

Sermon for Sunday, September 12, 1982 by Dr. Andrew A. Jumper, Senior Pastor
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HOW TO REORGANIZE WHEN YOUR FEET ARE TIRED

St. Matthew 11:25-30

Text: "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."

St. Matthew 11:28 and 29

In our Scripture this morning Jesus says he will give us rest and then he goes on to tell us that the rest he is talking about is rest for our souls. I suppose we might call that "soul rest".

Well, do you need some rest this morning? Are your feet tired? Do you catch yourself saying, "Oh, if only there were not so much pressure." Or, "I just have too many demands on my life." Or maybe you complain, "There just are not enough hours in the day!" I suspect a lot of us this morning feel that there are just too many demands being made on us and our feet are really tired.

On the other hand, there is another kind of tiredness. This tiredness doesn't come from the demands and pressures of life, but it comes from a sense of despair or a sense of hopelessness about life. You see, sometimes life doesn't go very well for us. Maybe we don't accomplish the things we hoped we would or maybe we worked to achieve something and when we got it, there was not satisfaction in it. Or maybe a loved one is snatched away in death and suddenly you are all alone, ...afraid, lonely, friendless. Yes, emotionally our feet can get tired that way, too.

So Jesus in effect says to us, "Hey, everybody whose feet are tired, come to me and I'll give you rest." What kind of rest do you think we is talking about? I can think of some things he doesn't mean. For example, Jesus doesn't mean he will free us from duty and responsibility. There was a time in my life when I thought it would be restful not to have any duty and responsibility, but I quickly discovered I was wrong. I discovered that feeling unneeded--having no contribution to make--having no one to depend on me--made me feel absolutely useless. I read a story once about a man who had so much responsibility that he longed to be free of it. His phone was always ringing, the mail always brought new duties, his desk was always cluttered with things he had to do, and there were people always clamoring for an appointment. How he longed to be free of all those duties and responsibilities! And then one night he had a dream. He came to his office and the waiting room was empty. In his office he found his desk clear of work. All morning he sat there and his phone never rang. He heard the mailman come, but there were no letters for him. "What is wrong", he cried, "What place is this?" "Don't you know?" replied the mailman, "This is hell".

Would you like to wake up in the morning with absolutely nothing to do? With no one depending on you for a thing? Well, it might be nice for a day or two, but then it would become an awful boredom. Over the years I have watched members of the congregation retire and frequently soon afterwards that person will have something happen and he will pass away.

And do you know, sometimes I think people die of boredom or of a broken heart because something important to their inner being is gone. A 19th century poet put it this way: "Let me die, working. Still tackling plans unfinished, tasks undone! Clean to its end, swift may my race be run. No laggard steps, no faltering, no shirking; let me die, working!"

No, the soul rest that Jesus is talking about is not freedom from labor, not freedom from duty and responsibility. You see, pressure and tension and stress are not so much created by what is outside of us, but by how we respond inwardly to those things. For example, Jesus says in our Scripture for this morning, "Take my yoke upon you..." Now, I don't know if you know what a yoke is or not, but let me tell you that a yoke is an instrument for pulling a load. So Jesus isn't saying that we shouldn't be something hard and difficult. What he is saying is that if we pull our load his way, we will have rest for our souls.

Does that begin to make sense to you? It isn't what we have to pull in life, it isn't the load we are asked to carry, it isn't the amount of duty we have that gets us down, but it is how we pull the load. Some years ago that Bureau of Standards in Washington undertook to measure the amount of moisture in fog. They discovered that in a dense fog, covering seven city blocks up to a height of 100 feet, there is less than one glass of water! Isn't that amazing? One glass of water broken down into 60,000 million drops, can blot out great realities such as buildings or the sky or the sun.

Does that ever happen to you? I know it does to me. For example, I got a letter in the mail this past Friday. That letter upset me terribly and it made me feel betrayed. It became like a fog over my day and that night my heart was so heavy that at first I couldn't sleep.

