

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commings+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 11:25-30

"Take My Yoke"

When Beverly was reading the Epistle – Romans 8:1 is so powerful and so wonderful because it reads this way: *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* Do you know what that means? That means if you know Jesus (yes, I know we have read John 3:16-18 a thousand times – and I have told you that if you know Jesus you are saved and you have eternal life – and if you don't know Jesus – Jesus said "you are condemned already." My point that I am making is what a precious gift Jesus is to us. A precious gift – and there is more that comes with that gift than just batteries! It is amazing that with Jesus comes forgiveness of our sins. When we give it to Him – He doesn't take it back. *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation;"* I don't know about you but in my life I have carried a lot of baggage around – because you know I wasn't always a priest; I had another life – and another life before that – it seems like I have lived three or four lives – but there is also a lot of stuff we have all done. What that Scripture says that if you know Jesus Christ – STOP CARRYING AROUND BAGGAGE! When you give it to Him – He doesn't give it back.

We live in a tense, uptight and fast paced world – filled with plenty of "let's go" and "hurry up!" Do you have that problem at home? You know – it's like "c'mon we gotta get going – we are gonna be late!" Time magazine wrote that back in the 1960's, which if you think about it – it is 50 years ago - expert testimony was given to a Senate sub-committee on time management which predicted that **technology would radically change how many hours a week people worked.** (I can tell you that I worked more this week trying to get the new sound system right – but it will eventually take some things off my plate and off other people's as well.) They said that the average American would be working 22 hours a week within 20 years. That was 50 years ago! They predicted America would have plenty of "excess time." Here we are over 40 plus years – near 50 years later, after incredible advances in technology – and how many of us are wondering what to do with all the excess time on our hands? Instead, it would seem that if you want to get somewhere else, you've gotta run at least twice as fast as that." How many of us feel like that?

So, let's take a little participation quiz to see how many of us are being dragged through life. Fill in the blanks:

I'm ready to throw in the...

I'm at the end of my...

I'm just a bundle of...

My life is falling...

I'm at my wit's...

I feel like resigning from the human...

Apparently we're all experiencing the rat race. Just when you thought you were getting ahead, along come faster rats. But remember, whoever wins the rat race is still a rat!

You know what - we need to learn how to experience rest. If all we needed was physical rest we

can always take a nap. If we needed only emotional rest, we can always take a vacation. But where can we find spiritual rest? How can we obtain relief regarding the deepest issues of life at the deepest level of our hearts? The more things change the more they stay the same. 50 years later we are taking on more due to technology. Jesus spoke to this very issue 2,000 years ago in Matthew 11:28-30. This passage contains 3 commands from Jesus that lead to rest. Jesus said *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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."*

I will experience rest for my soul if I obey Jesus' command of...

COME TO ME: Jesus regularly invited people to come to Him to meet their needs. NOTICE: What Jesus did NOT say, "Come to church to find rest" The truth is that Christianity begins with meeting Christ personally. Going to McDonalds does not make you a hamburger. Going into a garage doesn't make you a car or a truck. Going to church does not make you a Christian (you must meet Christ personally). Gathering information about Jesus does not make you a Christian – it makes you a historian. Joining a group does not make you a Christian. Having Christian parents doesn't make you a Christian. You become a Christian through a moment of time choosing to answer Jesus' personal invitation to turn from your own ways and come to Him. You will find that He's been waiting for you all along. Can you recall when you decided to answer Jesus' call to come?

I will experience rest for my soul if I obey Jesus' command of...

RECEIVE THE SPIRITUAL REST THAT WILL BE GIVEN: Jesus said *"Come to me... and I will give you rest"*

Rest for those who labor: Jesus is not speaking to just the blue collar worker, but to sincere, conscientious people who are trying to balance what they believe to be the scales of good deeds vs. bad deeds to be accepted by God. With that way of thinking you never know how your account is balanced at any time.

Human effort falls far short of the standard that God requires. Before every service the worship team gathers in the sacristy (the acolytes, the Lay Ministers) and we pray. We pray that God would give us the strength to try to serve Him in excellence. We know that we will fail – but He always makes up the difference. Our efforts can always be strengthened by the power of God. You will not know the difference – we may know if we messed up – but God doesn't let you see that. He wants you to worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. Receive the spiritual rest that will be given by Him. Human efforts fall far short of the standard that God requires. The cross is the place of exchange where what I am is placed on Him and what He is, is given to me. My bad deeds are removed and placed on the shoulders of Jesus Christ when He laid on the cross – and they were forgiven. I rest on His perfection – which is credited to my account – His righteousness in place of mine. When we die and we know and love Jesus Christ and have repented of our sins – when we stand in judgment before God the Father, He will not see our unrighteousness, our sins – instead He will see the righteousness of His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Is that good news? STOP CARRYING AROUND BAGGAGE! Leave it at the cross – it is

