

I Will Give You Rest
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First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
July 6, 2014

Zechariah 9:9-12

⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!

Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

¹⁰ He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the warhorse from Jerusalem;
and the battle-bow shall be cut off,
and he shall command peace to the nations;
his dominion shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

¹¹ As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

¹² Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;
today I declare that I will restore to you double.

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

¹⁶ ‘But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,

¹⁷ “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we wailed, and you did not mourn.”

¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, “He has a demon”; ¹⁹ the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, “Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!” Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.’

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸ ‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’

Did you hear that? Those words of comfort in both of our readings? We have heard many times “Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” Follow Christ, listen to Christ and you will be given rest. And our reading from Zechariah is likely familiar, directly referenced by our Palm Sunday reading: “Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on colt, the foal of a donkey.” The comfort comes not just in the king coming but also in the type of king coming. A king coming on a horse, as one might

expect, comes on an animal of war of battle. A king coming on a donkey? A donkey then was as domestic as it is now. A donkey signals the ordinary ventures of farming and supporting a family. The men could stay at home rather than go to war for this king would “cut off the chariot...and the warhorse,” would cut off all against which they battled, against which we battle. To whom are these words *not* good news?

Who among us does not carry a heavy burden? Concerns about finances. Concerns about health. Concerns about family and friends. Concerns about the future. Regrets about the past. Who among us does not have battles we wish would cease? Battles among family members. Battles among friends. Battles with addictions. Battles with mental illness. Jesus will give you rest and God will make your battles cease. We have lived this life, though, and we know it cannot be so easy as this. Can it?

John came with the news of God’s way and people dismissed him, claiming he had a demon. Jesus came with news of God’s way and people dismissed him, claiming he was drunk. Yet they both shared this news that trusting in God was enough, making God the center of life was enough. That generation then, and this generation now, fought that instruction, fight it, making life harder with our resistance. In our own ways, we dismiss their words as those of demons and drunkards for surely it cannot be so easy. The way of which they speak seems too unconventional, too unlikely to work, too “not-the-way-we’ve-always-done-it.”

Jesus prayed, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants.” Then, the wise and the intelligent were the scribes and Pharisees who were convinced they knew best. Today, the wise and the intelligent are those who think they have it all figured out, those who have set their own path and are convinced it is right and enough. But they don’t and it isn’t. The infants are those who open themselves to learn, to receive, to obey, to be molded. It is not simply that we are to come to Jesus, us who are weary. He continues, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me.” Whatever you do, do it in service of God, not for yourself or for selfish means. Jesus is gentle and humble in heart. Should we also be, we would find rest for our souls.

There is a new hymn in our hymnals, new to us but not new as hymns go. Number 753 is the prayer of St. Francis, and is entirely about taking Christ’s yoke upon oneself. “Make me a channel of your peace. / Where there is hatred, let me bring your love. / Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord, / and where there’s doubt true faith in you. // Where there’s despair in life, let me bring hope. / Where there is darkness only light, / and where there’s sadness, ever joy. // O, Master, grant that I may never seek so much to be consoled, as to console, / to be understood, as to understand, / to be loved, as to love

with all my soul.” We find rest because, as the song continues, “It is in pardoning that we are pardoned, / in giving of ourselves we receive, / and in dying that we’re born to eternal life.”

The way itself is simple. It’s the living of it which is not. It is easy to convince ourselves that we are the wise, the intelligent, and that our ways will bring us peace and comfort. How assured are we that, if we had more money, then things would be easier? How assured are we that, if we got the perfect scores on our AP tests and high scores on the standardized tests, then the school of our dreams would come knocking on our doors? How assured are we that, if we could just find more time, then our houses would be clean? But that’s not how it goes, is it? We strive and strive after our own goals and, in the end, money isn’t the answer, the school which is a great fit, where you feel at home, is rarely the school of your dreams, and the fleeting joy of a clean house is nothing compared to the joy of those same moments spent with a child, a pet, a spouse, a friend, a book, the Bible, in prayer or meditation.

Jesus says, “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” “I will give you rest” does not mean having nothing to do, nothing to strive for, or nothing which worries. It means we carry much which we cannot control and much which does not matter. It’s like packing for a trip and bringing those things you never use but still need to lug around. You know what I’m talking about – the extra pairs of shoes, the jacket, the three pairs of pants too many. When we pare down to only what is necessary, to what matters, there is less to carry and we are relieved, we have rest. When we leave behind what we cannot control and what does not matter, we are left with that which serves God and we find rest for our souls. So may it be for you and for me.

Let us pray: Clear our minds and our hearts of that which wearies us so that we might serve you alone, O God, and find peace in so doing. Amen.