

Genesis 24:34–38, 42–49, 58–67; Song of Solomon 2:8–13; Zechariah 9:9–12; Psalm 145:8–14; Romans 7:15–25a; Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30

Opener:

Friends, we begin today not with a demand, not with scolding, and not with shame, but with an invitation.

Jesus speaks one of Scripture's tenderest invitations: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28 NIV).

You can laugh with people, answer messages, show up for work, take care of your family, sit in church, sing the hymns, and still feel something inside you whispering, "I am tired."

Friends, there is a kind of tiredness that sleep does not fix.

Not just physically tired.

Soul tired.

It is the weariness of carrying more than you know how to name: trying to be strong, knowing what is right and still struggling to live it, praying over the same battle and wondering why it has not lifted yet.

Sometimes that weariness grows heavier when faith itself gets turned into pressure. If you were more faithful, more disciplined, more spiritual, more committed, more something, then maybe you would not feel this way.

Into that kind of tired, Jesus says, "Come to me" (Matthew 11:28 NIV).

Introduction:

And the Gospel of God is this: Jesus does not shame the weary; he calls weary to himself and teaches them how to live free.

Holiness is not the burden Jesus adds. Holiness is the rest Jesus teaches.

The way begins here, with these words: come to Jesus, take his yoke, learn his rest.

First, Jesus meets the weary heart honestly.

But before we can receive that rest, we have to tell the truth about why we are so tired.

Romans 7 tells the truth about the divided life. Paul says, "I do not understand what I do" (Romans 7:15 NIV). He knows the good. He wants the good. He can name what is right. But there is another power at work in him. He says, "For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out" (Romans 7:18 NIV).

That is the ache in the room.

It is one thing not to know what is right. It is another thing to know it, want it, and still feel divided inside.

This is why cheap advice can feel cruel: “Just stop worrying,” “Just forgive,” “Just move on,” “Just trust God,” “Just do better.”

When spoken without mercy, even truth can become another weight on tired shoulders.

Paul does not cry out for a better checklist. He cries out, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?” (Romans 7:24 NIV).

Who will rescue me?

That is the right question. **Not** how do I rescue myself? Who will rescue me?

Then comes the Gospel answer: “*Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!*” (Romans 7:25 NIV).

So before holiness becomes visible obedience, it is first a rescue we receive. It is Christ meeting us in the divided place and saying, “Come to me.”

Illustration

I remember seeing a Boy Scout once with a backpack that looked almost as large as he was. The weight kept pulling his shoulders backward. Every few steps he had to stop and adjust it. He did not ask for help. He just kept trying to prove he could carry it.

Then someone reached down and said, “Here, let me help you.”

For a second, he resisted. Not because help was bad, but because surrender felt embarrassing.

I know that child. I have been that child. Maybe you have too. Some of us are carrying backpacks no one else can see: regret, fear, family strain, old shame, grief that keeps changing shape, and the need to hold everyone together.

Sometimes the hardest part is admitting that we cannot carry it alone.

But Jesus does not say, “Come back when you have yourself together.” He says, “Come to me.”

That is mercy. That is the beginning of rest.

Second, Jesus comes as the gentle King.

Zechariah gives us a picture of the King who comes, but he does not come the way anxious people expect power to come: “**See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey**” (Zechariah 9:9 NIV).

Lowly. Gentle. Humble. This King is not weak, but he is not violent. He is righteous and victorious, and he comes in humility.

Zechariah says this King will proclaim peace, break the weapons of war, and call them prisoners of hope. *“Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you”* (Zechariah 9:12 NIV).

Prisoners of hope. Bound to mercy. Captured by the promise that God is not finished.

Psalm 145 sings the same truth: *“The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love”* (Psalm 145:8). Then the psalm says, *“The LORD upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down”* (Psalm 145:14 NIV).

So, when Jesus says, *“Come to me,”* we hear the voice of the gentle King who lifts the bowed down.

Third, Jesus gives us his yoke, not our shame.

Jesus says, *“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart”* (Matthew 11:29 NIV).

The word yoke may not sound restful. A yoke sounds like work. So why would Jesus invite weary people to take a yoke?

Because the question is not whether we will be yoked. **The question is what we are yoked to.**

Some are yoked to shame. Some to fear. Some to keeping everyone happy. Some to proving they are useful. Some to the hidden belief that God’s love must be earned every morning and can be lost by evening.

