**4 Pentecost, July 6, 2014, Gen 24:34..67; Ps 45; Rom 7:15-25a; Matt 11:16-19,25-30; Rev Mary Trainor**

Jesus said, "***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."*** These words are ones we never tire hearing. They are words of comfort and consolation. They reduce our blood pressure and our anxieties, and give us hope. They make us feel supported, encouraged. There are two ways we can process these words of Jesus: through our souls, our right brain, our emotions -- like we listen to a symphony or a poem, and what registers here is the flow of the words, the feeling. We can also process these words, through our intellect, our knowledge base, our understanding. Today, let's do both of these: look at the meaning of the individual parts of this passage and the depth and breadth of what God is telling our souls.

The passage begins with Jesus saying "***Come to me***." This is a gentle invitation to leave where we are/what we are doing and draw closer to the person of Jesus. This is an intimate summons for certain people, and those people are "***all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens***." Isn't that all of us, at one time or another? The burdens He is referring to are daily worries, pain, frustrations, inadequacies. Back in the first century, many of the burdens were related to the difficulties of keeping the heavy laws of the Pharisees' religion. The Pharisees were all about rules and regulations: 600 of them. Religion was a burden. In our day, burdens are more from our workload, our financial and caregiving responsibilities, our health, our relationships. What Jesus was doing here was ushering in a whole new thing: a positive religion, a religion that was about love: love of God, and loving your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus says that if people come to Him, He "***will give you rest***." What does this mean? Can Jesus do our jobs for a week, so we can have extra vacation? Can Jesus step in and solve our problems? Can He give us a long, restful night sleep? What is this "***rest***" He is talking about? This rest He is talking about is more than all those things, and available for free all the time. It is "***rest for your souls,"*** which is a deep, peace-filled stillness we can settle into --knowing that all will be well because God is enough.

Then Jesus talks about His "***yoke***." The word "yoke," as a verb, means to join or unite. As a noun, a "yolk" is the crossbar harness that is around the necks of oxen to guide them as they are plowing the fields. We, the disciples, are connected to God -- we are joined to God and the "yoke" is our divine guidance. Jesus says, "***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."*** In other words, with Jesus' loving and gentle guidance with us as we go through the mission field of our lives. The field is our work, interactions with others everywhere we go, on the phone, on the computer, on the lakes, in the parks, at home, at church. Jesus meets where we are and supports us so much that as we go we will feel lifted up, free, light. Our burdens are not ours to carry alone. Jesus said, ***"For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."***

Right near the side door of the Church, for the past three years you have been able to read the Footprints poem. We had it hanging there in the form of a quilt for a while, and now it is hanging there as a message in a tasteful picture frame. This Footprints poem, written by Margaret Fishback Powers in 1964, captures today's message. It goes like this: **"One night I had a dream...I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord, and across the sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand; One belonged to me, and the other to the Lord. When the last scene of my life flashed before us, I looked back at the footprints in the sand. I noticed that many times along the path of my life, There was only one set of footprints. I also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in my life This really bothered me, and I questioned the Lord about it. "Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, You would walk with me all the way; But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, There is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why in times when I needed you the most, you should leave me. The Lord replied, "My precious, precious child. I love you, and I would never, never leave you during your times of trial and suffering. When you saw only one set of footprints, It was then that I carried you."**

The pace of our lives nowadays is so fast that we don't tend to take the time to stop and reflect on where we have come from and where we are today. Many are burdened so heavily that they do not come up for air. Others do not want to take the risk to slow down and reflect for what they might find.

What burdens are you carrying? Jesus is making a personal invitation to you today, and He will meet you where you are, come alongside you, help you deal with those burdens. Jesus is like a kite of love and wisdom, present to lift you up. Will you answer the invitation?

Amen.