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July 9, 2023 Sermon
St. David's Episcopal Church

“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.”

This translation of the today's Gospel reading is from The Message, a modern language translation of the Bible. I love reading different translations of the same Bible verse as it often helps me glean something new from the reading.

“Walk with me, and work with me - watch how I do it.” If only we could have walked with Jesus in person. And yet, over the past six months, I believe that we have been walking side -by-side with Him. As we pulled together as a church - in the truest sense of the word- to make church happen while our beloved rector, our leader, our priest has been battling cancer, we have lived into the front of our bulletin which names each of us as part of the ministry team at St. David's. We have done this by walking with Jesus. Working with him. And taking up Jesus' yoke – one in which the burden is light.

**Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;
For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'**

Over the past six months, we have been called to do Jesus' work – to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, love one another and worship the Father – all without a rector to lead the way on a daily basis. It hasn't been hard. In fact, I hope I speak for all of us when I say it has been an honor, a pleasure, a profound spiritual experience to watch each one of us live into the ministries to which we were called while Elizabeth has been away. This is what using spiritual gifts is all about. This is taking up Jesus' yoke. What joy it brings to each of us when we use our God given gifts! These burdens are light.

**Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me
and you'll recover your life.**

The work that we have all been doing is not religion. It is church like the church that Jesus envisioned in which he is the cornerstone and we are in communion with one another, our community and the world.

Last week I shared my love of the Psalms. This week I wanted to share with you "The Good News" - that is to say, the Gospel. I wasn't sure exactly how to do this until we received some "Good News" ourselves in the form of a letter from our beloved Elizabeth. Elizabeth's letter was beautifully written (we wouldn't expect anything less from a priest who is also a published author,) filled with news of her health, her return and her thanks for everyone at St. David's who has risen to the challenge of being a church without a priest for nearly six months.

For those who didn't have the opportunity to read it, the letter shared that Elizabeth plans to return to St. David's on September 1st. She will work part-time and participate in as much as is possible given the challenges that her diagnosis

allows. This is the good news. The tough news is that she must continue to take a targeted therapy medication that keeps the cancer at bay while weakening her immune system and causing many devastating side effects. She will be with us, but not always as much, or as fully as she would wish.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

It is hard to be a church without a priest. We all look to our priest to give us communion, absolve us of our sins, lead the programs of the parish, visit the sick, marry the lovers and counsel the lost. It's hard to have visiting priests lead the funeral services for our beloved elder members whom they didn't even know. It is hard to call upon our vestry to put in so many hours making sure that our programs continue, our services are streamed, our sick are ministered to, our homebound are visited, but the truth of the matter is, THIS is what we are called to do in our Gospel reading each week. Because, as much as we LOVE our priest, we are all called to ministry. And sometimes, doesn't it take someone giving us the opportunity to live into our ministry for us to discover what God had planned for us all along. As John Calvin said, “The gospel is not a doctrine of the tongue, but of life. It cannot be grasped by reason and memory only, but it is fully understood when it possesses the whole soul and penetrates to the inner recesses of the heart.” We have been given the opportunity to live the Gospel and to take it into our heart.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;

And, as hard as it is to be a church without a priest, I dare say that it would be harder to be a priest without a church. Our continued prayer is that God gives

Elizabeth the strength and the courage to continue with her treatment, get strong, and come back to her church, one that has been given the opportunity to call forth the gifts of her people and live into God's plan for our lives. Elizabeth will come home to a church that is ready to SHARE ministry, not expect one person to fill all roles, do all the duties, and be the only minister on the ministry team at St. David's.

Come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

I used to drive by big, beautiful homes with perfectly manicured lawns, and think to myself how much I would like to live there because it seemed as if that home and any family that lived there wouldn't have any worries in the world. The same is true of big brick churches with fancy stained-glass windows and staff to take care of every program, problem and prayer request.

But the truth of the matter is, these families, these churches all have their messy closets and we all have something that we are dealing with. But, the promise that the Gospel brings us is that we don't have to deal with these things by ourselves.

for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls.

Even Jesus didn't spread the good news by himself. He recruited 12 men, a full dozen, to help him share the Good News. At St. David's, God has recruited a team of around 100 people to do the work of the church while our priest has been out sick. He will continue to call on each of us when our rector returns. But now we know that truly, Jesus' yoke is easy and his burden is light and we are ready to welcome Elizabeth whenever she is ready to come back to her church on the corner wherever you are.