

Matthew 11:28-30 (NRSV)

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.”

Matthew 11:28-30 (*The Message*)

28-30 “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”



The Right Tempo

When I was a preschooler, I was so skinny (yes, I said skinny), that my mother was worried that I would be diagnosed with “failure to thrive.” So, I was sent to my grandmother’s house to be “fattened up!” Didn’t Gramma do a good job!?! By the time I started school, I was taller, and larger than most of my classmates. In fourth and fifth grade, I developed some significant strength to go along with my size, so much so that I was usually chosen first when teams were being selected for neighborhood football games. I could literally drag three or four other children down the field with me when running the ball toward the end zone.

In high school, I was introduced to clothing labeled, “One Size Fits All.” Let’s just say, I was not included in “All!” And when that form of labeling was modified a decade or so ago to “One Size Fits Most,” it was abundantly clear that I was not among the “Most.” While in my elementary years my size and strength was in high demand, as I matured, the demand waned and I needed to rely on my mind and heart to foster meaningful relationships. That transformation prepared me for a spiritual journey that would cause me to periodically search for the Right Tempo in my relationship with God.

Was God seeking a follower equipped with brute force? Or would the Jesus of the gospels seek me out as one not included in “All” the way he always looked for the lost, healed those on the margins of society, and expanded the circle of faith and care even to those Samaritans? Would the Holy Spirit breathe through one who did not fit with the same passion and persistence as the Spirit seemed to rest upon the popular ones in our youth group?

The Scriptures remind us many times that the earthly experience of heaven is located at the heart of our struggles. And yet, Jesus issues the invitation:

*“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,
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.”*

Actually, Jesus never promises that his yoke was easy. We have to remember that Jesus didn't speak English. He spoke Aramaic, which was translated into Greek, which was (much later) translated into English. We don't have access to his original words, but we can find the Greek translation easily enough. And when we look at the Greek, we find that the word translated as “easy” in many Bibles is “crestos.” A better translation of “crestos” would be “kind.” An even better translation, given the context of yoking animals, would be “well fitting.” If you place an ill-fitting yoke on an ox, it doesn't matter how light its load is, every ounce of effort will be burdensome. Yet even a heavy burden is bearable if the yoke is custom fit.

What Jesus is telling us is that, in contrast to other yokes, his FITS. Jesus' yoke isn't a “one size fits all.” It fits each individual **perfectly**. It is like that yoke was made just for each person. And it was.

When I was ordained an elder in the UMC, Bishop Felton May placed this stole around my neck and upon my shoulders. This stole was made just for me by my mother and grandmother, and contains symbols from my young faith development. And when Bishop May placed it upon me he pulled it down so hard that I could hardly hold my head up. He said, you are yoked in this ministry with Christ. You will never need to go it alone!

Now, there have been times in my ministry when that yoke felt burdensome, when it was extraordinarily heavy, when it drooped to one side, and when I felt like I was tripping along the way. The yoke was not easy and the burden was not light! In those times, I realized that I was trying to carry most, if not all, of the load myself. My rhythms and tempo were all off because I was only relying on myself, and had neglected to rely on my partner and inspiration in ministry, on Jesus Christ! The yoke was not intended to facilitate carrying a load with only one of the partners working.

There have also been times when I have considered removing the yoke. We are in the midst of one of those times. When I see the church of Jesus Christ harming and excluding LGBTQIA persons, members of God's created human family, I just want to remove that yoke, that sign of my partnership with Christ in the church, and set it aside. Many called, gifted, and passionate ministers of the Gospel have been forced to lay aside their yoke, or never take it up, because of a sexual orientation that some deem as not within the “One Size Fits All.” If some of my siblings who love and follow Christ do not fit, then perhaps I don't fit anymore either. My rhythms and tempos no longer sing of a community of love, following the Savior who searches for the lost sheep, and joins in celebration over the discovery of the pearl of great price.

And Jesus says again,

The Right Tempo

First Sunday in Lent ~ March 10, 2019

Rev. Rebekah Sweet

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, 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.”

Even when those in authority are not so gentle and humble in heart, our Savior is. And Jesus wants us to thrive in all of our relationships, especially as we share his easy, perfectly fitting yoke. So friends, I invite you to seek the right tempo for your faith journey during these days – One that is not too slow, and now too fast. But a tempo that is in sync with Christ desire to engage with you in a ministry of care for self and for neighbors. A tempo that connects us with an unhurried God.

PRAYER:

For the times when we have run ourselves and others ragged...forgive us.

For the times when we have asked of ourselves too much or too little
...forgive us.

Help us find the right tempos for the right times, O God.

Help us be gentle in our learning and growing—
with ourselves and with others.

Help us step back when the toxic and overbearing pace of life
that we believe we must adhere to in order to live us to some external ideal threatens to
tear down our connections to life, love, and to you.

In this moment we hear your promise:

“My yoke is easy, my burden is light.” Amen.