kindest and appealing words he ever uttered, the greatest invitation ever given:
Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
While any event that has an invitation is usually limited to a certain number of people, and the event itself is limited to a specific time and place, the invitation given by Jesus is open to all people for all time. There are no limits on this invitation. There is no fine print to be found about limits of time, place, membership.... or anything! It is a free lifetime offer!
There are three key words in this invitation that speak to our lives:
Come. All. Rest.

The first word 'COME' is the never ending invitation by God to everyone. This invitation is woven throughout the scriptures and is also found at the very end of the Bible in Revelation 22:17: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let everyone who hears say, 'Come.' And let everyone who is thirsty come . . . take the water of life as a gift". This invitation has been extended to all people and all generations. Come, let everyone come. Whoever we are, wherever we are, however we are, come. Come, even as we try to find our way in a world that seems to shift and change. Come, even as we try to live responsibly in this confusing world. Come, even as we acknowledge and live within our limitations. Come, even though our sins are many. The welcome of Jesus is ever-extended. COME.

The next word from this invitation is the word 'ALL'. All are invited. Not just a few. Not just those who are qualified, educated, or capable. Not just those who feel worthy or seem worthy. All. All of us. In spite of ourselves, our past, our present, our sins, our failures, our shortcomings. Everyone is welcome. Everyone receives the same invitation. This is a small word that speaks of the vastness of the invitation of inclusion from a loving God.

COME. ALL.

The final word that we hear from this invitation is the word 'REST'.

That is what Jesus offers at the end of the invitation. We are invited to accept rest. We read that this invitation that is to all who are weary and burdened. Have you ever felt weary? Weary from the physical work that we do, or the stressful demands of work and life? In an age where technology is said to make life easier and faster we continually have less time to relax and enjoy our lives.

In our current pandemic, do we have an opportunity to set aside our burdens, worry and stress? Vacation is a welcomed time that we all enjoy, and we tend to take time in the summer to get away from our daily routines and escape for a while. That rest and relaxation that we need and crave is often found when we vacation. It gives us a reprieve from our burdens and rest for our weariness. This year is the first in my memory that we have not planned for our vacation. The risks involved in travelling do not justify our planning. We have to be content with a 'staycation' which is an important time for rest and relaxation. Imagine how this invitation by Jesus to rest from our burdens and worries would affect each and every day of our lives! That 'vacation' feeling of being free from all that wears us down can be felt every day.

Jesus offers this feeling not to just a select few, but to all.

COME. ALL. REST.

But are we truly aware of this invitation to come, for all, to rest?

Do we go to Jesus when we are feeling weary and heavy laden? This invitation must be received each and every day of our lives. We are always in need of God's forgiveness and rest.

The people that first heard these words were weary and heavy laden not only with the cares and concerns of life, but also by the rules and laws of the Pharisees. If we are told not to do something, why is it that we want to do it even more? If I tell you not to look at the ceiling of your living room, do you not feel compelled to look at it? That is the effect that the laws have. Did your neighbor get a new car? Wow! It has all the newest bells and whistles. Wouldn't it be great to have a car like that! But wait a minute! Am I being covetous of my neighbor's

car? This is the effect of the laws. There was no freedom in these laws, only bondage.

This invitation by Jesus continues as we are offered further instruction: to take on Christ's yoke. This means to submit to Jesus as the one who is gentle and meek, as one who is gentle and caring and concerned for us. It means to put yourself under God's leading, to join yourself together with Him, but the difference is, He is the *yoke mate* and this is how He can give rest.

Note the following illustration of two oxen, one huge, and one very small.

The author shares his experience: "There was an old farmer plowing with a team of oxen. As I saw this team I was somewhat amazed, for one was a huge ox and the other a very small bullock. That ox towered over the little bullock that was sharing the work with him. I was amazed and perplexed to see a farmer trying to plow with two such unequal animals in the yoke and commented on the inequality to the man with whom I was riding. He stopped his car and said, 'I want you to notice something. See the way those traces are hooked to the yoke? You will observe that the large ox is pulling all the weight. That little bullock is being broken into the yoke but he is not actually pulling any weight.'" When I read this illustration, my mind instinctively came to this passage of Scripture where our Lord said, "Take my yoke upon you, learn of me; for I am ..." In the normal yoking the load is equally distributed between the two that are yoked together, but when we are yoked with Jesus Christ, He bears the load and we who are yoked to Him share in the joy and the accomplishment of the labor but without the burden of the yoke.

This invitation is a lot for us to consider. We first receive the invitation to come to God. We are to come to God daily, without fear or shame.

This invitation is for all of us, whether we realize we need God's help in our lives or not. We are also invited to rest.

We are invited to lay down our burdens, to rest from our struggles and stresses.

We are to take up the yoke with Jesus, knowing that he will carry the load for us when we are unable to.

Today we have received the best invitation we could wish for: to be free of our burdens, to find rest and help in our God. Rest in his love and grace today. Amen