Jesus does not say, “You have no yoke.” He says, “Take my yoke.” There are yokes that crush and a yoke that heals.

Illustration and Word Picture

Imagine a field after a long dry season. The ground is hard. A young animal is restless, pulling against the harness, wasting energy, wearing itself out before the row is even opened. Then that young animal is placed beside one that has learned the field. The stronger one does not shame the younger one. The steadier one does not mock the weaker one. It simply walks the path.

Step by step, the younger learns the rhythm by nearness, by shared movement, by being joined to the one who knows the way.

That is the image Jesus gives us. He does not throw instructions from a distance. He yokes us to himself. He says, walk with me. Learn my pace. Learn my heart. Learn what holiness becomes when it is rooted in communion instead of performance.

He says, “*For my yoke is easy and my burden is light*” (Matthew 11:30 NIV).

None ya gotta understand: Easy does not mean effortless. Light does not mean meaningless. Jesus is not offering laziness. He is offering grace-shaped life. The yoke is still a yoke, but the weight changes because the company changes.

Fourth, Jesus teaches holiness as rest.

Genesis 24 tells the story of Rebekah being invited into a covenant future she cannot yet fully see. The family asks, “Will you go with this man?” She answers, “I will go.” She has not seen the whole road, but she hears the invitation and responds.

Song of Solomon gives us the same movement in the language of love and springtime: “*Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me*” (Song of Solomon 2:10 NIV). Then the beloved says, “*See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone*” (Song of Solomon 2:11 NIV).

Grace often begins like that. Not with all the answers. Not with every fear resolved. Grace begins with Christ calling and the soul learning to answer, “I will go.”

Many think of rest is like sitting in a recliner but is not really rest... Your body has stopped moving, but inside you are replaying yesterday, fixing tomorrow, carrying the bills, the family tension, and the thing you wish you had not said.

Your body is in the chair, but your soul is still dragging a wagon uphill.

Jesus is not merely offering a break from activity. He is offering rest at the center, to the Divine Center, to a life gathered in God rather than scattered by every demand pressing upon us. That is close to what Jesus is doing here.

As Friends, this should sound familiar. Christ is not merely a figure from the past or a doctrine on the page. Christ is present. Christ teaches, gathers, convicts, comforts, leads, and forms a holy people in the living presence of God.

That is why waiting worship matters. Not because quiet is magic. Not because stillness is escape. But because weary people need to stop long enough to hear the living Christ say, “Come to me.”

So here is the Gospel today.

The weary heart says, “I cannot carry this.”

- Romans says, “Who will rescue me?”
- Zechariah says, “Your King is coming.”
- Psalm 145 says, “The Lord lifts up the bowed down.”
- Song of Solomon says, “Arise, come with me.”

- Genesis says, “Will you go?” And Jesus says, “Come to me.”

Everything converges there.

Take my yoke. Learn from me. Find rest.

Jesus does not say, “Come to me and I will give you an easier life.” He says, “I will give you rest.”

There is a difference: The fields may still need plowed. The family may still be complicated. The grief may still take time. The obedience may still cost something.

But you do not have to live yoked to shame. You do not have to live yoked to sin’s mastery. You do not have to live yoked to other people’s anxiety. You do not have to live yoked to proving yourself.

Christ gives rest, and then Christ teaches rest. That is holiness.

Holiness is not the burden Jesus adds. Holiness is the rest Jesus teaches.

So what do we do?

Come honestly. Do not clean up the weariness before you bring it to Jesus.

Learn from him. Let his gentleness and humility become the shape of your holiness: truth without cruelty, mercy without performance, obedience without anxiety, faithfulness without frantic strain.

So hear the invitation of Jesus, not as a decoration, not as a religious slogan, but as the living voice of the living Christ: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28 NIV).

And as we move into Open Worship, I invite us to hold one query before the Lord:

Lord Jesus, what burden am I carrying that you are inviting me to bring to you?

Let us wait together in the presence of the gentle King.

Manuscript Notes

1. Thomas R. Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), especially Kelly’s language of the Divine Center and the gathered life rooted in God’s presence.
2. Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, rev. ed. (New York: Church Publishing, 2017); Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1978).