

Recently a child tried to convince me that being lazy was a virtue - and while some of you may be eager to take his side, I was not amused. He even invoked the concept of yin and yang - and I am pretty sure he was articulating that his laziness was a fair counterbalance to my hard work. Again. Not amused.

Laziness is not the counterbalance to hard work, I told him.

Rest. Rest balances hard work.

And rest and laziness are not the same thing.

This conversation snuck its way back into my consciousness as I began studying the scripture for today, and found myself mouthing those words that I have heard so often throughout my formation as a follower of Jesus:

“Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, 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.”

Will you say that first line with me: “Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

This is such a comfortable promise that I would like to wrap up in it and settle down for a nap. I could just offer you a blessing and send you on your way. But the world is on fire and bodies are being broken, and there are so many other things in our text for today - it seems like we might have some reckoning to do.

I want to check in about how we got this passage today. We are in that season after pentecost that is often called “Ordinary Time.” This name identifies times that are not high holy holidays, and that are not Lent, or Easter, or Christmas, or Pentecost.

And “Ordinary Time” is perfectly fitting - in general. It’s a structure for being church - and being followers of Jesus - without pageantry or production. It’s just plain ole following Jesus.

But Ordinary Time shouldn't be mistaken for a period of just waiting for the next thing - like sitting in an airport during a layover.

Yet we **are** waiting for so very many things. This period in our history - in our life together, in our reckoning with all of our brokenness - is anything but ordinary.

Green and Growing. That is the way "Godly Play" describes this season. This is the "Green and Growing Season." And do you remember what sets this season between Pentecost and All Saints Sunday off - liturgically? What is it that we study in the scriptures, always, during this season?

The stories of Jesus - mostly stories that Jesus told. Mostly parables. And other teachings. We are nourished by the stories about the time that Jesus walked on the earth.

When I used to teach children about the liturgical seasons, we would claim it with our whole bodies. "Green and growing!" we would sing as we stretched from the floor up high above our heads.

As with the tomatoes, and Brown-eyed Susans, and lily's, and basil that may be growing in the world around you, this summer season is one in which we can deepen both our roots and our reach, becoming stronger and heartier.

So in our cycle of scripture we are in the green and growing season, and also in a Matthew Cycle. For many weeks in a row we have heard, and will hear, passages from the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew tells the story of the fulfillment of prophecy - the Gospel that uses David's genealogy, making Jesus an heir to that kingship. It also portrays Jesus as a new Moses. It's the most obviously Jewish telling.

It has a fuller Easter story than Mark, and it is longer than Mark by about a third.

And the stories in Matthew are full of phrases that many folks both inside and outside of the church use. I read something that said "when we hear 'the Bible says' we will hear more often from Matthew than any other book of Scripture."

Maybe. There certainly are many phrases that are familiar to me:

- Casting pearls before swine
- Burning the midnight oil
- Salt of the earth
- Waiting until the eleventh hour
- Beware of wolves in sheep's clothing
- The blind leading the blind
- The left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing
- The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few
- The kingdom of heaven has drawn near
- Even the hairs on your head are all counted
- Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

And in the midst of this rich storytelling, Matthew does more with church order than the other gospels - kind of a foretaste of what we have in the Epistles. It is the only gospel to mention “ekklesia.” It gives the church direction and invokes wisdom in the Jewish tradition - wisdom for believing and for living a godly life.

All of this is to say:

This Gospel was written to the community of followers of Jesus who were

- deeply steeped in the religious tradition;
- formed by infighting among those who followed Jesus and between those who followed Jesus and the larger religious community;
- disappointed - perhaps anxious - because Jesus had not returned in glory, the holy and majestic end for which they waited.

The church was unhappy with how things were, how things had been, and what had not happened yet.

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And so let us pick at this passage for today, and all the oddities that it holds for a people who are unhappy with how things are, how things have been, and what has not yet happened.

This passage portrays the present generation as being fickle.

It contrasts John's mourning and fasting with Jesus' feasting - pointing out that folks call John demonic and Jesus a glutton and a drunkard who is friends with all the wrong people. And Jesus is the one drawing out this distinction. "They think you are crazy, they think I am crazy - but I am wise, in fact I am Wisdom," Jesus says.

Jesus says that God has hidden real wisdom from the intelligent and wise - from the sages and given it to children - likely a reference to the disciples, actually.

And this passage says that no one knows God except through Jesus.

It feels a bit like a tennis match. John. Jesus. Fasting. Glutton. Demon. Son of Man. Hidden Wisdom. Revelation in Jesus.

And while we are still aiming for that cozy rest at the end of the passage, it is Jesus' identity as Wisdom herself that gets us there. "Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds" Jesus says.

Jesus is doing 2 things that matter: he is taking on this feminine descriptor, and he is highlighting the actions which he described just verses before in this way - "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them."

Jesus' deeds are deeds of mercy. Wisdom is vindicated by deeds of mercy. Intimacy with God is tied up with deeds of mercy. Being a congregation that follows Jesus means ministering through deeds of mercy.

Now Jesus' claim to be Wisdom, to actually BE the exclusive mediator of knowledge of God could be off putting to some, I guess. But it matters.

And the emphasis is made in the contrast. "You can't fast your way to knowledge of God and you can't learn your way to knowledge of God," Jesus seems to be saying. You can only know God through Wisdom, with a capital W, Wisdom incarnate, the Wisdom of the ages, the Wisdom which Jesus claims to be for the world.

Jesus' way, Jesus' teachings, Jesus' new reading of the law - these are the yoke by which we are to be led.

The fretting and weary narrator in the Romans passage describes the inner battle that so many of us face: we want to love the way of the Lord but something in us resists. "I do the very thing I hate" the writer says..."Wretched one that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

This is a weariness caused by shame and sin. And this is a weariness that many of us carry.

But then there is the weariness that comes from the sin around us. Sin that shatters hope. That sends dreams crashing and burning. Sin that enslaves and oppresses and possesses. Sin that is ignorant. Sin that is insidious. Sin that is putrid and hateful. Sin that grabs hold of the beautiful truth that the lives of people of color matter - and calls this truth "hatred" instead of seeing it as "love". Sin - that again and again - ravages God's beloved and worships monuments to hell on earth. This sin is breaking bodies and spirits.

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are heavy laden, 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."

The rest which we are promised is not laziness. We are promised rest rooted in allowing ourselves to be yoked to a strong lead, to one whose fierce love bears acts of mercy. The rest which we are promised is rest so that we might be sustained in the midst of strife, rest so that we might survive days that are far from ordinary. Rest so that we might expand our roots and our reach, so that we might grow stronger and heartier.

When we are unhappy with how things are, how things have been, and what has not happened yet, we rest in Jesus - not so that we might lie down - no - so that we may continue to put one foot in front of the other, so that we might continue to stand, so that

we might learn from the one who changed everything. We are called to rest. Resting is not the same thing as being lazy.