Dr. Mayo of Mayo Clinic fame tells us that one out of every two beds in the hospitals today is for those who are emotionally or mentally ill. He goes on to say that as life becomes more complex and complicated more people find themselves unable to cope. Down deep I suspect most of us wish for times when things were simple and uncomplicated. I think one reason that western movies have had a consistent appeal over the years is because they present life in a simple, uncomplicated form. In a cowboy movie, things are always black and white with no shades of grey. You have the good guys and the bad guys and the Calvary always arrives in the nick of time. When John Wayne took his reigns in his teeth and a gun in each hand, you knew that justice was about to triumph. But real life isn't that simple and many of us do not have the inner emotional and spiritual equipment to handle trouble. Our feet get awfully tired.

Sometimes we think that if we could just change the outward circumstances things would be better. Some of you may remember the classic film, "Rebel without a Cause." In this movie James Dean portrayed in a moving way the confused young delinquent. But the real problem in the story revolves around the mother. She feels that changing the outward circumstances will solve their problems--a new home, a new community, a new beginning will bring a solution. But the real problem is an inner problem, it is a soul problem.

Frequently in marriage counseling a partner in the marriage will look for circumstances outside the home to blame for the problems. It is one's job or the community, or other people--and all the time it is an inner problem where one doesn't want to face up to blame or responsibility. I know of people who have run from home to home, from marriage to marriage, from job to job, from town to town in a vain effort to find that ideal circumstance where life works well. But all the time the problem is within and wherever they go and with whomever they go, that inner problem goes with them.

If your feet are tired this morning, that may be part of your problem. Dr. Charles Allen tells the story of two women who had the same operation. One of them responded badly, became depressed and talked about the terrible thing that had happened to her and how she would never be able to take care of herself. Her condition worsened and in a few weeks she died. The other woman had children at home. Her concern for them made her eager to get back home to care for them. In two weeks she was out of the hospital and home again. What made the difference? It was not the outward problem but the inner response.

Basically I have said two things: First, I have said that outward circumstances don't make us weary, but second, it is our inner response that makes our feet tired. The third thing I want to say is this: Jesus says that if we come to him, he will give us soul rest.

Well, what is soul rest? Jesus says it is coming to him. That is, it means to organize your life with him at the center. Do you remember the story of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus and said, "What must I do to have eternal life?" That is, "How can I reorganize my outward circumstances and reshuffle my world to assure my salvation?" The answer that Jesus gave is particularly striking. In effect he says, "quite worrying about external circumstances. In fact, get rid of them so that they won't side-track you. Instead, reorganize your life inwardly--come, follow me." And isn't that what a lot of us need this morning, a life reorganized around Jesus?

Do you remember the parable Jesus told about the rich man and his barns? This rich man reorganized his outward life and his outward circumstances. He tore down his old barns and he built great, new larger ones. And in the light of his reorganized world, he said, "Soul, take your ease." But Jesus said that getting yourself organized outwardly and rearranging your external circumstances didn't give one soul ease. That night the rich man discovered his feet were tired because his Lord said to him, "Fool, tonight your soul is required of you."

You see, no matter how well we rearrange and reorganized our outward circumstances, things will happen to shake them to pieces. Isn't that what happened to the Philippian jailer told about in Acts? His prison and his job were the center of his life. Then one night an earthquake came along and shook his world to pieces. Everything that was important seemed gone and because his soul was in despair he was about to commit suicide. Suddenly his feet were very tired. However, in a recognition that his problem was really an internal and spiritual problem, he fell down and cried out to Paul, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul told him to reorganize his life around Jesus and he would have soul rest.

A lot of us who are Christians are suffering from spiritual fatigue this morning. That's because we have taken the focus off of our relationship to Jesus and suddenly our world gets shaken to pieces. A moment ago I mentioned a letter that hurt and wounded me. That night Sydney and I prayed together as we do every night. We put the focus on Jesus and asked for his shield to cover us. Out of that we could sleep because he gave us rest. Do you need that rest this morning? Do you remember how the hymn writer put it?

I heard the voice of Jesus say, "come unto me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down thy head upon my breast
I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad,
I found in him a resting place, and he has made me glad.