

**AN INVITATION TO REST
OCTOBER 20 AND 21, 2019
MATTHEW 11: 28-30**

Our new vision statement Hospitality, Opportunity, Prepare, Engage (the first letter of each word spelling ... HOPE) is meant to challenge the way we think about and do discipleship.

Hospitality puts people first. Hospitality comes directly from God's heart, and if God takes up residence in our hearts, makes his home in our hearts, then our hospitality for others should be radical. Radical hospitality means that we are ever mindful of who is **not present** in our faith communities: our neighbors, our friends, our co-workers, our family-- and our hearts are restless until that invitation to community is extended and accepted.

Extending that invitation today requires us to find new ways, new places to develop relationships of trust through conversation and listening. Opportunities to practice radical hospitality are placed before us every day if we become more aware of the people around us in the places and spaces we spend our time.

We know that Jesus spent so much of his time, out of the synagogue, creating places and spaces for relationships to develop. It takes intentional time and structuring of our ministries and our lives to push ourselves out from our Christian bubbles and into places where we can interact in

our communities with those who may have no or nominal religious affiliation.

Perhaps this whole new, really old, way of doing discipleship has been challenging for you --- hospitality, shmospitality ... we've always been a friendly church ... little over the top if you ask me. Greet in the parking lot? When it's cold?

You want me to find time to find time to "listen" and have a "conversation" with someone I barely know? And in a new place? With somebody I don't really like? That's just not me. And if I do have to try to meet somebody new, I'll *try* to find time to fit it into my already packed schedule.

Oh, and those Every One in Ministry forms? That really means "everyone else", right?

Now, I know none of us gathered here would think any of those thoughts, and somewhere in Scripture I'm sure Jesus says we should be comfortable, don't talk to anyone you don't know or like ... yeah No....

I haven't found anywhere in Scripture where Jesus says his disciples are supposed to be comfortable.... Comforted maybe ... but not comfortable. Jesus continually challenges -- "Go (not stay) but go and make disciples of all the nations. Jesus challenges us to follow him, to learn from him; to grow in faith through him; to go to great lengths to pray, plan, prepare, and work toward helping others become part of a community, part of a "faith home."

Discipleship is hard. Discipleship is challenging. So, there is no way we can face the challenges of discipleship, the fears of discipleship without first preparing our hearts and lives.

So today is an invitation to rest.

Hear the words of our Scripture once again:

²⁸ “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Oh, those words sound so comforting and inviting don’t they? Who’s not weary, who doesn’t feel burdened? So, when Jesus invites us to bring our yokes of weariness and burdens to him to find rest, it sounds pretty good.

But, he doesn’t stop there.

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.”

Jesus indeed invites us to get rid of our yokes of weariness and burdens, but then he instructs us to actually pick up another yoke ... his yoke. Jesus didn’t offer a pillow, he didn’t offer a recliner or a couch. He offered a yoke—something that is used for labor, for work. Jesus’ words are still an invitation to rest, but to rest in a place of deeper commitment, a place of deeper discipleship, a place of deeper learning.

And we rest in those places by taking on his yoke and learning from him. He’ll teach us to pace ourselves so that our spiritual life and work doesn’t exhaust us.

Healthy discipleship is difficult -- it takes intentionality, time, effort, stepping out of the comfortable, into the unknown. However, we often make it much more difficult than it really has to be.

In the ancient world, when a farmer bought a new ox to plow his field, he would yoke the young ox together with one that was older and wiser. Otherwise, the young ox would try to carry the load himself, become overburdened, expend all of his energy resisting the work, and fall exhausted by the end of the day.

Our loads will become overbearing, too, when we try to carry the burden ourselves. But when take upon Jesus’ yoke, we’re seeking his direction, he’s determining the pace, and He’s deciding how far and how much we do. We walk step-by-step with Jesus, not pulling against Him, not pulling away from Him, not resisting His leadership, but working in his well-fitting yoke. Our part of the yoke that he has created specifically for each one of us.

When we yoke up with Christ, it’s not so much us asking God to help us out; it’s us learning to join Him in His work, resting in his work because He’s the lead, He’s the One leading us into the work. He’s the One in charge of the pace. He’s the One in charge of the direction.

One of the reasons the discipleship path can be so frustrating and tiring for people; one of the reasons we

have difficulty building new relationships outside of our comfort zones; one of the reasons we hesitate to share our faith, is that we're resisting where God wants to take us; we're trying to do God's work under the power of our own energy, under the insistence of our own ways, rather than under the yoke of Christ.

The work we are called to do as followers of Jesus *can* be some of the hardest, most challenging work. We can get into the mindset that we're working for God... we have to be able to do certain things to please God, follow all the rules, check all the boxes and we'll be one step closer on that ladder as we climb higher to earn his favor. We don't have to earn God's favor -- Jesus has already done that by his grace.

We're to work with God, and that's where we'll find our rest, that's where we'll find a grace-filled, transformed lifestyle, through an intimate relationship with Him. That's when our work will become joy rather than burden.

The yoke is a great metaphor for discipleship.

Taking Jesus' yoke upon us means our prayer should be, Lord, what do You want me to do? Where do You want me to serve? How do You want me to partner with you to accomplish Your work? One of my daily prayers, now, as I think about hospitality and opportunity, is for God to lead me each day to have a conversation with someone I don't already know. Lord, who do You want me to know today?

Jesus' invitation to his yoke and to learn from him is an invitation to seek what God wants and then to rest and trust in the assurance of his presence, his guidance, his provisions, his direction as we walk into this great work we've been called to with him.

With oxen, an older ox is always yoked together with a younger ox. The younger ox will push and pull and strain while the old ox will walk at a steady pace. Soon the young ox will settle in to the pace of the old ox – the pace it would need to be able to keep going for long distances.

Have we settled into pace with Jesus? Can we rest in the challenges he leads us to as we go the distance in our discipleship journeys? Can we walk with him into new places and spaces of opportunity and relationship?

On the discipleship pathway, to learn how to rest in Jesus, to take on his yoke and to learn from Him takes time and it's an ongoing process. It's like an onion. You peel through a layer and think that you have made it and learned what God wants, only to find there is another layer for you to discover, learn and enjoy. But all of those layers are still part of our discipleship journey – a lifelong journey that only gets better and better with time.

Let us pray:

In times of weakness and need, yours is the strength by which we carry on, the shoulder we rest our head upon. When our load is heavy and too much to bear, yours are the arms stretched out to help us, the grace that we depend on. In times of weakness, your voice is heard, 'Come... find rest... take my yoke and learn from me.' This is grace divine, this is the path that leads us to walk in step with you, and for which we offer you praise. Amen.