

The Rev. Canon Charles Morris

9 July 2017

St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Barnstable, MA

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Well, this is going back a bit - to the late 90's, I think. Remember Luke Bryan's Lyrics for *"Been There, Done That"*?

Girl you and me ain't talking much I just slam the door and leave in my truck
There ain't nothin' left for us I think enough's enough
I look down see your name there on my phone
Then I hit ignore and just drive on We've been living like this too long
And there ain't no reason to turn around, baby you can have it all
[Chorus:] I ain't, I ain't coming back I've already been there done that
And I'm done with you messing with my mind The last time's the last time baby
I can only change who I am so much And all I can give is all my love
And my love ain't never been enough So I ain't coming back, I've been there done that.

"Been there, done that" is a phrase that works both negatively and positively. On the one hand, it can act as a dismissal -- as in the song. On the other hand, this phrase can also signal affirmation. People sharing common experiences -- good or bad --shake their heads and testify that they, too, have been there and have done that. In fact, as an affirmation "been there, done that" is about as close to a confessional as most of us will ever come.

In today's culture, "been there, done that" is a stock phrase that can either be a sincere affirmation or a flip dismissal. Likewise "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden" was an idiomatic phrase in Jesus's day. He was not the first teacher/preacher to offer that comforting invitation.

--In a time when human beings were beasts of burden just as often as animals, this image had real power.

--In an age with no concept of "the weekend," the mandates of traditional Jewish Sabbath laws of "rest" had always been exceedingly inviting.

There is a story that Hebrew families tell their children to help them understand the fourth commandment. *"The Sweetest Sound"* is the story of King Ruben, and it goes something like this:

King Ruben was always asking questions. "Where is the hottest place on earth?" "Where is the place that the snow falls deepest?" One day he asked his advisors, "What is the sweetest melody of all?"

His wise men rubbed their chins and searched their books of wisdom, but they could not find the answer.

"Why not have a contest to find the sweetest melody?" they suggested. So the king called all the musicians of his kingdom to come to the palace.

Early in the morning, they gathered under the king's window with flutes, harps, violins, horns, bells, drums, banjos, bugles, chimes, cymbals, gongs, triangles, lutes, lyres, and trumpets.

Their tuning and scraping and testing awoke the king. Smiling, King Ruben jumped up, believing that today he would discover the sweetest melody in all the world.

Throughout the morning, the king sat on his balcony and listened. By noon, he had listened to all the sounds imaginable that could be made by plucking, tinkling, blowing and banging. By afternoon, the king had heard all the melodies which could be made by whistling, jingling, shaking, sawing, buzzing, and pounding. Then the advisors asked their king, "To your ears, which melody is the sweetest?" King Ruben had listened, but he could not tell which sound was the sweetest. One of his advisors suggested that he should have all the instruments play together, at the same time. "A wonderful idea," said the king. All of the instruments rang, bonged, blared, pealed, strummed, and whistled together.

The noise was so great he could not think. Just at that moment, a woman dressed in her Sabbath best pushed to the front of the crowd. It was now late on Friday afternoon. "O King, I have the answer to your question," she said. The king was surprised because she did not even have an instrument. "Why didn't you come earlier?" the king asked.

The woman replied, "I had to wait until just before the setting of the sun."

Sure enough, the sun was setting in the west. The musicians were still puffing, blowing, chiming, and strumming. But again, there was so much noise the king could hardly think. He raised his hand.

"Stop!" he said. And all the musicians put down their instruments.

Taking two candles and placing them on the balcony railing, the woman lit them. Just as the sun was setting, the flames of the candles glowed.

She lifted her voice and prayed, "Blessed art thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who sanctified us by thy commandments and commanded us to kindle the Sabbath lights."

Then she took her hands away from her face. "He that has ears to hear, let him hear," she said.

The king raised his head; the advisors took their hands away from their ears. The people in the crowd stood still.

The king was whispering, "What? What is that?" He could not hear a sound.

"What you hear is the sound of rest. And isn't the peace that the Sabbath brings the sweetest melody of all?"--John A. Stroman, *Thunder From the Mountain* (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1990), 53-55.

Jesus's words, "Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest," sounded familiar--but to a few who had seen His miracles and heard His message, this "come to me" phrase had an unmatched depth and resonance. For those who had caught the vision of Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, this promise of "rest" was real. As Messiah, Jesus offered a glimpse into the kingdom, into a place where burdens grew weightless.

What does our culture offer all who are "weary and heavy laden"--all who have "been there, done that"?

--those fidget spinners, or catalogs giving us a million kinds of other distractions.

--computer software programs offering us new ways to pay monthly bills, organize our taxes, keep track of expenses, and plan our calendars.

--health clubs offering us personalized fitness programs designed to make us thinner, firmer, and friskier.

--cable television offers us mindless entertainment, endless sports events, a few educational opportunities, and perpetual infomercials.

But do any of these really offer us rest? How many catalogs can you look at before you've seen it all? How long can you cruise the Internet before it all start to sound the same? How many times can you climb the Stairmaster before your body reminds you--you've "been there, done that"? How long can you keep your finger on the remote control, only to conclude after 199 stations have flipped past that--you've "been there, done that"?

Jesus's invitation to rest is more than skin-deep. It is peace for the soul. Christ is our real rest. Christ is our real peace. One of culture's fantasies that feeds our inherent weariness, our perpetually overburdened souls, is the notion that we must all be "self-made." We expend as much energy trying to decide what image we will make ourselves into this year, this week, this day, this job, this marriage, this friendship--as we do actually inhabiting that image.

When Jesus offers to share our burdens by becoming our "yoke-mate," the weight of all this "image-production" baggage quietly slips off our shoulders. Jesus's yoke--though "easy" and the burden "light"--nonetheless gives us direction and purpose for our lives. We no longer need to create and re-create ourselves--we are now being gently re-sculpted into Christ's likeness.

There is freedom in being yoked to a single focus and direction through Christ. Ever notice how those who have genuinely yoked their lives to Jesus don't seem to think they are "missing out" on anything? The perfect freedom and fulfillment that come from a life lived in Jesus's "rest" allow disciples of Christ to look down all life's other torturously twisting side roads, speed traps, and dead-end routes and affirm with a shake of our heads--"no thanks--been there, done that." Amen.