Sermon – September 1, 2024 – "The Wisdom of St. Francis, pt. 1: Peacemaking"
by Rev. Dale Carl Fredrickson

On Labor Day weekend, we celebrate the achievements of American Workers. We remind ourselves that work is good. And we also remind ourselves that rest is good. Before we fill our calendars with the activities of fall, we overhear Jesus' warm and welcoming invitation in Matthew 11:28: **"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."**

Have you ever noticed these beautiful words come right after a heated moment? Jesus' ministry of healing, teaching, and reconciliation comes with opposition from the religious leaders. The hostility of those who should know better is growing. Jesus' identity as "messiah" and "savior" is in question. Jesus expresses real anguish of heart and frustration with people and, like an Old Testament prophet, issues fierce warnings of judgment to the people of Galilee. Jesus knew what it meant to be tired, misunderstood, and under-appreciated.

Are you tired? Are you tired this morning? Have you ever felt exhausted by the demands, responsibilities, and endless to-do lists?

To those who have ever been tired and beaten down by religion, God offers us good news; on Labor Day weekend, God says:

28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. **29** 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.**30** For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30, NIV)

Jesus' words in Matthew 11:28-30 are worth our time and attention, and this morning, I want to walk us through them.

"Come to me."
Such inviting words. Jesus' words are warm and welcoming. Said with tenderness and genuine interest and connection.

"…all who are weary and burdened.."
The invitation is for those of us who are tired. Jesus invites those of us carrying heavy backpacks for too long. Maybe our shoulders ache from walking for so long without a break. Perhaps we can lay our burdens down this morning.

"I will give you rest.
The invitation now moves to a promise. It is not your office, school, or even church that gives you rest but the person of Jesus. The promise flows from the one who gave his all for you. The Greek word translated as "rest" here is anapausis. It does not mean a "brief respite" or "to catch your breath" but the refreshing break travelers across a barren desert experience when they stumble upon an oasis. Jesus is presenting himself as the refuge, relief, the stream of living water, if you will, for burdened humanity. Sabbath in the Jewish tradition intends this type of sacred rest from your burdens.

“Take my yoke upon you”
Yoke refers to a wooden frame placed over the necks of two animals drawing a cart or plow. Jewish tradition would use the metaphor of the “yoke” to explain a believer's connection to “Torah.” Good Jewish boys and girls were taught that our livelihood is determined by our connection to “Torah.” Torah is simply God’s “instructions,” “guidelines,” or “teachings” and has come to mean the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Jewish thinking understands that living in connection to the Torah brings life. However, Jesus is critiquing religious leaders who, through their teachings, i.e., “Torah,” place burdens on people. Jesus is the one who lightens our backpacks and leads us into new ways of being human.

“and learn from me.”
Jesus and his life, death, and resurrection become our teacher. His healings, miracles, and stories. His alternative lifestyle becomes our model.

“for I am gentle and humble in heart.”
God is not an angry, out-of-touch teacher but a being described as “gentle” and “humble in heart.” God is not a distracted parent but fully present, offering empathy and understanding of our human troubles.

This doesn’t lessen Jesus’ challenge for our lives. The demands for us to participate in his Justice and Peace mission to the world remain. Somehow, our spiritual lives grow in the soil of “gentleness” and “humility,” not by “power” and “control.”

“and you will find rest for your souls.”
And, once again, the promise of anapausis. God’s oasis-shaped rest is offered to us. God invites us to grasp this dynamic energy field of big Grace. Notice there is no room for shame, guilt, manipulation, or coercion. Jesus invites us to enter an ancient/future way of being human. Life was never intended to wear us down, but instead, we learn new rhythms from this God.

“For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”
This yoke is “easy” and “light.” This new way of being human is not about power and domination but ease, gentleness, and the underground swelling tide of love supreme.

Jesus offers us freedom. God’s rest is freedom from our culture’s obsession with productivity. Our culture’s “Torah,” if you will, of productivity.

How do we enter Jesus’ soul rest?
Nurturing our souls is different than inspiring productivity, isn’t it? We enter or say “yes” to God’s rest through our practices.

For example, someone who wants to play the piano well must practice their scales daily. Or a Basketball player who wants to shoot the basketball like Steph Curry better get in the gym and practice.

Jesus' rest will become ours when we:

1. **Look back and not forward.**

Savor the good moments of the last week, month, year. Hold onto God's big grace moments to you. Where did you experience God in your family, friends, and neighborhood? Where have you felt God's joy?

2. **Sit with problems; do not solve them.**

Permit yourself (at least once a week) to not solve every problem.
Surrender these to God.
Name the pains, worries, and fears, but don't hold them too tight.
Don't play God.

3. **Be moved by wonder, not answers.**

Let questions rise, follow your curiosities, be open-ended, playful, and wonder-filled.
Hang out with kids.

4. **Get lost in the present; don't fixate on to-do's**

Have a meal with friends.
Take a walk in the park or hike a mountain trail.
Shoot hoops.

5. **Embrace the messiness of the journey and give up destination living.**

There's great joy in remembering that we never fully arrive.
Enjoy the journey itself and the joy that comes with being human.

Conclusion: ***Matthew 11:28-30 Message***

28-30 "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."