

At the Brown Bag Eucharist on Tuesdays we read and discuss the Gospel lesson for the coming Sunday. We go around the circle, each of us reading one sentence. This week the scripture from Matthew was so short that there wasn't even one sentence for each of us. But let's hear it now as we heard it on Tuesday.

'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.'

Jesus was offering to all who come to him freedom from the loads that we carry now. Lisa noted that in the Jewish community of that time, those who decided to follow a particular teacher proclaimed that they had taken on the yoke of that Rabbi. They were not merely writing class notes of what they heard and received, but were being disciples who let their lives be shaped in a particular direction. The question for these disciples, and for us today, is whether the new yoke is better and easier than the one worn before. In order to answer that, we would have to see what are the things we carry now.

Consider the book A Christmas Carol, by Charles Dickens'.

The hero of the work is a crotchety, wealthy old miser named Ebenezer Scrooge. After a long Christmas Eve workday, dedicated to making even more money, he went home alone to his miserable dark house. His main living area was frigid with only a tiny coal fire, but he was not about to make himself any more comfortable by adding a few more pieces of coal to the grate. Coal cost money.

As he sat there huddled near whatever imaginary heat he could feel, he heard strange noises in the house. The sounds seemed to come closer and closer, until he was terrified by the

ghost of Jacob Marley walking right through the locked door into his rooms.

Marley had been dead since Christmas Eve seven years before. and Scrooge did not want to believe in the ghostly presence of the man who had been his business partner. But he saw before him "...The very same face: Marley in his pigtail, usual waistcoat, tights and boots. New was the chain clasped around his middle. It was long and wound about him like a tail;...Scrooge could see that it was made of cash boxes, keys, padlocks, property deeds and heavy purses, all of steel, clanking with every step Marley took.

Scrooge said, trembling, 'you are fettered. Tell me why.'

'I wear the chain I forged in life,' replied the Ghost. 'I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you?'"

It's a chain rather than a yoke, but all the same an excellent metaphor for the preoccupations with which we load ourselves "link by link and yard by yard."

So, think for a minute about what your chain might be made of – the things that weigh down our life and attention, claim our time and energy. Perhaps there is a promotion at work which you know you deserve more than others....A new car seen in a TV ad, being driven at top speed up a winding mountain road.... an acceptance letter from Harvard ... a brand-new Apple computer... a fabulous new house on a pristine lake.

See how all the longings and dreams are tied tightly to anxiety that we might fail or be criticized; tied to envy of those who have more than we, who can do more than we. They are tied to the prices we exact from our dying earth as our pursuit of more brings everything to disaster. These are heavy burdens indeed.

The choice we all face at various turnings in our lives, is whether or not our pursuit of achievement brings us to the place

we truly want to go, is worth the deepest energy of our lives. And when we are broken down by the effort put into the race we run, when our souls are tattered and ragged, can we consider the lifeline thrown out by Jesus?

“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.”

Since September, we at St. Johns have been exploring and learning the seven spiritual practices of the Way of Love:

Turn
Learn
Pray
Worship
Bless
Go
Rest

What if these practices describe for us the shape of the yoke of Jesus, which is easier than that which we have carried for ourselves before? What if they are the measure of the burden offered to us by him?

And we have now come to the last practice on the list, Rest. This does not mean merely a day off in which we can get things done around the house, or go to a Vikings game or shop at the Mall. It means something much more spacious than that. The Rest given to us is the rest of Sabbath, the day with which God finished Creation, the day blessed and consecrated by God for our sake.

It is true that we do not live in a culture that sanctions and supports for us an entire day of rest. But what if entering into the practices of Sabbath makes it possible to bring the experience into parts of many other days.

Sabbath is for the gathering of family and friends to a simple meal together. Wouldn't that be different for many of us whose

mealtimes bring a scattering of all in a household to different activities and obligations! Sabbath is a space for conversation with each other, for sharing ideas in depth, truly hearing one another. There would be time for reflection on God's life-affirming ways. There can be worship in a community that helps us savor the joy and delight of God's great gifts to us. In Sabbath our day-to-day moments of passing time open up to God's eternity. It's a space in which we can notice that when we stop for rest the world does not come to an end.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, perhaps the greatest Jewish scholar of the 20th century, wrote in his book called simply The Sabbath, "Unless one learns how to relish the taste of Sabbath while still in this world, unless one is initiated in the appreciation of eternal life, one will be unable to enjoy the taste of eternity in the world to come."

Rest is our foretaste of the sweetness, glory and delight of God's coming Kingdom. How could we not want to touch this now?! For once we have known the fullness of Sabbath rest, we will carry it in our hearts, into the world which so desperately longs for the true, deep rest of God.