

I Will Give You Rest

Psalm 145: 8-14

Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30

July 9, 2023

Rev. Donna Vuilleumier

Psalm 145: 8-14

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your faithful shall bless you.

They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.

The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.

Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30

But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; 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.”

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; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 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. “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.”

--

“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.”

Jesus’ gentle invitation is beloved, comforting and familiar in times of distress, grief and worry, in times of illness, crisis and chaos. Come rest in the open arms of Jesus, let your weary souls be unburdened by the One who loves us more than we can ever imagine. Lean into Jesus, you do not need to carry this alone on your shoulders. The Shepherd, the Prince of Peace, is by your side helping to carry the load. When you are lost in deep soul weariness Jesus says, ‘come to me, and I will give you rest, I will give you peace, I will be side by side with you.

For all the times and situations in Jesus’ life when he could have said these comforting, compassionate, encouraging words—times when he healed sicknesses and infirmities, when he fed thousands of hungry listeners, when he calmed the anxious disciples on the stormy sea—any of the many times that Jesus comforted and attended to people in distress, he did not. Jesus could

have also said these words as his followers struggled with and were exhausted by some of his hardest teachings—love your enemies, turn the other cheek, you must deny yourself, take up your cross daily, the gate is narrow and the road is hard, let the dead bury the dead, but he did not.

Those times and situations certainly all point to the rest and burden-easing that Jesus offers, but none of those are the moment when he offers this beloved invitation. This invitation comes when he and John the Baptist have been misunderstood, when all that they taught and offered and shared was dismissed, denied, rejected and turned against them. The Baptist was deemed demon-possessed and the Son of God was deemed a drunken glutton. The people, ‘this generation’ as Matthew calls them, are like children in the marketplace who cannot decide whether they want to play wedding games or funeral games, whether the joy and goodness Jesus offers or the austere and repentant life John upholds are of value and meaning to them, so they completely reject both ideas and those who teach them.

What is it about being misunderstood that would prompt Jesus to offer such an invitation? Why here? Why now?

History is filled with people who were misunderstood in one way or another. How often have any of us been misunderstood—sometimes with cute, even comical consequences, but how often with relationship-impacting, work-impacting, life-affecting consequences? Being understood is a first step in being known for who we are, for being welcomed as we are, for having our values, hopes, dreams, pains, struggles and accomplishments validated. We all need to be heard, and understood.

As the founder of the International Listening Association, Dr. Ralph G. Nichols, said, "The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them."ⁱ

Or as the Animals famously sang in 1965, “I’m just a soul whose intentions are good, Oh Lord, please don’t let me be misunderstood.”ⁱⁱ

Socrates encouraged people to think for themselves and to question the existing order. The authorities considered him a threat and had him executed for ‘corrupting the youth of society.’ Yet he is now considered the father of Western philosophy.

Mary Magdalene was one of Jesus’ most devoted followers, including bearing witness to both his crucifixion and resurrection. She is mentioned by name in the gospels more than most of the apostles. Yet for a long time, she was conflated with Mary of Bethany and considered a “sinful woman” – a fallen prostitute.

Charles Darwin developed the theory of evolution against a backdrop of disbelief and skepticism. When he published his conclusions in *On the Origin of Species*, it sparked a bitter public debate in which Darwin was drawn in cartoons as being half a monkey – a clear misrepresentation of his theory of evolution.

Malala Yousafzai is a Pakistani schoolgirl who defied threats of the Taliban to campaign for the right to education. The Taliban felt she was undermining their hardline Islamic teaching. She was shot by a Taliban gunman, but survived and lived to advocate women’s rights.ⁱⁱⁱ

As head of the CDC, Dr. Anthony Fauci became the face and the voice of widespread misunderstanding about how the scientific method works. New information was not seen as lessons in managing the evolving Covid virus, but rather a changing, manipulative narrative. Even science was toppled from its pedestal as unreliable and irrelevant by some.

Each of these people knew what it is to be misunderstood, to have their beliefs, knowledge, truths, not only rejected but twisted and cruelly, sometimes dangerously, used

against them. Their ideas, their insights, their good work was denied value, worth, even any consideration.

John the Baptist and Jesus certainly knew what it was to be misunderstood, to have their work and worth used as weapons against them. To his adversaries, John's "advent of the empire of heaven" was harsh and judgmental, and he was dismissed as just a societal misfit, a demon-possessed throwback prophet. Jesus broke all the rules in favor of God's light of love and welcome, and so was deemed a drunkard glutton, a friend of sinners, even of tax collectors. John austere lifestyle called for mourning and repentance in the face of judgment and Jesus proclaimed joy because of the presence of the kingdom, yet in both cases their messages encountered unbelief or indifference. But whether the announcement of God's presence and power was cast as judgment or as redemption, the response has been one of misunderstanding. The people, 'this generation,' is fickle and restless. Matthew spoke of his generation, but he could really be speaking of any generation as good people, as great ideas, are misjudged, misunderstood.^{iv}

In a world where the truth is often presented as debatable and lies are painted as truth, we can become weary. The truth does matter. Truth is the beginning of wisdom. It is a starting point for us to live fruitful lives. There is always more to learn. We must seek wisdom, be open to instruction so that our paths may become clearer and so that we can live peaceably and find rest from our labor.

When we are wearied, when we are misunderstood, it can undermine what we are doing, how we are handling whatever we are facing. Jesus' response to being misunderstood—when he is not understood—when any of us are not understood—is an invitation to rest in him. This is a direct invitation to not just comfort but to discipleship. Despite all the warnings about rejection and suffering, Jesus speaks of a discipleship characterized by "rest," "light" burdens, and an "easy" yoke.^v

The rest Jesus invites us to echoes the song of the psalmist:

The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.
They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.

Faith is resting on the hopeful promises of God. That is the yoke Jesus calls us to put on. Be not afraid I go before you always. Come follow me, and I will give you rest. Amen.

ⁱ An Appreciation of Ralph Nichols: Founding Figure in the Discipline of Listening-Ralph G. Nichols Prophet, Pioneer, and Visionary by James J. Floyd, Pages 18-19 | Published online: 02 May 2012

ⁱⁱ Don't Let Be Misunderstood, Written By: Sol Marcus · Bennie Benjamin · Gloria Caldwell

ⁱⁱⁱ Pettinger, Tejvan. "Famous People who were Misunderstood", Oxford, UK. www.biographyonline.net Published 26 September 2018.

^{iv} Stanley Saunders, Faculty Emeritus, Columbia Theological Seminary, Atlanta, Georgia, 2014

^v John Bloom, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/come-all-who-are-weary>