

*2<sup>nd</sup> SUNDAY IN ADVENT*

*December 4, 2016*

*Matthew 11:28-30:*

## ***“The Word During Advent: Invites”***

*I. The Invitation.*

*II. The Acceptance.*

*III. The Rest.*

*IV. The Yoke.*

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St. Matthew 11:28-30

Dear Friends in Christ,

Back in a 1977 issue of Christianity Today, a fellow by the name of Calvin D. Linton wrote:

The Adversary's most successful method of deception has always been imitation. His packaging has always been almost (almost!) indistinguishable from the Real Thing, with such ethical knee-jerkers as Religion, Piety, The Golden Rule, and Virtue freely used in prominent places. Only a close reading of the small print reveals the missing ingredients - chiefly, everything having to do with sin and redemption, heaven and hell.

That's a correct insight: Linton terms it, "the missing ingredients (the ones Satan wants man to ignore) - chiefly, everything having to do with sin and redemption, heaven and hell." It all began with that most deceptive question: "Did God actually say..." (Gen 3:1b) And with it that incredible moment of the irrevocable force that offers no room whatsoever for a re-do or a second thought - the irrevocable force of leaving this world and entering what most ignore or deny.

Again, it's nothing new for us. It's what we consider year around. And how crucial for this season. It's the Word, our Lord Jesus, Who lovingly confronts us. He moves us beyond the here and now. The Word . . .

## **INVITES**

### **I. The Invitation.**

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

It's rather simple, isn't it? Jesus says, "Come to me..." The Invitation. But the content of that invitation directs us to a reality that cannot be ignored. The One inviting isn't just another earth-bound human with a nifty program. This is God.

The old commentator, P. E. Kretzmann wrote:

No mere man could have spoken these words, so full of heavenly majesty and divine comfort. Christ purposely makes use of many Old Testament phrases, but He applies them all to Himself, thus showing that all the types are realized and fulfilled in Him. Full of both authority and kindness is His call, going out to the fatigued and the burdened... (P. E. Kretzmann, Popular Commentary of the Bible, New Testament, Vol. I., p. 65)

It is as Isaiah wrote: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows..." (Is. 53:4a) The invitation.

### **II. The Acceptance.**

And then, there's the acceptance behind that invitation. That is to say, Jesus' acceptance. His willingness and want for all to come to Him. We know the key figures in what has been called "the drama of His birth." Look! Mary and Joseph. People completely insignificant to the leaders, the great thinkers, the self-appointed theologians, the celebrities, the pundits of that moment in time.

Equally interesting is the nature of the first ones to receive the good news of His birth: Shepherds. It has been noted, "Shepherds of that day generally were rough-cut individuals not particularly welcome in polite society." And, of course, the Magi; people who were not part of God's covenant. And lo, and behold, there are other faces there. The most unexpected people ever. You. Me.

Can you recall the incident surrounding the man blind from birth. We're told, "And his disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'" (Jn. 9:2) Well, that's how they saw it. Who you are, your affliction, your mess in life, your *whatever* that isn't good, is probably the result of some sin. "Jesus answered, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.'" (Jn. 9:3)

Do you ever suspicion that some specific sin is why some have such grand struggles with life? But, you see, the mirror of the law says the same about...you...me. "The wages of sin is death..." (Rom. 6:23a) And that takes into account the earthly consequences, the messes of our sin that culminate in death. You've made your messes. So have I. And we're still making them! In spite of that, Jesus extends the invitation of acceptance: **Come to me.**

### III. The Rest.

And therein lies the issue: "'Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest..." (vs 28) Kretzmann wrote, "Full of both authority and kindness is His call, going out to the fatigued and the burdened, to the poor sinners whose weight of transgressions is bowing them down to earth, who can find no solace or relief in all the wide world." (Kretzmann, p. 65)

And so it is that He gives rest to those who weep and are burdened with guilt and fear of God because of the sin that tears and destroys. God says through David, "He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." (Ps. 103:10-12)

He promises rest to those consuming themselves with trying to build their lives on things that cannot give life. Remember His promise? "...for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." (Matt. 6:8) And this: "casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7)

And the greatest promise of all: Eternal rest. Rest to those fearful of death for themselves and their loved ones. Jesus said, "'Because I live, you also will live.'" (Jn. 14:9) Rest from being wearied and burdened, frightened by the unknowns and tearful over life's disappointments.

### IV. The Yoke.

Finally, this: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

The yoke we bear is the Cross. It's what we endure as God's people in this world. I have two insights for you. First, the Albrechts in their commentary on St. Matthew write:

The yoke Jesus asks us to take upon ourselves might be defined as the whole Christian life and hope.... Crosses we are called to bear on account of our loyalty to our Savior are faith-strengthening experiences, for they help us understand what Christ endured for us, and we have our Lord's promise that he will give us the strength to endure them and that he will make them channels for all kinds of blessings. The more faithfully we follow Christ, the easier his yoke and the lighter his burden becomes. (Albrechts, *Matthew, People Bible Commentary*, CPH, St. Louis, 1996 p.171)

The Holy Spirit had Paul write concerning this world and life in this world for a child of God who clings to Christ's payment for every sin, "For this light momentary affliction (life in this world as a Christian) is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen." (2 Cor. 4:17,18a) What we must experience in and from this world prepares us for our entrance into eternal life. That's why Christ was born into this world. In fact, a little later Paul writes, "...I am filled with great comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy." (2 Cor. 7:4b)

The second insight is from Martin Luther:

The believers look upon the invisible only and not upon the visible, they adhere with simple, pure faith to the Word. And it is true also in regard to temporal (earthly) things...that the goods which we have from God are more important and more excellent than temporal misfortune can be. But how much more is this true in the Church, where this word is sounded: My burden is light, namely, for those that believe my words; and My yoke is easy, namely, if we look upon Christ, who has promised to give us rest, as He Himself says there: And ye shall find rest unto your souls. For these words: Ye shall find, indicate that the pious (God's people in Christ) are without rest for a time. But such turbulent time is short... (Kretzmann, New Testament, Vol. I., pp. 65,66)

It's quite simple. Of all the distractions and preparation this month offers, we dare not - for one moment - ignore the invitation from the One Who invites us to cherish the greatest gift ever. Eternal life in Him, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott