

St. Andrew's UMC  
July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008  
Matthew 11:25-30  
"My Burden Is Light"

My father once worked with a missionary organization when he was a young man, and this is what he told me. The inflation had become so bad after the Korean War, that the wages the workers received were not enough to feed their families. So the support staff decided to talk to the head missionary of the organization for a raise. When the missionary heard the story that her staff families did not earn enough to buy the rice, she replied: "Why do you always have to eat expensive rice? Why don't you eat other food—like bread, eggs, vegetables and meat?" The staff did not know what to say to that—because, rice was the staple food, and it was a lot cheaper than eggs or meat. So they just left the office.

That reminded me of the saying that Marie Antoinette was supposed to have said. When she was told that the French people had no bread to eat, she replied: "Let them eat cake."

There is an expression in Chinese adage that roughly translates into: "Common ailment, mutual attraction." It refers to the fact that people who suffer from the same illness understand one another. The saying recognizes the fact that people who are well do not understand the degree of suffering of those who are not well.

And it is true. Do you understand what it is like to suffer the illness that other people are suffering? I know that we can see that they do suffer, but can we really? Isn't it why we have the Native Americans' saying about walking a mile in the other person's moccasins? We do not know what it is like to endure the plight, until we, too, find ourselves in it.

Westchester County, New York. A mother is frantically dialing the phone, in search of a babysitter for the evening, for she and her husband must attend the gala-fundraiser at the country club in one hour.

Los Angeles, California. A single mother is desperately trying to convince the emergency room staff to admit her child. Because she has no money or health insurance, she is told that she would have to take the child to another

hospital that may or may not accept her child. The child dies in her arms, on the way.

Who can understand the Westchester mother's stress? Then again, compared to that of the mother whose child was refused of the medical service, what is that? I do believe that the Los Angeles mother would understand what it is like not to have a baby sitter, when she has to go to work in one hour. But I do not believe that the Westchester mother could understand what it is like to be refused of the medical service, and see her child die in her arms—on the account that she did not have a medical insurance.

I read a news article that, despite the tough economy, luxury yacht builders are doing just fine, building the vessels that cost tens of millions of dollars each. The biggest problem at one shipyard is having enough workers to handle 24 custom contracts. "Nobody is buying these yachts, because they need them," the shipyard's VP said. "They are buying them, because they want them."

Do you think their customers would understand the anguish of the average home owners who are struggling to make the mortgage payments, in order to stem the foreclosures?

These are the common burdens that we may hear about, but we do not share their pains, nor understand what it is like to walk in their moccasins. What is it like to be sent to the prison for 16 years for the crime you did not commit, like the Texas man who was recently freed by the DNA evidence? What kind of burden has it been for the man and his family? Who could understand the pain and suffering this man and his family endured? The prosecutor who put him away? The witnesses who picked him out of the line-up? The judge who sentenced him?

No. It was those former inmates, who had also been wrongly convicted and imprisoned like this man. They have habitually attended the exoneration hearings in solidarity to the innocent man. Patrick Waller, who is Black, is the 19<sup>th</sup> man since 2001 in Texas, who was set free by the new DNA test. All my stress, all my pain, all my worries are like luxuries, compared to what this man had to go through.

Jesus understands today what it is like to bear the burdens of life. And Jesus calls all who are weary and heavy-laden to come to him, and offers them a rest. Who among us is a stranger to the weariness? Who among us is yet to feel the heavy burden on the shoulders?

We have been sharing our joys and concerns with one another at every worship service. We have prayed together on one another's behalf. We came to the presence of God, and emptied our hearts of the burdens through our prayers every Sunday.

We prayed for an ailing grandchild. We prayed for a dying son. We prayed for a daughter who suddenly passed away. We prayed for those who lost their jobs. We prayed for those who struggle with chronic illnesses. We prayed for recovery from serious illnesses. We prayed for the accountability from the insurance companies on behalf of our member. We prayed for healing of the strained relationships and broken hearts. We prayed for the neighbors who lost almost everything they owned. We prayed for the people of other nations and the leaders who misled our nation. We understand what it is like to be weary, and to carry the heavy burdens.

To claim that we are children of God, or Christian disciples, does not necessarily mean that the sun is always shining, or that the road always rises to meet us, or the wind blows always on our backs. We cannot avoid the pains and challenges of life. To live is to endure the challenges of life and to struggle to overcome it. Our lives will never be burden-free. We may even succumb to the challenges. But that burden-freeness is not what Jesus is offering to us.

So here is what Jesus offers us: Jesus offers us rest. Jesus takes off the heavy burden of this world, and instead places a lighter load on our shoulders. It is much preferable to take up on his offer, because his yoke is easy, and his burden, light.

I watched Wimbledon tennis games, and sometimes low-seeded players advance to the semi-finals, instead of the favored, top-seeded players. It is beyond the wildest dreams of these low-ranking players to get to the semi-finals, and they understandably get excited. "What if I win this match?" is the question that every player asked him or herself.

When the low-seeded player faces the former champion in the first round, he or she would not expect to win the match. When the low-ranking player advances to the semis by luck, or skill, or both, however, his or her outlook changes. Once the player entertains the possibility of winning the match, suddenly the player tenses up, and makes a lot of absurd mistakes he did not do in the earlier matches.

When the player did not expect to win, he was free, and was able to perform at his maximum potential. The moment he began to cling to the idea of winning, suddenly all the stress kicks in, and he is not any longer free. The low-ranking one eventually loses, despite the early showing of the strong sets.

I see the same trend in golf. When the player realizes this putt can make the difference of a house in the prize money, the pressure becomes great, and he chokes at the last moment. Once he realizes that there is no chance of winning, however, suddenly the game improves, and he birdies, even eagles. Once he gives up his claim to the prize, he becomes free. The prospect of winning suddenly becomes a psychological burden.

Most times, what we aim to achieve in this world works as an incentive for us to produce our best. But the same incentives could become a yoke that bears down upon one's shoulders. Once we are committed to that worldly yoke, we might gradually exchange our freedom for the worldly incentives, and we might even lose our perspective of life—we might give up something precious that cannot be replaced or bought.

One day we might wake up and realize that we ended up surrounding ourselves with things that can be bought and replaced. In the pursuit of happiness and profit, we might shed a little bit of humanity for a little bit of material gain. We may even discover that the yoke that the world placed around our necks wore down our spirits, and its burden almost crushed our souls.

The yoke that Jesus places upon our shoulders—though they may be costly at the time—will never let us make the mistake of giving up what is irreplaceable for what can be bought.

Once we are committed to the yoke that Jesus places upon our shoulders, Jesus will give us rest for our souls. Thus refreshed, we will clearly see

what is truly precious in our lives, and never trade in what is irreplaceable for what is commonly bought.

Jesus surely places upon our shoulders the burden of the discipleship. But his yoke is easy, and his burden, light. And we will find rest for our souls.