not yours anymore! If you gave it to Him – forget about it! Jesus wants to provide rest for those who are heavy laden and burdened by sin. I keep thinking of that image of Ebenezer Scrooge watching Marley carrying those chains and those blocks. Do you want to do that? You don't have to! The enemy keeps reminding you of what you did – but Jesus wants you to forget about what you did – when you gave it to Him. The burden is no longer yours. He is speaking to those who are wrapped up in living for themselves, for possessions; for stuff. In Jesus Christ the full penalty has already been paid. God did not send Jesus to rub our sins in, but to rub them out. He bore the guilt and paid the penalty, and there is nothing left to pay. Have you ever gone to a restaurant and you ask for the check – and the waiter or waitress comes to you and says that it has already been taken care of. Have you ever had that experience? It is amazing – your jaw drops down about this far – and you are like 'who? What?' Or how about this – have you ever pulled up to a toll booth and you go to pay the toll and they say to you 'the car in front of you has already paid your toll' – and you are like 'what?' Or maybe you have driven up to the toll booth and given some money to the toll collector and said 'pay for the next car.' That is what we are talking about here - come and rest in what Jesus has done for you.

You will experience rest for your soul as you also obey Jesus' command of... **TAKE MY YOKE** (upon you): A yoke is a type of harness that connects a pair of oxen. Look at the picture in your bulletin – that is a yoke. Jesus uses this to refer to submission to a teacher. In NT times the phrase, "to take the yoke of" was used by rabbis to refer to "becoming a submitted pupil of a teacher"

JESUS SAID "MY YOKE:" Jesus commands we take up HIS yoke to find rest. There is no rest without having a personal relationship with God based on the finished work of Jesus. So - which yoke have you been under - Jesus' or your own? Through the choice we make – we access all that God has for us.

When I picture a yoke I picture three things:

1. **Connection with Jesus.** Yokes are made for two, not for one. We were not meant to go through life living apart from God. His yoke fits well and is lighter than the one we've been pulling all by ourselves. We must be connected to Jesus – in order to survive – eternally!

2. **"Follow Me:"** The yoke gives forward motion of two connected together. You cannot be yoked to Jesus and go your own way anymore. We follow Him and His direction for our life.

3. **Cooperation:** To be yoked together with Jesus means that we cooperate with His work. Before we come to Him, we were living for "this side of eternity." Now we are joined to His work and discover that our lives make an eternal "kingdom" impact.
Rest is the result of obedience - when we rest in Him!

Then thirdly - you will experience rest for your soul as you also obey Jesus' command of... **LEARN FROM ME.** All of us are ignorant, just on different subjects. Henry is an engineer – I couldn't go there. The other Henry rides a motorcycle – I couldn't go there either! George was a

principal – I couldn't go there. We all have different experiences – coming from different directions. There are farmers in here that I am just so amazed at what they do – and teachers – so amazing of the gifts that God has given. Rest is the result of obedience when we rest in Him. We learn from Him, and we are all ignorant at different levels.

When we come, take up His yoke, the process of learning begins. We learn to be more like Jesus –and yearn to take on traits like His:

- Jesus' gentleness draws us to Him with our cares and concerns. Wouldn't it be great to have someone you can pour out your deepest thoughts to, a gentle person who has the strength to help? And you know that no one else is going to hear it! It is amazing how you tell one person and they tell someone and they tell someone – it is like that commercial – and so on and so on and so on, and it is never what was supposed to be said. When you tell Jesus it goes nowhere – except His ears. We need to learn that Jesus wants to just love us.
- The Apostle Peter wisely and lovingly tells us in 1 Peter 5:7 *"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."*
- Selflessness – also known as humility: (Jesus as the example) Pride and self-centeredness is strictly straight from the enemy. The very things that turn people off from the church are the very opposite of what Jesus is really like. Hurting, lost and weary people were drawn to Jesus because He cared for them and met their needs – and changed their lives and lifestyles.
- The grace that we receive in His rest. Once and for all we rest in His work on the cross for us to make us acceptable to God.
- Jesus is gentle and He is humble. The more you learn that about Him, the more you will find your rest in Him.

I think you may find this illustration very helpful. There was an old farmer plowing with a team of oxen. He had one huge ox and one very small ox that were teamed together by a dual yoke. The big one towered over the little one that was sharing the work with Him. In truth, the way that they are yoked – the big one is doing all of the work, and the smaller one is not carrying any weight to speak of, but is being trained or "broken in," learning how to do the job. Just as it says in today's Gospel – *"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."* When we are yoked with Jesus – He bears the load and we who are yoked to Him share in the joy and accomplishment of the labor but without the burden.

I know sometimes life makes us feel like the ox whose pulling himself to exhaustion. True rest comes from obedience to Jesus' three commands:

1. COME to Me,
2. TAKE My yoke upon you,
3. LEARN from Me.

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, July 9, 2017, Year A

Today, let each one of us take with us these words from the author of the letter to the Hebrews 4:11 *“Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.”*